FREEDOM SUMMER

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Oxford University Press
New York   Oxford
1988

their misfortune to slog through every last page of every last draft of the manuscript. If they look closely, they will see the imprint of their handiwork on many a page in the book.

So too will Kelly Moore, Ronelle Paulsen, Sarah Sample, Emilia Stein, and Nigel Vann. Over the past five years, this quintet has comprised the best collection of research assistants an author could ever hope for. The same can be said for the office staffs of the Sociology Departments at George Mason University and the University of Arizona. Long before any outside funding source had discovered the project, my former chair at George Mason, Joe Scimecca, had generously contributed scarce departmental resources to aid the research. Departmental secretary Peggy Gay was chief among these resources, cheerfully devoting hundreds of hours to any number of tasks associated with the research.

At Arizona, I have never received anything less than 100 percent support from the best departmental staff I have ever worked with. Administrative Assistant Sherry Enderle has worked the system, as only she can, to scrounge resources vital to the project. Georgia Zeutzius has virtually functioned as another research assistant, so often has she done work connected with the project. Finally, I owe special thanks to Jo Migliara and Barbara McIntosh for the exceptional job they have done in typing the various drafts of the manuscript. Not only did they do so quickly and accurately, but with a keen eye toward catching the grammatical errors I am prone to make.

Appropriately, the last thanks is a more personal one. As any author will tell you, writing a book is a long, emotionally draining experience. This book was no exception. What made this one all the more difficult was that it occurred during a particularly tough time in my life. The final debt of gratitude, then, is the one I owe my friends and family, whose support and love made this book possible and the tough times a lot more bearable.

Tucson, Arizona
February 1988

D. M.

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Freedom High

THE SUMMER OF '64

FOR MOST of the volunteers, Freedom Summer began not in Mississippi, but at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. There, in mid-June, the National Council of Churches sponsored two, week-long orientation sessions for volunteers accepted for work in Mississippi. The first session was held June 14–20 and was tailored to those who were to work in voter registration. A second session, for Freedom School teachers, was held the following week.

If the volunteers had expected a languid, leisurely week in the early summer freshness of rural Ohio, they were to be disappointed. The intensity that was to mark the entire summer was very much in evidence at Oxford. It is interesting that the volunteers interviewed have retained so few specific memories of orientation or of the summer itself. They seem to attribute this to the fact that the events in question occurred nearly twenty-five years ago. In contrast, they usually have very detailed memories of events *prior* to the summer, such as when and how they heard about the project in the first place. Possibly the reason for the lack of specific memories is simply the pace of events that summer. Things happened too quickly to allow time for the reflection required to commit specific events to long-term memory. The volunteers were feeling, seeing, experiencing too much.

Some of the intensity of the experience owed to the specific activities planned for the week. The volunteers were subjected to a daunting schedule of general assemblies, section meetings, and work groups. The general assemblies brought all the volunteers together to hear what amounted to broad orientation sessions on Mississippi or some aspect of the movement. Sometimes staff members spoke at these assemblies; more

often, it was invited speakers from outside the project. Established civil right leaders, such as Bayard Rustin, Vincent Harding, and James Lawson, spoke. So too did native Mississippians, trying to give the volunteers a better understanding of their state. Jess Brown, one of only three civil rights lawyers in the state, apprised the volunteers of the "unique" quality of Mississippi justice. Long-time state civil rights leader, Aaron Henry, gave a short history of the movement in Mississippi. Even the Justice Department dispatched a representative to the orientation. In a sobering and, for many, radicalizing session, John Doar warned the volunteers not to expect federal protection while in Mississippi. "Maintaining law and order," he argued, "is a state responsibility" (quoted in Belfrage, 1965: 22). In the weeks to come, the volunteers would have ample opportunity to see just how Mississippi exercised that responsibility.

Section meetings were more focused planning groups involving twenty to thirty people who were expected to be engaged in the same type of work during the summer. Work groups were smaller still, consisting of between five and ten people who would actually be working with one another in Mississippi. What these smaller groups lacked in drama and emotional intensity, they made up for in relevance. It was here that the volunteers met and got to know their fellow project members and were trained in the basics of their work assignments.

The power of orientation, however, derived less from this mix of planned sessions as from the informal aspects of the experience. For many of the volunteers it was the beginning of an intensely stressful, yet exhilarating, confrontation with traditional conceptions of America, community, politics, morality, sexuality, and, above all else, themselves. What the volunteers were beginning to experience at Oxford was, to use Peter Berger's term, "ecstasy," that giddy, disorienting sense of liberation that comes from "stepping outside . . . the taken-for-granted routines of society" (1963: 136). It was not so much a case of the volunteers *choosing* to take this step, as being compelled to do so by virtue of their contact with a project staff that had itself become more radical and alienated as a result of three long years of struggle in Mississippi. If ever a group embodied the risks and rewards of an "ecstatic" way of life, it was the SNCC veterans. The volunteers were clearly fascinated by them and drawn to the way of life they represented. One volunteer interviewed by Sarah Evans (1980) "claimed that the first night of the orientation session in Oxford changed her life 'because I met those SNCC people and my mouth fell open'" (quoted in Evans, 1980: 70). In a letter home, another volunteer, Margaret Aley, described the SNCC staff in equally glowing terms:

> I've never known people like them before; they are so full of heart and life. They are not afraid to show their emotions, they cry when they are sad; they laugh and dance when they are happy. And they sing; they sing from their hearts and in their songs they tell of life, struggle, sadness and beauty. They have a freeness of spirit that I've rarely seen. But I think that's because they don't worry about maintaining the status quo. When we arrived here Saturday, I had a feeling that I didn't belong . . . [Now] somehow I feel like I've found something I've been looking for for a long time. I feel like I've finally come home. I now have no doubt that I belong here.[1]

Ruth Steward put the matter a bit more succinctly. In a letter to her parents, she explained that "you can always tell a CORE or SNCC worker—they're beautiful."[2] What these statements betray is a growing identification with the activist community and with a way of life that would later be dubbed the "counterculture."

Other aspects of the orientation sessions also reinforced this sense of identification. For many, the legions of reporters and television cameramen swarming over the campus had that effect. Their presence communicated a sense of "history-making" significance that was intoxicating. Not that the hypocrisy and sensationalism of the media was lost on the volunteers. This too was a part of the radicalizing process they were undergoing. In her beautiful book describing the Freedom Summer experience, another volunteer, Sally Belfrage (1965: 23–24), wrote of how the media

> followed us into the classrooms and dormitories, around the lounges, out along the paths. They asked people to sing that song again for the American public. There was footage, yardage, mileage of every face in the place. "At the beginning it made me feel important," a boy from Utah said at lunch. "But they have a way of degrading everything they touch." "It's because we need them more than they need us," his neighbor returned, "and they know it." "It's just their job," commented a third. "Well, I feel unclean," the boy from Utah said.

Degrading or not, the volunteers' letters home are filled with entreaties to parents to "save the *Life* magazine picture for me," or to "watch CBS tonight; I may be on." Degrading or not, the media attention clearly reinforced the volunteers' sense of their own and the project's importance.

More than anything else, however, it was the volunteers' growing appreciation of the dangers inherent in the project that had the greatest impact on them. If they had not realized the extent of these dangers before orientation, they certainly did by the time they left Ohio. This was no accident. In planning the sessions, one of the overriding goals had been to overwhelm the volunteers with the savagery and violence of life in Mississippi. It was hoped that by doing so, the staff might be able to persuade the naive or those with lingering doubts to stay home. So in session after session, staff members recounted the litany of horror they had seen in Mississippi. In turn, the volunteers duly recorded these sessions in their journals or letters home. Margaret Rose wrote:

> Last night's objective narration of facts is shot to hell by a breakdown in my defensives against fear and intimidation. The straw to break the back was the narration of a white leader here (a face mangled by scars) about a near death experience on the road coming up here. Fifteen guys in 3 cars ran them off the road (normal) and all in the car experienced the intent of the group: murder. It was somehow absolutely clear. A car full of leaders. Too good to pass over. One man, an exchange professor from Pakistan in a Mississippi university, happened to say he was a foreigner and had a passport. Some small doubt cross [*sic*] the minds of one of the 15. Somehow the mood shifted. They did not murder. He said we could expect this kind of encounter. He means it.[3]

Another volunteer wrote:

> There is a quiet Negro fellow on the staff who has an ugly scar on his neck and another on his shoulder where he stopped 45 slugs. . . . Another fellow told this morning how his father and later his brother had been shot to death. . . . I'd venture to say that every member of the Mississippi staff has been beaten at least once and he who has not been shot at is rare. It is impossible for you to imagine what we are going in to, as it is for me now, but I'm beginning to see. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 7–8)

Role playing sessions and lessons in how to protect oneself if attacked only underscored the growing fear the volunteers were feeling. A volunteer described the general response to one such session: "John Strickland [a volunteer] stood ashen, staring at the lad curled up on the ground. Like the rest of the crowd, he was silent. Their eyes stayed riveted to the frozen tableau of a violence that till that moment had existed for them only in grade-B movies and tabloid spreads" (Sugarman, 1966: 29).

But no planned simulation could ever have dramatized the dangers of Mississippi life more forcefully than the real life event that took place in Neshoba County, Mississippi, on June 21, just as the second group of volunteers were arriving at Oxford, Ohio. Less than twenty-four hours after arriving in Mississippi, one in the first group of volunteers, Andrew

Goodman, climbed into a station wagon with staff members James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, and drove off to investigate a church bombing near Philadelphia, Mississippi. They never returned. Arrested in the afternoon on traffic charges, the three were held until the evening, and then released into the Mississippi night. It was the last time they were seen alive. Their burned-out station wagon was found near Bogue Chitto Swamp the next day. But it was not until August that the bodies were discovered beneath an earthen dam near Philadelphia: Chaney's showed signs of a savage beating, and Goodman's and Schwerner's, single gunshot wounds to the chest.[4]

Back at Oxford, news of the disappearance reached the volunteers during a general assembly. Sally Belfrage (1965: 11–12) describes the scene:

> There was an interruption then at a side entrance: three or four staff members had come in and were whispering agitatedly. One of them walked over to the stage and sprang up to whisper to Moses, who bent on his knees to hear. In a moment he was alone again. Still crouched, he gazed at the floor at his feet, unconscious of us. Time passed. When he stood and spoke, he was somewhere else; it was simply that he was obliged to say something, but his voice was automatic. "Yesterday morning, three of our people left Meridian, Mississippi, to investigate a church-burning in Neshoba County. They haven't come back, and we haven't had any word from them. . . ." Then a thin girl in shorts was talking to us from the stage: Rita Schwerner, the wife of one of the three. She paced as she spoke, her eyes distraught and her face quite white, but in a voice that was even and disciplined . . . Rita asked us to form in groups by home areas and wire our congressmen. . . . We composed telegrams, collected money and sent them, and tried to rub out the reality of the situation with action. No one was willing to believe that the event involved more than a disappearance. It was hard to believe even that. Somehow it seemed only a climactic object lesson, part of the morning's lecture, an anecdote to give life to the words of Bob Moses. To think of it in other terms was to be forced to identify with the three, to be prepared, irrevocably, to give one's life.

