

ARKANSAS
FIELD REPORT--HELENA PROJECT

Week of March 7th - 13th

OFFICE
ONLY

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Sunday, March 7th--Howie went to services at the Greater First Baptist Church in West Helena. He introduced himself to the congregation and in turn was welcomed by the minister, Rev. Butler. Rev. Butler came on strong. He was happy I was there and recommended that the congregation lend their support and encouragement. After services concluded, many members of the congregation introduced themselves to me. This has led to several contacts and a greater awareness of my presence in the community. That night Howie met several people from Marianna (Lee County) and Rondo (Lee) at the American Legion Hut. Hopefully these people will be good contacts.

Monday, March 8th--Howie spent the day talking to women in the community about our program and his desire to have them become active in the Women's Voters League. Mrs. Boyd and Mrs. Hill, both inactive of late, promised that they would be at the next meeting and that they would try to get some young people to attend. Howie also talked to Mr. Greg, who would like a copy of the article naming Jack Bryant in the Election Research Council's investigation.

Tuesday, March 9th--Howie looked for a new place to live. So far no luck. He spent the rest of the day talking to women and high school students about some of the community's problems and our program.

Wednesday, March 10th--Arkansas SNCC had a staff meeting in Little Rock, which took the entire day. On Wednesday night the Women's Voters League of West Helena held a meeting to discuss what will be their future plans. The Voters League decided that they would form a committee to talk to the City Council and other personnel explaining their public accommodations and employment. The final decision was that people (elder people) would begin testing public accommodations Saturday afternoon. Testing would be limited to just Saturday afternoon since this is the starting point for most of the people's involvement. Then people would set a day for demonstrations if their complaints were not heard. Granted they won't be. The most amazing thing that came out of the meeting was the attitude of the people about their own involvement. That is, the people at the meeting did not say at any point that the young people should demonstrate. They talked about what they as older people had to do--they talked about what the older people in Selma are doing.

Thursday, March 11th--Jim Jones spent most of the day in Lee County. During the early part of the morning we talked to some people in Southland (Phillips) about making the Voters League of West Helena county-wide. People were interested in this. Out of the meeting with a few individuals in Southland a few proposals were made. One was that we have a Mass Meeting in Southland on March 22nd. This will have to be approved by the deacons of the church Sunday. Freedom Schools were discussed and it was mentioned that from the community of Southland and the surrounding communities there are several students in college at AM&N and Philander Smith that will be home this summer and would be glad to work on freedom schools and community centers. Some interesting comments made by the local people were that out of a freedom school people should be taught baby care, first aid, waltz dances rather than funky, close, squeezing dances, and how to dress, that is matching clothes--ex.: red socks, purple pants, green hat, orange shirt, etc. (ha, ha, ha). The People were really impressed by the Freedom School idea. Later Jim Jones was in Rondo and Marianna. Jim spent most of the day talking to people. There were a few definite contacts Jim had known before going to Marianna, but they fell through. A few people in Marianna knew who he was but expressed fear to talk about it. Some general attitudes concerning what few people he met were that they could forget it, nobody was interested with the exception of a few young people. We shouldn't demonstrate under any circumstances because of physical danger. The crackers in Marianna are unlimited. Some examples were given such as a white man killed a Negro and the court threw the case out. Jim was in Marianna until about 7. He returned to Helena because he was unable to spend the night with the contacts he had. Howie received a letter from

a grade school teacher from New York City who is in charge of the integration committee of her school. They want to send clothing. They also want to send materials for Freedom Schools and they want pen pals for the students. The school is 75% Puerto Rican, 24% Negro and 1% white.

Friday, March 12th--Most of the day was spent looking for a place to live because we had to move from where we were living because the landlord's marriage problems. While looking for a house we bumped into a number of people and their attitudes in some cases were a little surprising. People expressed the idea that through public accommodations in Helena, there won't be any problems. Of course, our immediate reaction was: "Did you hear about the sit-in here in the past--or, are you familiar with the police force here?"

One lady answered by saying what happened during the sit-ins was the young people's fault. If they had checked with the sheriff before, things would have been fine because she knows the sheriff and he is a good man, although he is a businessman, whatever that means. This is very clearly not true--Sheriff Hickey has his Uncle Toms and the rest of the Negroes are just plain scared of him.

REPORT ON DEMONSTRATIONS AT THE CAPITOL CLUB, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

Background: There is a cafeteria in the basement of the State Capitol, Little Rock, which has always maintained segregation. After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, Negroes tried to be served there and were refused service. After this, a private club, called the Capitol Club, was formed and only members were allowed to eat there. A suit has been filed through the NAACP Inc. Fund contending that the cafeteria was made into a club only to keep Negroes out and that in fact it is not a club at all. Any white person can eat there without membership cards. The suit was filed eight months ago and has not been followed up. One of the major reasons for this is the fact that the plaintiffs have not pushed the court to hear the case. Two white SNCC workers, Arlene Wilgoren and Nancy Stoller, attempted to eat at the cafeteria a number of times and were served without question. Our contention at the demonstration was, therefore, twofold (forgetting the symbolism that the cafeteria is in the basement of the Capitol building): 1. the "Capitol Club" is not in fact a private club--that it is a public accommodation since white people are served without membership; and 2. that the mere existence of a private club on public property supported by ALL taxpayers is illegal under the Equal Protection Provision of the 14th amendment as well as provisions of many Civil Rights Acts.

