

PROSPECTUS FOR A SUMMER FREEDOM SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Proposal (originally submitted by Charles Cobb, December, 1963)

It is, I think, just about universally recognized that Mississippi education, for black or white, is grossly inadequate in comparison with education around the country. Negro education in Mississippi is the most inadequate and inferior in the state. Mississippi's impoverished educational system is also burdened with virtually a complete absence of academic freedom, and students ~~are~~ forced to live in an environment that is geared to squash intellectual curiosity, and different thinking. University of Mississippi Professor James Silver, in a recent speech, talked of "social paralysis . . . where nonconformity is forbidden, where the white man is not free, where he does not dare express a deviating opinion without looking over his shoulder." This "social paralysis" is not limited to the white community, however. There are Negro students who have been thrown out of classes for asking questions about the freedom rides, or voting. Negro teachers have been fired for saying the wrong thing. The State of Mississippi destroys "smart niggers" and its classrooms remain intellectual wastelands.

In our work, we have several concerns oriented around Mississippi Negro students:

1. The need to get into the schools around the state and organize the students, with the possibility of a statewide coordinated student movement developing.
2. A student force to work with us in our efforts around the state,
3. The responsibility to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands and questions. More students need to stand up in classrooms around the state, and ask their teachers a real question.

As the summer program for Mississippi now shapes up, it seems as if hundreds of students as well as professional educators from some of the best universities and colleges in the North will be coming to Mississippi to lend themselves to the movement. These are some of the best minds in the country, and their academic value ought to be recognized, and used to advantage.

I would like to propose summer Freedom Schools during the months of July and August, for tenth and eleventh-grade high school students, in order to:

1. supplement what they aren't learning in high schools around the state,
2. give them a broad intellectual and academic experience during the summer to bring back to fellow students in classrooms in the state, and
3. form the basis for statewide student action such as school boycotts, based on their increased awareness.

I emphasize tenth- and eleventh-grade students, because of the need to be assured of having a working force that remains in the state high schools putting to use what it has learned.

- The curriculum of this school would fall into several groupings:
1. supplementary education, such as basic grammar, reading, math, typing, history, etc. Some of the already-developed programmed educational materials might be used experimentally.
 2. cultural programs such as art and music appreciation, dance (both folk and modern), music (both folk and classical), drama, possibly creative writing workshops, for it is important that the art of effective communication through the written word be developed in Mississippi students.
 3. political and social studies, relating their studies to their society. This should be a prominent part of the curriculum.
 4. literature.
 5. film programs.

Special projects, such as a student newspaper, voicing student opinion or the laying of plans for a statewide student conference, could play a vital role in the program. Special attention should be given to the development of a close student-teacher relationship. Four or five students to one teacher might be good, as it offers a chance of dialogue. The overall theme of the school would be the student as a force for social change in Mississippi.

The Freedom Schools should have a special appeal for many of the students planning to come to Mississippi this summer, as this would be a project they could follow through from the beginning to the end--watch development and would have some definition. Some of the newer ideas now circulating in educational circles, whatever they are, might be incorporated into this program.

If we are concerned with breaking the power structure, then we have to be concerned with building up our own institutions to replace the old, unjust, decadent ones which make up the existing power structure. Education in Mississippi is an institution which can be validly replaced, as most of the educational institutions in the state are not recognized around the country anyway.

The Program

1. General Description. About 25 Freedom Schools are planned, of two varieties: day schools in about 20-25 towns (commitments still pending in some communities) and one or two boarding, or residential, schools on college campuses. Although the local communities can provide school buildings and staff housing (and, for residential schools, student housing), all equipment, supplies and staff will have to come from outside. A nationwide recruitment program is underway to find and train the people and solicit the equipment needed. In the schools, the typical day will be hard study in the morning, an afternoon break (because it's too hot for an academic program) and less formal evening activities. Because the afternoons are free, students will have an opportunity to work with the COFO staff in other areas of the Mississippi Freedom Summer program, and the additional experience will enrich their contribution to the Freedom School sessions.

a. Day Schools. The day schools will accommodate about 50 students with a staff of 15. There are 20 communities, located in all five Congressional districts of the state, where the people in the community have indicated that they want a Freedom School and are cooperating in finding facilities and housing. These are towns of some

size, where the local Negro communities can provide housing for the staff, and where a suitable building can be located and safely leased. The day schools will attract high school students from the immediate area only, since there are no provisions planned for living in, but there will be organized contacts--exchanges, sports events, etc.--between day Freedom Schools across the state. The sessions will present similar but not identical material, so the students can profitably attend one or both sessions. This will allow some adjustment for students who must work during the cotton-picking season, and faculty people who are unable to stay six weeks.

b. Boarding Schools. The one or two boarding schools will accommodate 150 to 200 students apiece, in a college-campus atmosphere. Mt. Beulah Christian Center, in Edwards, Mississippi, just south and west of Jackson, is definitely committed for a residential school, although financial agreements are not complete, and negotiations are still pending at three other sites, with the likelihood that at least one will come through. (This report as of early April) There will be one six-week session of the boarding schools. The curriculum will be similar to that of the day schools, but on a more intensive level, and with an additional goal of bringing together and training high quality student leadership. The boarding schools will recruit students who have displayed some leadership potential, and can profit from the more intensive approach.

2. Curriculum. On the weekend of March 21 and 22, the National Council of Churches sponsored a conference in New York City to develop a curriculum for the Freedom Schools. This conference brought together a group of well-qualified educators and many of the more perceptive mind presently engaged in studying our society. The conference participant worked from a preliminary outline which laid out the basic skills which the students needed to improve, divided into four areas:

I. Leadership Development

- a. to give students the perspective of being in a long line of protest and pressure for social and economic justice (i.e. to teach Negro history and the history of the movement.).
- b. to educate students in the general goals of the movement, give them wider perspectives (enlarged social objectives, nonviolence etc.).
- c. to train students in specific organizational skills that they need to develop Southern Negro communities:
 1. public speaking
 2. handling of press and publicity
 3. getting other people to work
 4. organizing mass meetings and workshops, getting speakers, etc.
 5. keeping financial records, affidavits, reports, etc.
 6. developing skill in dealing with people in the community
 7. canvassing
 8. duplicating techniques, typing, etc.
- d. to plan with each other future action of the student movement.

II. Remedial Academic program

- a. to improve comprehension in reading, fluency and expressiveness in writing.

- b. to improve mathematical skill (general arithmetic and basic algebra and geometry).
- c. to fill the gaps in knowledge of basic history and sociology, especially American.
- d. to give a general picture of the American economic and political system.
- e. to introduce students to art, music and literature of various classical periods, emphasizing distinctive features of each style, and
- f. to add to knowledge of and ability to use the scientific method.

III. Contemporary Issues

- a. to give students more sophisticated views of some current issues
- b. to introduce students to thinking of local difficulties in a context of national problems, and
- c. to acquaint students with procedures of investigating a problem --rudimentary research.

IV. Non-academic Curriculum

- a. to allow students to meet each other as completely as possible, in order to form a network of student leaders who know each other.
- b. to give students experience in organization and leadership
 1. field work--voter registration
 2. student publications
 3. student government
- c. to improve their ability to express themselves informally (through creative writing, drama, talent shows, semi-spontaneous discussions, etc.)

As a result of the curriculum conference, the curriculum planning took on the following direction:

The aim of the Freedom School curriculum will be to challenge the student's curiosity about the world, introduce him to his particularly "Negro" cultural background, and teach him basic literacy skills in one integrated program. That is, the students will study problem areas in their world, such as the administration of justice, or the relation between state and federal authority. Each problem area will be built around a specific episode which is close to the experience of Mississippi students. The whole question of the court system, and the place of law in our lives, with many relevant ramifications, can be dealt with in connection with the study of how one civil rights case went through the courts and was ultimately decided in favor of the defendant. The episode of Congressman Jamie Whitten's tractor deal, where Whitten quashed a federal program to train over 2,000 tractor drivers in the Mississippi Delta (because it would have been integrated) can lead one into the whole area of state and federal relations. The campaign of Mrs. Pannie Lou Hamer for Congress (running against Whitten) provides a basis for studying all the forces which are against her, and which have worked against a Negro's even attempting to run for Congress in Mississippi. Planning the COFO project to challenge the regular Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention provides the starting-point for a study of the whole presidential nomination and election procedure. These and other "case studies" which are used to

explore larger problem areas in society will be offered to the students. The Negro history outline, as presently planned, will be divided into sections to be coordinated with the problem-area presentation. In this context, students will be given practice activities to improve their skill with reading and writing. Writing press releases, leaflets, etc. for the political campaigns is one example. Writing affidavits and reports of arrests, demonstrations, trials, etc. which occur during the summer in their towns will be another. Using the telephone as a campaign tool will both help the political candidates and help students to improve their technique in speaking effectively in a somewhat formal situation. By using a multi-dimensional, integrated program, the curriculum can be more easily absorbed into the direct experience of the students, and thus overcome some of their academic problems of concentration and retention.

3. Students. Students for the Freedom Schools will be recruited through established contacts with ministers, educators, and other organizations in the state. Around a hundred applications have already been returned, and we do not anticipate that written applications will form the bulk of the students. A state-wide student organization, the Mississippi Student Union has recently been formed, and will be important in the recruitment of students. Students who have shown evidence of leadership potential will be encouraged to attend the statewide boarding schools, to meet students from other parts of the state, and lay the foundation for a much broader student movement.

4. Staff. Both professional and non-professional teachers will participate in the staffing of the schools. Professional teachers will be sponsored by the professional teachers' associations, the National Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church and other institutions with educational resources. The non-professional teachers will be selected from among the applicants for the summer project. A special delegation of Chicago high school students, who have taught Negro history to other students their own age under the auspices of Chicago's Amistad Society, will work as student teachers in the Negro history program.

5. Schedule. The boarding school staff and staff for the first session of the day schools will go through a general orientation program with the community center staff, probably held at Mt. Beulah. This orientation will run July 8-12. On July 13, the boarding schools and the first session of the day schools will receive students. Orientation for the teaching staff of the second session of the day schools will be held August 5-9. On August 10, the second session of the day school will start classes. The sessions will end on August 22 for the boarding schools and August 30 for the second-session day schools.

6. Budget.

1. Boarding Schools

Cost per person -- \$10 per week (Charge made by institution; includes room, board and use of school facilities)
School supplies -- \$400 per week

Weekly cost for 200 students and 45 faculty and staff -- \$2850.

Six-week cost for one school -- \$17,100

Expenses for two residential schools -- \$34,200

Budget, continued

II. Day Schools

Rent of facility -- \$25 per week, over 2-month period --
\$200

Food -- \$915
food -- one meal and a snack per day, figuring just
under \$.30 per meal per person for 65 people -- \$675
salaries for two cooks, at \$20 per week -- \$240
(other kitchen help will be volunteer from the community)

Furnishings -- \$300
(figure is low, because we hope to raise much of the
furniture from the community)

Supplies -- \$570
school - \$85 per week
cleaning - \$10 per week

Administrative overhead -- \$160
utilities - \$48 (\$24 per month)
equipment rental - \$90 (\$15 per week)
(figure is low because we are appealing for donations
of equipment such as typewriters, phonographs, etc.)

telephone -- \$24

Staff expenses -- \$1350
room and board for 15 (\$10 per week)
expenses (\$5.00 per week)

Field trip -- \$500

Total cost for one day school, two sessions -- \$3,995

Total for twenty day schools -- \$79,900

Total cost for Freedom School program -- \$114,100