Word of the disappearance did, in fact, force the volunteers to confront the possibility of their own deaths. Some, like Stuart Rawlings, did so dispassionately:

> What are my personal chances? There are 200 COFO volunteers who have been working in the state a week, and three of them have already been killed. I shall be working in Forrest County, which is reputedly less violent than Neshoba County. But I shall be working on voter registration, which is more dangerous than work in Freedom Schools or Community Centers. There are other factors which must be considered too—age, sex, experience and common sense. All considered, I think my chances of being killed are 2%, or one in fifty.[5]

Others expressed their fears more emotionally. "The reality of Mississippi gets closer to us everyday. We know the blood is going to flow this summer and it's going to be our blood. And I'm scared—I'm very scared."[6]

In the face of these fears and mounting parental pressure a few of the volunteers did leave for home. The vast majority, however, stayed. And with the decision to stay, their commitment to the project and attachment to the "beloved community" grew as well. By week's end the combination of fear, history-making media attention, exposure to new lifestyles, and sense of political mission that suffused the project had produced for many the type of transcendent, larger-than-life experiences that would bind them to the movement for years to come.

> June 25
>
> It happened today. . . . We were all watching the CBS TV show—about 100 of us . . . Walter Cronkite told how the whole country was watching Mississippi. And then the television was singing our freedom song, "We shall overcome, we shall overcome. . . ." So we all joined hands and sang with the television. We sang with all our hearts—"justice shall be done . . . we shall vote together . . . we shall live in freedom . . ." and then someone said, "Everyone hum softly," so we hummed, and a Negro by my side spoke . . . "You know what we're all doing. . . . We're moving the world. We're all here to bring all the people of Mississippi, all the peoples of this country, all the peoples of the world . . . together . . . we're bringing a new revolution of love, so let's sing out together once again now, everybody hand in hand. . . ." "Deep in my heart, I do believe. Oh . . . we shall overcome some day." Stunned, I walked alone out into the night. Life was beautiful. It was perfect. These people were me, and I was them. Absolutely nothing came between us, as our hearts felt the call to work toward a better world . . . I felt that I could and would devote my life to this kind of revolution. Alleluia.[7]

> June 20
>
> We just saw off two chartered bus-loads . . . of kids headed south. It was an incredibly moving experience. The buses pulled up and all belongings were piled aboard. But the kids refused to follow them, and we all stood in a large circle along side one bus and sang "We Shall Overcome"—SNCC-style—i.e. with arms crossed, holding hands. Then the departing kids got aboard, and along [*sic*] period of farewells through the windows began. All this time, black clouds were

> massing on the horizon. The sky was angry and threads of lightning flashed occasionally: it seemed like a bad omen. Finally, the bus motors started up and the buses began to move forward. Kids were hanging out the windows kissing and hugging their friends from the moving bus. It was a strange [combination] of children headed for summer camp and soldiers going off to war. Finally the buses gathered speed and left us behind. Wordlessly, as if pulled by some strong magnet, we silently formed a circle and, joining hands, sang "We'll Never Turn Back" very slowly and solemnly. Afterwards, we broke up silently and moved apart. Overhead, the . . . sun . . . burst . . . through the clouds.[8]
>
> June 30
>
> Friday evening the conference met for one last time as a whole. After discussing security regulations, Bob Moses . . . got up and spoke to us. He spoke of his fears and his weariness, of the burden he carries because of the workers who have been killed in Mississippi and because he knows that the probability is great that more will be killed. . . . He shared with us his burden of having to send us in knowing that he was sending some of us to our death.
>
> The group was very still as each person watched his leader bare his soul to the group. When Bob finished, a girl's voice rose up singing . . . "They say that Freedom is a long, long struggle." Slowly the voices in the room joined in. We stood with our arms around each other and we sang for each other. I stood between a boy I knew from Morehouse and a girl I knew from Carleton. And I felt the boy reach across behind me and hold the girl as well as me. I felt his love go through me whom he knew and loved to a girl he did not know well but whom he loved also. On the other side of this girl stood a woman who had taught at Spelman whom I knew and loved and who gave her love to this girl she did not know. . . .
>
> The group sang in one voice, each individual singing not for himself but for the group. Tears ran down many faces. . . . As I sang . . . I knew better than ever before why I was going to Mississippi and what I am fighting for. It is for freedom—the freedom to love. It is something that no one can have until everybody has it.[9]

In the vernacular of the movement, the volunteers had had their first taste of "freedom high."[10]

Buoyed by that high, the volunteers left Oxford and headed South. Some traveled by car, but the majority went by bus. One of the volunteers interviewed said that the bus ride down was "the only time during the entire summer I had a chance to step back and reflect on what was happening."[11] Afforded the same opportunity, another volunteer, Paul Cowan, recorded the following thoughts:

> [I]t is one o'clock and our bus, inconsequential to whoever observes it, is traveling down a Tennessee road, far into the country. I have always thought that between the hours of one and three a.m. America comes closest to realizing her promise. There is a true unity between all her travelers sharing, for the particular night, a lonely vigil, a personal responsibility for their land. But it was at this hour six days ago that Mickey, James and Andy disappeared on the frontier of Mississippi. And it was Americans who apparently captured them, men who speak the same language, sing the same anthem, fight in the same wars as those of us on this bus. We all inhabit the same night in the same land, but somehow that is not enough.[12]

By whatever means the volunteers traveled, neither the fears activated in Oxford nor the media were ever far behind. Both grew more active as the volunteers reached the state.

> Last Saturday four of us took the long ride from Oxford to Memphis in a small Corvette which was rigged with a mike so a CBS sound car behind us could record our profound thoughts as we went into battle. . . . I felt quite relaxed during most of the 14 hour drive. Mississippi seemed very remote! At midnight we pulled up to a Howard Johnson's Motel just a few miles from the border . . . the feeling that we were in enemy territory swept in on me.
>
> Sunday morning after the dead sleep of exhaustion, I awoke with fear gripping my gut. I had a hard time forcing down breakfast. At 10 a.m. we left for . . . Ruleville. When we got to the state line, the camera car told us to stop at the side of the road while they went to set up a shot at the big sign that welcomes tourists to the Magnolia State. Waiting there as cars streamed past with their occupants craning their necks to look at us, we got quite spooked. We finally got the go-ahead but then had to go back past the sign for a second run. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 36)

Those volunteers who entered the state without benefit of a media escort had their share of anxious moments as well.

