

Field Report--- Mrs. Colia LaFayette

Dallas County

April 6, 1963

This is a continuation of the report from March 10- April 6 1963.

We have been informed that the high school students will be out from March 11 to March 15 for a spring break. At this time we plan to double our efforts to get some of these students to work. So far we have promises and no work.

March 10- We gave another get together at our house for Selma U. students, Lutheran Academy and College, and Hudson High school- only three persons showed up and all three were out of school. These persons were interested in getting registered to vote, they all planned to go to the registrars office on tomorrow, March 11 and take the voter examination. One of the young ladies promised to help us with secretarial work.

After this little get together we were very pessimistic about getting students in Selma to work. On February 17 when we gave the get-together there were three students present and today not one student. If our plan to get some high school students involved fails then we will have to move forward alone .

March 11-

We spent most of today working on canvass forms. This evening we canvassed in the city. This time we saw no police officers.

March 12-

Today I talked with Mallory Chestnut an eleventh grade student at Hudson High school about the voter education program. Chestnut seems to be interested in the program but has to help his daddy run a grocery store they have on the corner of Lapsley Street and Small Ave. Since he can't work Chestnut is drawing up a list of his friends that he thinks will be interested in the program. There were two other 9th grade students present when I talked with Chestnut- both students expressed a willingness to assist in the project, they are to get their " buddies" together for a meeting at our new home at 1703 Union Street one block from Hudson High school tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock.

March 13

We have made a " Lucky Strike" in Selma. For the first four weeks we had no assistance from the local students. We talked at length with college and High school students and got no results. But today Bernard stopped a car load of fellows and went directly into the specifics of the voter education program. All the young high school students expressed interest and begun to ask a million questions. Who are you?- Who do you work for?- Where are you from? and How long are you going to be here. They insisted on coming home with Bernard and he gladly brought them to our new apartment. The young fellows wanted to know just what could they do to get Negroes in Selma registered. Bernard outlined to them several things they could do to help:

1. Canvass the city to determine how many registered voters there are and their names and addresses and phone numbers, how many non registered voters and those non registered voters interested in becoming voters, at the same time they would invite interested persons to the voter classes being held at 31½ Franklin Street and Tabernacle Baptist Church on the corner of Minter at Broad Street.
2. They should organize their friends to help with the canvass and to discuss other methods of getting Negroes registered to vote.

continuation:

The students sized up this job and decided it was too big for five fellows. Then Cleophus Hobbs, who appeared to be the leader of the group, asked if they could start the canvass immediately since they were out of school for the rest of the week. He was informed the canvass sheets were already prepared - any time they desired to begin they could.

All the fellows wanted to start at that moment and after a brief instruction period the young students began the canvass assisted by field secretaries. These students had not been on a canvass before so they were shocked at the answers their neighbors were giving to the voter question. They watched doors closed in their faces and men tell them they were afraid. One student said after the canvass for the evening was completed, "I show didn't know there were so many scared Negroes in Selma, its a shame". Cleophus Hobbs 1406 Church Street- junior at Hudson High- was utterly shocked, "Rev. LaFayette how is it people you have known all your life can be so ignorant? You know I think something different about all those people, but I don't know what." He then turned to his friends and said, "Boys we are going to complete this job, and get some of our gang to help!" All of the fellows agreed to this enthusiastically.

They decided to meet us Thursday morning at 8 o'clock on the basketball court of the George Washington Carver Home which they suggested as a good area to get a large number of persons registered. The GWC Homes is a federal owned project which has 550 apartments.

March 13-

We met with 8 high school students on the basketball court of the GWC Homes to start the canvass of the apartments. We canvassed the apartment until 12 o'clock and called off until four o'clock that afternoon. We discussed the morning canvass in front of Brown Chapel AME Zion Church. All of the students had questions about the morning canvass. Should we try and persuade Negroes who are not interested? What do we tell people who continue to say they are too old? What do you say when a person call you bad names? We answered these questions and returned to our apartment followed by Cleophus Hobbs, who said he just had to keep up with us because if we had not come to town he probably would have gotten his boys to rob a bank or something.

This afternoon we returned to the project to continue our canvass. Our canvass number has increased from 8 to 11. All high school students eager to work. We canvassed from 4 to five and regrouped in front of Brown Chapel AME Zion Church. The pastor Rev. Minifee who lives next door in the parsonage said a white fellow came to him early that evening and asked what was he organizing in his church. He informed the man his church was open to any group and what went on he consider private. The man left but Rev. Minifee was unable to get his license number.

We invited all the students to the voter class at Tabernacle Baptist Church this evening at 7 o'clock.

At seven o'clock this evening we held our regular voter education class in Tabernacle Baptist Church. Four of the students who worked on the canvass were present at the clinic. They brought with them two of their young friends of voting age and three other students. Other students wanted to come but they had to attend a Debutante Ball. Charles Bonner called his date off and came to the class, so did Cleophus Hobbs.

continuation:

The students present were:

Charles Bonner	824 Small Ave.	Trinity 46096
Cleophus Hobbs	1406 Church St.	Tr46549 or 22054
Odell Jackson xxxx	1129 Church St	Tr 48764
Willie J Williams	1417 Lauderdale St.	Tr 48764
Rosetta Smith	1120 Small Ave.	Tr 47066
Oscar Johnson	1505 Church St.	
Sam Rudolph	1315 Church	Tr 20033
Eva Hines	390 GWC Homes	(old enough to register)
Alice Hines	390 GWC Homes	(old enough to register)

We invited over Miss Maxine Ruffan and Miss Imogene two of our former students who had recieved registration certificates to give the young high school students a boost. These young ladies boasted to the students that they felt like new people. The instructor of the class for the night was Mr. Ulysses Blackson, an instructor at the Lutheran school. Also present was a student from Selma University. The student would not give us his name and this brought snickers from the high school students.

The students decided to reinforce their team and canvass the GWC Homes again. Many of them wanted to know when would the sit-ins begin. We explained that we should get Negroes registered and then think of sit-ins. I can't say this satisfied these inquisitive students. March 14-16 the canvass of the project continued with many more students helping. We could not get across the river to Tipton High school because we had no transportation. March 17-

All of us attended Tabernacle Baptist Church for morning worship services.

March 19-

We had a group of 39 students present (high school students) at the class tonight. We discussed the voter test, each student had to fill in a blank. After checking the blanks carefully- we went into the canvass forms and discussed the techniques of canvassing. After this tutoring and training period was concluded we begun to teach them freedom song from song sheets we had stenciled.

Several of the student have written new freedom songs. One of the songs written by Charles Bonner 824 Small Street and Nathaniel Tate 1411 Church Street ~~xxxx/written/~~ is " Hallelujah". They have added new verses to some of the freedom songs also. Enclosed is a song sheet. They have formed to small freedom choirs to carry the message of freedom across Dallas County. "We are moving on". Students present were: