

P. O. Box 547
Shaw, Mississippi 38773
February 1, 1965.

Dear Friends,

There have been many changes here since I last wrote. I'll try to tell you what things are like now.

There are three of us on the staff now; a fellow who lives here in Shaw, a fellow from California, and myself. But we're not really the ones doing all the work. The local people, especially the adults, are really working hard and participating consistently.

The freedom school for adults is really booming. An average of thirty men and women have been meeting each morning -- all in the living room of a small house. Now we have rented a small building to be used for this purpose. The group started out by discussing what freedom means, what it was they wanted, how they might go about trying to get it, and going on to discussions of the U. S. and Mississippi government (which are not the same), science and religion. Now they are reading a book about life following the Civil War. Several of them can't read, because they had to work in the cotton fields and couldn't go to school. But on the first day of reading they decided to pair up so that those who couldn't read would look on with those who could, and in the evenings they would get together and re-read and discuss further the things they had read. Everyone participates, when the chapter of the previous day is discussed.

In the afternoons there is a freedom school for grade-school-age children. They learn to write sentences, tell stories, sing, do various art work, write letters, and to do many other things that interest them. One of the things which make the freedom school different from the regular schools is that the interests of those who come to them determine what shall be taught.

In addition, there are three mass meetings held each week. At a recent one the people decided to have another Freedom Day. This means that on that day a large number of people will go to the county courthouse to register to vote. Many will carry signs to show what they want, and probably some will hand out leaflets explaining in more detail. Many tried to register to vote in the last few weeks, but because of fear, many others have not done so. It is felt that these too will have the courage to go up if they know that many others will be with them. In the last three weeks three Shaw Negroes have passed the test and of course we're elated. But that brings to only six the total having passed the test in the last five months.

Some of the people on plantations want to have meetings in their areas, since they live far from town and have no cars. But it's just not wise to meet in their homes and it's hard to get the use of churches because of fear of bombing. But they're still trying.

Danger still exists all over the state. A girl here in Shaw was cut by flying glass the other day when two rifle shots were fired into a full classroom of a Negro elementary school in the part of town which is most

active in the movement. We don't know who fired them, but a car carrying two white men was seen about the same time on that street. It is this kind of thing that makes people afraid to register to vote, come to meetings, etc. Yet at the same time they are just plain tired of being treated this way and they're tired enough to do something about it. Today seven more tried to register.

Last week we painted the inside of the community center and it really looks nice and cheerful now. Soon we'll be fixing up the building we rented for the freedom school.

There are citizenship classes in two parts of Shaw now and three freedom movement libraries. One library is in the community center and the other two are in homes. The most popular books are the ones about Negro life and history by Negro writers. Few of these are available in Mississippi -- even in the schools, yet these are among the most important books to be read these days. Mississippi robs Negroes of their history, their heritage, and the knowledge that many Negroes have done outstanding things.

Lawyers in various parts of the state are gathering depositions to prove that there has been discrimination, harassment and intimidation, all interfering with voter registration of Negroes. The evidence is easy to find, but since it must be presented in a public hearing, much of it will never enter the case because people are afraid (I think justifiably so) that if they tell what has happened something worse will occur. This evidence is being collected in connection with the challenge of the right of Mississippi's five congressmen to represent the state in the United States Congress. The challenge is being made because they were elected illegally. The basis for this claim is that Negroes have been and are being systematically excluded from voting and other participation in the political life of the state. Even those few who have been able to register, have in several counties been barred from attending precinct meetings or voting in them. Lawyers for Mrs. Annie Devine, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and Mrs. Victoria Gray, who are actually making the challenge, have 40 days in which to take testimony; then the returning congressmen have 40 days, after which the contestants have another 10 days to prepare their rebuttal. After this 90 day period, all the testimony will be printed and presented to Congress. Some time in the summer the House will vote on whether or not the five men will remain seated. If they are unseated there would probably be a new election in Mississippi. Elections have been illegal for years, but they haven't been challenged (with the exception of Bilbo). The main reason has been danger. But now that there's a mass movement, the danger to any one individual is less.

More and more people are participating in the movement, making it increasingly effective.

It's hard to tell you what our work is really like because it's just working with people to help improve their situation. The things with the most meaning -- like seeing certain people take the step to register to vote, or others starting to come to meetings or citizenship classes -- these things just don't seem to have the meaning when I try to put them in writing. But there is progress and we are encouraged.

With love,

Mary Sue