> My eye moved once more to the mirror, once more to the road ahead, once more to the shivering needle of the speedometer. Once more I eased to fifty-five, and for the first time I was beginning to feel the tension in my neck. The car approaching moved out of the overheated light and turned out to be a green Ford pick-up truck. Two white men wearing wide, straw farmer's hats studied our license and squinted at us as the truck whooshed past. As I read my mirror, the man next to the driver turned and watched us move away. (Sugarman, 1966: 37)

By and large, however, the volunteer's entrance into Mississippi proved a bit anticlimactic. "Hell, off what we'd heard at Oxford, I figured there'd be road blocks or something. It was a bit disappointing."[13] Having made it behind "enemy lines," some of their initial fears drained away, and the volunteers began to size up their new environs. For those raised in the big cities of the North and West, it could be a strangely beautiful world, heightening the ecstatic state they were already in.

> The countryside is magnificent. Along sides of the road red clay banks tower up to 10 feet and over them drap [*sic*] long green vines. There is a special vine with round leaves that grows over everything else. The panorama thus looks rounded and makes the environs feel like a stage set for a fantasy.[14]

> Flat, endless Delta land of cotton, straight two-laned road, monotony, with only an occasional miserable shack to interrupt a landscape that was a visual forever. . . . A very few of them had flower gardens and a little tree, attempts at brightness, but by most the cotton grew to the door and the houses simply sagged as though about to melt into the ground. Shimmering in the heat mirage, they looked utterly insubstantial and invented. Dark men and women lazed on the tilting boards that were porches, or hacked at the dry dirt . . . SAVE OUR REPUBLIC! said a billboard, IMPEACH EARL WARREN! alone among miles of the pale, heat-colored earth, where the little plants grew, not a foot high. Another billboard shouted KILLS 'EM FAST! KEEPS 'EM DYING! and only abreast of it could you see the smaller print above, advertising a boll weevil pesticide. At a cross-roads, pointers to towns named Savage, Coldwater, Alligator. . . . There was nowhere that litter of neon, billboards, and gas stations, the identical sleep-and-eateries that negate distance and make American highways so much the same as each other; the country was foreign, resembling Spain or Syria or anywhere where heat and poverty combine to overwhelm attempts at the streamlined. Only at the outskirts of Greenwood did the asphalt widen, lines straighten, and ads for the Holiday Inn flash out America again. (Belfrage, 1965: 31–32)

Only in the larger towns and cities did the volunteers find hints of the America they knew. The downtown commercial districts and prosperous white neighborhoods of places like Jackson, Hattiesburg, Greenwood, and Biloxi bore at least some resemblance to places they had known before. But it was not in white Mississippi that they would be living.

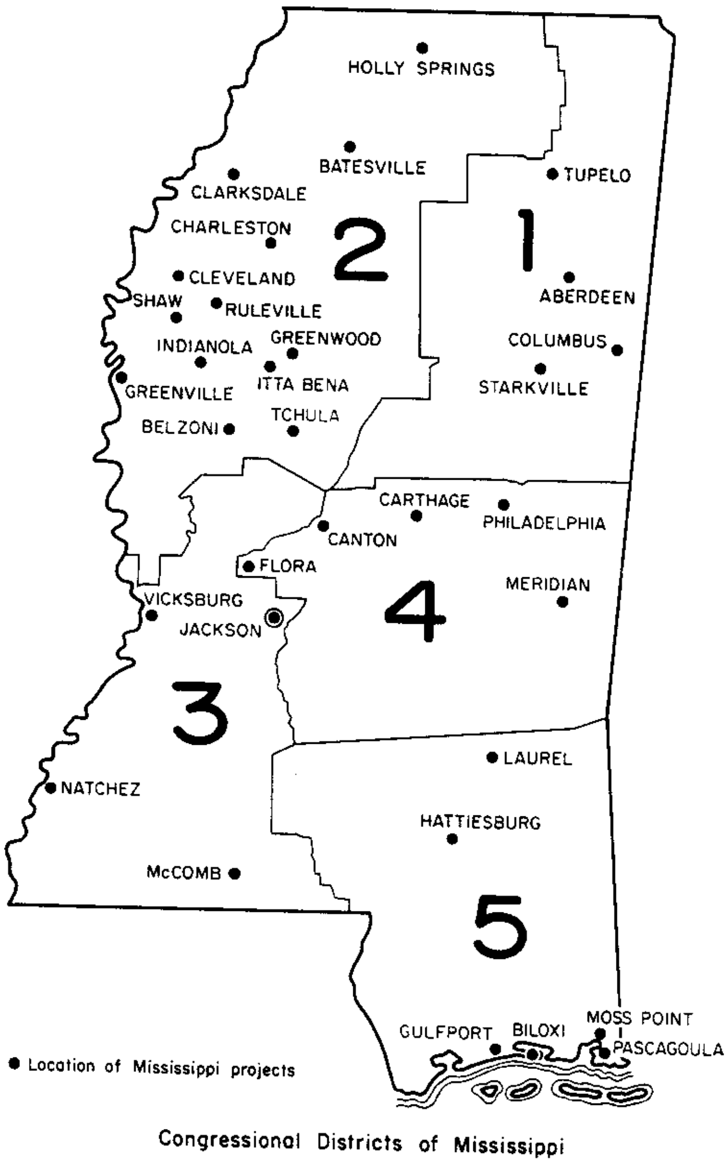
> [W]e crossed the tracks, and for a block or two the wiry, cheesy commercial atmosphere remained but as a cheap exaggeration of itself; then the pavement bellied out and sidewalks disappeared or fell away in broken pieces: Niggertown. Rows of shanties perched on stones and bricks and jammed together in precarious asymmetry. . . . The hot, end-to-end living sent the people out into the streets, where children, watched by parents on the porches, roamed barefoot. . . . (Belfrage 1965: 33)

As bleak as the landscape was, the reception accorded the volunteers was warm and celebratory.

