

July 18

Weekly Report From Sussex County, Virginia

On June 28th the Santa Barbara SCOPE chapter moved into the town of Waverly in Sussex County, Virginia. We had held a mass meeting the week before in order to find housing. The meeting was composed mainly of students and they seemed interested but they didn't have any student organization to work from. In view of this we worked the following week trying to organize a youth group. We did some canvassing and set up car pools to go to Petersburg to see Dr. King. The youth organization was set up and officers were elected. It is a very active group and has been a great help in canvassing etc.

While some of us were working in Waverly, others made contacts with different people in the county. Last Monday night we had a county wide mass meeting. A Sussex County Improvement Association was formed, officers were elected. This will in the years to come be the most powerful political organization in the County. Another meeting will be held tonight to iron out further organizational details. This club will be a great asset to the voter registration drive and perhaps in the future it will be able to bring federal programs into the county. This is the first county wide organization in this county for Negroes.

The adults in the town of Waverly have not responded with too much enthusiasm. They, as most people in the county, are economically dependent on one man, Garland Gray. He owns the only local bank which handles almost all the loans made to the people. He also owns the only industry in the county, a huge lumber mill, which employs many. The people feel that if they register they might lose their jobs or their homes. Because of that fear the people have little to do with us. Gray is also a very powerful state senator. Until this year he has been unopposed for the last 22 years. Is there any way that you could suggest that would help us to either reduce Gray's power or overcome the fear of the Negroes here? They are apathical and we feel need something to get terribly mad at, mad enough to risk their jobs for.

As of now we have not been able to set up political education classes. We felt that individual tutoring at first, to the the illiterate people some confidence and then we would form classes. We have here still the problem of the fear of Gray, perhaps if we set up youth classes first the adults would follow but we have no materials.

We have only had one bad incident. We went uptown to a laundromat to do our washing. Some of the little children that we were friends with came along too. We had put our things in the washers when the owner came in. We had never met him but we knew that Negroes washed there so we felt there wouldn't be any problems. However, he became incensed seeing us with the little children and began to cuss and curse. We didn't respond but he became more and more upset. At one point he started to lock us in. He came very close to hitting one of the boys. After we had finished our washing we went over to the town police to report what had happened. The police said that the man had come by and tried to get them to arrest us. They had told him that we couldn't have us arrested this time, however, if we came back then he could. We are waiting to talk with Mr. Coulton to find out whether or not we should go back. Any instructions you could send us would be appreciated.

That is about all that has taken place. We do need those literacy books, about 15, if you have them.

Sincerely,