On the demonstration itself:

On March 11, 1965, a group of 32 people, including Philander Smith College students and SNCC staff went to the Capitol Club for lunch. The guard at the door refused to let them in on the basis of the fact that they did not have membership cards. The white members of the group insisted that they had eaten there without cards and wanted to eat again with their friends. The guard did not seem to know what to do except to try to keep them out. After a minute or so, he asked one of the non-demonstrators to get the State Police down there. In the meantime, the group managed to block the entrance somewhat. Many people who would ordinarily be eating there did not try to get through. Others had to find membership cards somewhere and push and shove their way through.

And then the State Troopers arrived. They made a passageway for "members" by pushing us against the wall and continued to lean against us to keep us there. The Secretary of State, Kelley Bryant, then arrived on the scene and asked us to step aside and talk about it. We told him we had come to eat and not talk, whereupon he told us he could not let us eat there.

This went on for a while. There followed a short conference inside the cafeteria and then Major Mack Thompson of the State Police addressed us. He told us he didn't want any trouble and that we should step aside and

and talk about it, but in any event we had to clear the aisles. He said, "We don't want no Alabama here, and I don't think you do either, but if we have to have one, we are prepared to give it to you." When we again refused to move, he proceeded to give us just that. The order was given: "OK, move 'em outa here," at which point, approximately 15 or 20 troopers pushed, shoved, kicked, hit, slapped and threw bodies down the hall. Anyone who was there by chance, such as newsmen, photographers and just onlookers, were also treated in the same manner since no warning was given. A girl was thrown to the floor and kicked shoe; a boy was slapped in the face; a girl was hit by a trooper's fist, etc., etc. The group ended up at the opposite end of the hall where drivers' licences were given out. The Secretary of State, Bryant, spoke to us again. He told us that if we left peacefully he would send us the names of the people on the committee who lease the Capitol Club. We agreed to leave peacefully (we did not promise not to come back). On our way out we met the second group of about 12 people and we decided to walk around to the other door and try to get served again. About ten of us made it down to the basement--the troopers got the rest of us at the top of the stairs. Most of the group turned around to leave. Bill Hansen made his way through and sat on the stairs. Troopers lifted him up and threw him against the wall. As he was getting himself up, a trooper hit him with a blunt instrument on the head. At this point the group that had been downstairs was being shoved up the stairs by the state police.

About three or four people tried to lift Bill and carry him outside (he was unable to walk right away), but each time they seemed to have him, the troopers were pushing, shoving, etc. and they lost their grip. We were finally shoved out the door, at which point, Bill lay on the concrete. Someone called a doctor, while the rest of us formed a circle around Bill and sang "We Shall Overcome." After a doctor did not arrive within five minutes, we decided to drive Bill to a hospital. Four or five went in the car and the remaining 40 people marched back to the SNCC office (about a mile away) singing Freedom Songs. At the office, people expressed a desire to march on the Capitol that afternoon and protest the beatings. The next hour and a half was spent getting more students to march and making signs for picketers.

The March:

Around 200 people gathered at 3:30 that afternoon to march from the SNCC office to the State Capitol. We marched through the rain, some carrying umbrellas, singing Freedom Songs. When we arrived, we marched around the area in front of the Capitol although no attempt was made to enter the building. We then stopped and were addressed by three or four people. At one point we knelt and prayed. Just at that moment approximately 25 state troopers marched up the stairs and stood in front of the doors leading into the Capitol, all of them holding nightsticks 2 feet long.

We were told later that all doors to the Capitol were closed at that time (they remained closed for about 15 minutes--until we left. No one could leave the Capitol at that time either). We promised to return the next day.

That evening Bobby Harrison, the Chairman of the Little Rock Student Movement, called Bryant about the possibility of negotiations. Bryant was very much in favor and told Harrison to call his secretary in the morning to make a definite appointment. He said definitely that he would see him some time Friday afternoon. Some of us met with Bobb later that evening and we decided it would be better if a delegation went instead of just one person. This was agreed upon and the people were chosen. Demonstrations were called off for Friday in light of this new development. When Bryant's secretary was called, she wasn't there and neither was he. She called back around noon and told us Bryant was out of town on a speaking engagement. This was obviously a lie, but there was not much we could do about it at that time. It was also too late to call demonstrations on again.

Harrison spoke to Bryant again Saturday and was assured that a meeting would be arranged. If one is not definitely arranged by Monday or Tuesday, demonstrations will be resumed.

March 15, 1965
Arlene Wilgoren