> Batesville welcomed us triumphantly—at least Black Batesville did. Children and adults waved from their porches and shouted hello as we walked along the labyrinth of dirt paths and small wooden houses. . . . We had been warned to expect fear and hostility, but we were immediately invited to live and eat in Negro homes and to speak in Negro churches. For many local citizens, our coming was a religious event; I found it difficult to be cynical. Sometimes when we pass by, the children cheer. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 42–43)

The volunteers arrived in Mississippi in two waves. The first took place June 20 to 21 as the 250 voter registration workers who had attended the first orientation fanned out across the state. A week later, some 300 Freedom School and community center workers arrived fresh from the second orientation. These two groups formed the backbone of the thirty-two principal projects staffed by COFO (see figure on facing page). The projects were located in all five of Mississippi's Congressional districts, CORE having charge of those in District 4; SNCC the rest. District boundaries represented more than organizing devices. They also helped define natural geopolitical units with very different potentials for violence. Relatively speaking, the safest spots in the state were in the Fifth Congressional District. Here the majority of projects were located in Gulf Coast towns dependent on the tourist trade. At the opposite extreme was District 3. Especially dangerous was the southern half of the district, where a history of racial violence and Klan strength limited COFO activity to a small operation in Natchez and a beleaguered project in McComb. Over the course of the summer, the McComb area would suffer more than two-thirds of all the bomb attacks directed at the Summer Project (Harris, 1982: 61).

The size of the projects varied as much as the danger associated with each. The largest projects might have as many as fifty workers assigned to them. As an example, Stuart Rawlings listed forty-nine volunteers in Hattiesburg as of July 4. The breakdown of these volunteers was as follows: twenty-one Freedom School teachers, twenty voter registration workers, five community center personnel, and three office workers.[15]


HOLLY SPRINGS
BATESVILLE
TUPELO
CLARKSDALE
CHARLESTON
CLEVELAND
SHAW
RULEVILLE
INDIANOLA
GREENWOOD
GREENVILLE
ITTA BENA
BELZONI
TCHULA
ABERDEEN
COLUMBUS
STARKVILLE
CARTHAGE
PHILADELPHIA
CANTON
FLORA
VICKSBURG
JACKSON
MERIDIAN
NATCHEZ
LAUREL
HATTIESBURG
McCOMB
GULFPORT
BILOXI
MOSS POINT
PASCAGOULA
1
2
3
4
5
● Location of Mississippi projects
Congressional Districts of Mississippi

Principal Local Freedom Summer Projects (From Sutherland, 1965: 66)

Other projects, however, were staffed by as few as two volunteers.[16] Neither was the number nor personnel composition of the projects set for the entire summer. Volunteers came and went while both the total number of projects and workers rose between June and August. The ranks of the 550 early arrivals were supplemented by an estimated 400 to 450 additional volunteers who continued to arrive in the state until well into August. Whenever possible, the new arrivals were given a brief weekend orientation in Jackson, and then assigned to whatever project was in need of their services.[17] In this way, personnel attrition was offset by a steady stream of newcomers. Still, there were probably never more than 600 or so volunteers in the state at any one time, only slightly more than the number of workers who began work in June.

The same general pattern holds true for the number of projects. An August 25 accounting by the communications office in Jackson showed twelve additional projects in operation besides the thirty-two identified earlier.[18] For the most part, these new projects represented small operations spun off from the largest ones. Appendix C provides information on the size, project composition, and level of activity of all forty-four of these projects.

Appendix C also hints at the relative importance of the three principal components of the Summer Project. These were (1) voter registration, (2) the Freedom Schools, and (3) the community centers. Only two of the forty-four projects failed to have a voter registration program. Thirty of the projects organized Freedom Schools and twenty-three staffed community centers. The vast majority of the volunteers, however, were assigned either to teach in the Freedom Schools or to do voter registration work.

Voter Registration

Voter registration was the cornerstone of the Summer Project. This is not to say that it was necessarily the most important part of Freedom Summer. However, it did supply the strategic impetus to the project. It was the success of the Freedom Vote campaign in the fall of 1963 that led SNCC and COFO to approve Bob Moses' plan for an even more ambitious political project the following summer. Originally, the plan was simply to use large numbers of white students—à la the Freedom Vote—to register as many black voters as possible. However, as long as the state Democratic party was effectively closed to blacks, it was unclear how beneficial the simple registration of voters would be. To address the problem, SNCC spearheaded the establishment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) at a meeting held in Jackson on April 26, 1964. The MFDP then selected and ran a slate of candidates in the June 2 Democratic Primaries for Senator and three House seats. Not surprisingly, all four of the MFDP candidates (Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, John Houston, and the Rev. John Cameron) were soundly beaten. So, following the primary, they obtained and filed the necessary number of signatures to be placed on the November ballot as independents. The Mississippi State Board of Elections rejected these petitions. Thus stymied, the SNCC/MFDP leadership returned to the strategy that had served them so well the previous fall. If they were to be shut out of regular electoral politics in the state, they would conduct a mock election to challenge the Mississippi Delegation to the August Democratic National Convention to be held in Atlantic City.[19]

For the volunteers, this meant they would be involved in two parallel tasks: persuading blacks to attempt to register as official voters and "freedom registering" voters on behalf of the MFDP. Freedom registration forms could be filled out in the applicant's home; official registration meant a trip to the courthouse. That made the latter process the much more difficult of the two. Neither, however, was easy.

> Canvassing is very trying, you walk a little dusty street, with incredibly broken down shacks. The people sitting on porches staring away into nowhere—the sweat running down your face! Little kids half-naked in raggy clothes *all* over the place—this is what you face with your little packet of "Freedom Forms". . . . Unfortunateley [*sic*], Freedom registration is terribely [*sic*] remote to these people. I almost feel guilty—like I'm playing for numbers only; . . . you walk up to a porch, knock on a door and enter into another world. . . . The walls are inevitably covered with a funeral hall calendar, a portrait calendar of President Kennedy, old graduation pictures. Maybe a new cheap lamp from Fred's dollar store.
>
> You meet an afraid, but sometimes eager, curious face—one which is used to . . . saying "Yes Sir" to everything a white man says. . . . You see their pain, the incredible years of suffering etched in their worn faces; and then if you convince them to sign you leave. You walk down the deteriorating steps to the dirt, to the next house—the next world and start in on your sales pitch again, leaving behind something which has broken you a little more. Poverty in the abstract does nothing to you. When you wake up to it every morning, and come down through the streets of it, and see the same old man on the ground playing the accordian [*sic*], the same man selling peaches out of [a] basket to [*sic*] heavy for his twisted body, the same children, a day older—a day closer to those men—after this everyday, poverty is a reality that is so outrageous you have to learn to . . . become jaded for the moment—or else be unable to function.[20]

> I work in voter registration. . . . On a normal day we roll out of bed early in the morning. We may have slept in the Freedom House, or in the home of some generous and brave farmer. . . . We study the map of the county, decide where we will work for the day. We scramble for breakfast and hit the road.
>
> The work is long and hot. We drive from farmhouse to farmhouse. I have averaged almost 200 miles a day in the car. The roads are in despicable condition . . . where the pavement stops the Negro sections are likely to begin. And if there is not even gravel on the roads, we can be reasonably sure that we are in a "safe" neighborhood. Such is not always the case, though, and more than once we have been cursed and threatened by someone for knocking on a white man's door.
>
> When we walk up to a house there are always children out front. They look up and see white men in the car, and fear and caution cover their expressions. Those terrified eyes are never quite out of my mind; they drive me as little else could. Children who have hardly learned to talk are well-taught in the arts of avoiding whites. They learn "yassah" as almost their first words. If they did not, they could not survive. The children run to their parents, hide behind them. We walk up, smile, say howdy, and hold out our hands. As we shake hands I tell them my name. They tell me their names and I say Mr. ———, how do you do. It is likely the first time in the life of this farmer or housewife a white man has ever shaken hands with them, or even called them "with a handle to their names." This does not necessarily bode well with them; they are suspicious. Chances are they have heard about the "freedom riders" passing through. The news is usually greeted with mingled fear, excitement, enthusiasm and gratitude. But the confrontation is more serious and more threatening. They think, if Mr. Charlie knew . . . , and they are afraid. They have good reason to be. . . . Many . . . are sharecroppers, who must turn over a third to a half of the year's harvest to a man who does not work at all, but who owns the land they till. They may be evicted, and have often been for far less serious offenses. Nearly everyone black in Mississippi is at least a year in debt. The threat of suspended credit and foreclosure is a tremendous burden.[21]

But the work could be rich and rewarding as well.

> I have met some of the most amazing, great people among my canvassees. Out of nowhere, seemingly, come little old women with so much warmth and wisdom that I almost cry. . . . Yesterday, around

> 7 p.m. I marched up on the steps of a dark little falling apart house. Mrs. Brotherns—the lady of the house . . . invited me in. . . . She was already registered, but her husband was not. He was a beautiful man of about 59, great masses of graying hair and completely beardless face. He was crippled with arthritis and thus could not write and could not read either. . . .
>
> It was really quite beautiful. Just then it began to pour and the pageant continued inside—in a small dark room, lighted only by a brief flame in the fireplace, where Mrs. Brotherns was cooking dinner. The three adopted children sat on the floor and read from their school books or counted . . . bottletops, while the two old people looked on with love. The whole scene was from another century—especially because the little boy had a self-made bow and arrow, bent from a stick and tied with some cord. He proudly shot an arrow into the bushes across the street as I watched.[22]

> One day when I was canvassing I met Mr. Brown. I told him my name is Ann. He said yes, Miss Ann, pleased to meet you. He is a young Negro teacher in the all-Negro Temple High School and of course he had no contact with white people before, except as Mr., Mrs., "Massa,"—well, I said, please call me Ann . . . there was nothing so beautiful as the rest of the conversation. At every opportunity he had, he said Ann—he didn't just say Ann—he rolled the name around his tongue, savored the taste and sang it, listening to the echo in the back of his mind. He played with the word as a child would play with a new and fascinating toy, as a person would delight in the ecstasy of a new-found love. And that conversation has left a mark on me. I hear the name—a loved word—the start of something so big, so beautiful, so new. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 49)

Whether the volunteers were trying to persuade someone to register or signing up people for the MFDP, canvassing represented only the first step in a larger process. Having persuaded someone to attempt to register, there was still the matter of a trip to the courthouse. For blacks, this was a momentous and potentially dangerous act, a public challenge to the established order, and an invitation to violence or economic reprisals. For the volunteers it was a further test of their powers of persuasion.

> At about 9:30 [A.M.] two of us COFO workers drive to the houses of three or four people who want to register to vote. The car's driver is usually a local man who has volunteered to take people to the courthouse. I, or another COFO worker, would knock on the door, be invited in, and then ask how does the applicant feel. Usually he says "fine," but then offers some small excuse for not going—meeting some unexpected guests, doing chores, etc. At this point I often ignore the excuses and . . . ask, "Well, how long will it take to get ready? We can pick someone else up and be back for you in about ten minutes. Will that be enough time?" . . . All their excuses usually disappear after this question, and they say they can be ready in about five minutes. I wait at the house and we all drive to the courthouse.[23]

The fact that about 17,000 blacks traveled to the courthouse attests to the persistence of the volunteers and the extraordinary courage of those attempting to register (Carson, 1981: 117). Although only 1,600 of the completed applications were accepted by state registrars, the lonely trips to the courthouse proved to be a major step toward the democratization of voting in Mississippi and throughout the South. The many instances of delay, obstruction, and harassment of the applicants were duly recorded by the volunteers, thus providing the evidence for several important voter discrimination suits. In addition, the inequities uncovered over the course of the summer helped to dramatize the need for legislation and therefore to generate momentum on behalf of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Just as important as these formal political consequences was the effect this activity had on the black community. For its part, the white community observed the registration attempts with something more than benign indifference. In many communities, newspaper editors did their share for the old order by printing daily lists of those attempting to register, thereby making the names of the registrants available to anyone who might be inclined to take offense at such a brazen act of defiance. Historically, the publication of such lists had been enough to deter all but the most courageous, or craziest, blacks from trying to register to vote. But as more and more people donned their Sunday best for the trip to the courthouse, a curious thing happened: the daily newspaper lists of those registering to vote were transformed from an effective means of social control into a vehicle for gaining prestige in the black community. As one volunteer proudly noted in a letter home, "in Panola County now the Negro citizens look with pride at their names in the *Panolian;* they point out the names of friends and neighbors and hurry to the courthouse to be enlisted on the honor roll" (quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 87–88).

In the case of the MFDP, the act of registering voters was only the first step in a long process that eventually took black Mississippians and some of the SNCC leadership to the Democratic National Convention and later to the halls of Congress. The road there wound through the same tiered primary process the party regulars were subject to. The process began at the precinct level where all registered voters were free to participate in the election of delegates to a county convention. At the county convention, representatives to a district convention were chosen. The process was then repeated at several district conventions and finally the state convention, with the state delegates electing representatives to attend the National Convention in Atlantic City. The volunteers were involved every step of the way. Not only did they freedom register 80,000 prospective voters, but they served as precinct organizers as well (Carson, 1981: 117). In this capacity, they attended the precinct, county, and district conventions. Their accounts capture the excitement generated by the proceedings:

> The day before yesterday I went to a precinct meeting in one of the poorer sections of town. It was a very moving experience: about 40 people came, which was far above the expectations of the people who had been canvassing that area; many of them came up after the meeting which was probably the very first experience in their life of democratic procedures, their first inkling of the possibility . . . of any kind of action, and shook our hands, saying "God Bless You." . . .[24]

The delegate selection process reached its climax on August 6 at the state convention in Jackson. There sixty-eight people (including four whites) were elected to represent the disenfranchised voters of Mississippi at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. One of the few volunteers lucky enough to attend the convention described the scene:

> From the floor of the State Convention of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: This is the most exciting, moving, and impressive thing I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing—let alone be a part of.
>
> Miss Ella Baker presented a very stirring keynote address. . . . Right after Miss Baker's speech, there was a march of all the delegates around the convention hall—singing Freedom Songs, waving American flags, banners and county signs. This was probably the most soul-felt march ever to occur in a political convention, I felt, as we marched with a mixture of sadness and joy—of humility and pride—of fear and courage, singing "Go Tell It on the Mountain," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round," and "This Little Light of Mine." You would just . . . have to be here to really feel . . . what this means to the people who are here. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 212–214)

A few of the volunteers would travel on to Atlantic City to support the convention challenge. For most of the volunteers, however, the state convention marked the end of their involvement in the summer's political program. It had been a powerful experience, one marked by personal discovery as well as political education. The lessons learned, skills developed, and identities formed in the process would affect the evolution of the New Left for years to come.

Freedom Schools

In planning for the Summer Project, the SNCC staff was smart enough to realize that the oppression of Mississippi's black population depended on more than restricting access to the political system. An elaborate array of caste restrictions and institutional inequities also contributed to the maintenance of the racial status quo. Among these was Mississippi's separate but clearly unequal school system. As noted in Chapter 1, state educational expenditures in 1964 averaged $81.66 per white student and $21.77 for each black student. The fact that Mississippi was one of only two states without a mandatory education law merely underscored the lack of importance accorded public education. So too did other bits of evidence. At the time of the fall cotton harvest, many of the black schools in the delta were routinely closed to take advantage of the cheap source of labor the students provided. Within the classroom, curriculum content was carefully controlled. State-selected textbooks glorified the "Southern way of life" and made no mention of significant achievements by black Americans. In some districts, school superintendents even forbade the history of the Reconstruction period from being taught in the black schools. The Freedom Schools were an effort to counter the obvious inequities and insidious political messages inherent in this system.[25]

The chief architect of the Freedom Schools was veteran SNCC field secretary Charlie Cobb. Drafted in the fall of 1963, Cobb's proposal called for the establishment of Freedom Schools "to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives, and ultimately new directions for action" (quoted in Carson, 1981: 110). To put the necessary curricular flesh on the bones of Cobb's proposal, the National Council of Churches sponsored a March, 1964 meeting in New York City. There, educators, clergy, and SNCC staff members hammered out a basic curriculum for the schools emphasizing four principal topic areas: (1) remedial education, (2) leadership development, (3) contemporary issues, and (4) nonacademic curriculum (Rothschild, 1982: 95). This basic framework was modified again following the appointment of Staughton Lynd, a history professor at Spelman, as director of the Freedom School program. In a mimeographed packet sent out just before the start of the Summer Project, the prospective teachers were informed that "the kind of activities you will be developing will fall into three general areas: (1) academic work, (2) recreation and cultural activities, (3) leadership development" (quoted in Holt, 1965: 103). In effect, the second and third topic areas designated in the original proposal had been lumped together under the single heading of "leadership development." Judging from the letters and journals written by the teachers, most projects adhered to this modified framework in organizing their Freedom School programs.[26] Most offered a variety of basic courses in "leadership development," or what came to be known as the core curriculum. This consisted of courses in the history and philosophy of the movement, current events, and black history. "Academic work" was represented by nearly as many courses as there were students interested in taking them. Offerings ranged from basic remedial courses in reading and math to a variety of specialized classes in such topics as French, science, dance, and debate. Finally, a variety of "recreation and cultural activities" served to round out the Freedom School program. Among the most notable of these activities were the establishment of student-run newspapers on several projects and the writing and performing of an original play by the students in the Holly Springs project.[27]

By any standard, the Freedom Schools were a success. Where project staff had hoped to attract 1,000 or so students, between 3,000 and 3,500 showed up.[28] This in the face of a lack of facilities, the fears of black parents, and considerable violence directed at the schools. In McComb, seventy-five students showed up for classes the morning after a bomb leveled the church that had been serving as their school. Classes were held on the lawn in front of the smoldering church while younger children played in the ruins. In the small town of Harmony, the volunteers and townspeople set to cleaning up and repairing four abandoned school buildings to be used as classrooms.

> Then the sheriff came with about six white men, who were introduced as the "Board of Education." If they weren't Klan men, then they were at least Citizen Council [a more moderate segregationist group] people. God, they hated us . . . they told us we should not use it [the school building]; it is county property. We told them it was private property. We are getting a lawyer and will fight in court. Meanwhile . . . we will teach in a nearby church and outside. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 114)

Predictably, the court ruled in favor of the "Board of Education." Undaunted, the community erected its own school/community center.

> Everyday this week . . . the men of the community hammered and poured cement. At noon, about 7 or 8 women all gathered at the center with fried chicken, fish, salad, gallons of Kool-Aid, and apple turnovers, and served them to the men, we teachers, and each other. It is a thing of beauty to see us all work together. . . . We are a living repudiation of the "too many cooks" theory. It should be up by Saturday, or at latest Tuesday. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 115)

Eventually construction was finished and classes were held in the new building, if only for the final week of the summer.

In the classroom, the volunteers discovered most of the frustrations teachers have always faced. Overcrowding was frequently a problem:

> It became evident quite early that we were going to have many more than the expected 75 students. We called Jackson and got a promise of more teachers—at full strength we will have 23. This was when we expected 150 students. On registration day, however, we had a totally unexpected deluge: 600 students! . . . After a while, as they were coming in, it changed from a celebration to a crisis. This is 26 students per teacher—much better than the local or usual ratios, but still not enough . . . to do all we want to in six weeks. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 94)

Complaints about a lack of "educational standards" or "academic discipline" were common as well:

> The . . . class tends to degenerate into discussion of anything from standards of Negro beauty to the Marxist view of private property. . . . They are eager to argue, in some ways less eager to learn; some days ago I was attempting to give some minimal account of certain facts, when one of the more brilliant and remarkable pupils, but somewhat headstrong, declared that no offense, but, all this was rather boring, and it would be better if other people got a chance to speak, and if we could have discussions. I often think of the difficulties which . . . we will (for these schools will be continued all year) have in making the transition from this school to one where solid academic discipline must be imposed.[29]

Add to this list the problems of absenteeism, staff dissension, and teacher "burn-out," and one might well be describing the generic teaching experience. But there was a difference. The volunteers also experienced the emotional rewards reserved for those teaching students who are there voluntarily and who are being taken seriously for perhaps the first time in their lives.

> I can see the change. The 16 year-old's discovery of poetry, of Whitman and Cummings and above all else, the struggle to express thoughts in words, to translate ideas into concrete written words. After two weeks a child finally looks me in the eye, unafraid, acknowledging a bond of trust which 300 years of Mississippians said should never, could never exist—I can feel the growth of self-confidence. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 97)
>
> The atmosphere in the class is unbelievable. It is what every teacher dreams about—real, honest enthusiasm and desire to learn anything and everything. The girls come to class of their own free will. They respond to everything that is said. They are excited about learning. They drain me of everything that I have to offer so that I go home at night completely exhausted but very happy in spirit because I know that I have given to people. . . . Every class is beautiful. The girls respond, respond, respond. And they disagree among themselves. I have no doubt that soon they will be disagreeing with me. At least this is one thing that I am working towards. They know that they have been cheated and they want anything and everything that we can give them. I feel inadequate to the task of teaching them but I keep saying to myself that as long as I continue to feel humble there is a chance that we might all learn a whole lot together.[30]

In talking to the volunteers today it is clear that they *did* learn a lot from their experience as teachers. Some became more politically radical as a result of the courses they taught or the discussions they had with other teachers. Others altered their career plans because of the satisfaction they had derived from teaching. The schools, then, had an impact beyond the students; the teachers, too, were taught.

Life in the Black Community

While not discounting the time and energy the volunteers expended on their jobs, it may well be that work was the least demanding part of their summer experience. After all there was a certain familiarity about their work assignments. Many of those who taught either were studying to become teachers or had taught before. Those with no teaching experience had at least spent years going to school as students, so the classroom was hardly a foreign place to them. As for the voter registration workers, 76 percent had participated in some form of civil rights organizing prior to the summer.[31]

Very few of the volunteers, however, had had experiences that prepared them for life in the black community. For one thing, few had ever lived in rural areas. Their letters capture a kind of bemused appreciation of the new experiences this afforded them.

> Man, like I don't even believe what I just did. You really had to be there to appreciate it. I took a bath. But no ordinary bath 'cause there's no running water. No, we take this bucket out in the back yard and fill it with water warmed over a fire. It's pitch black so we shine Mr. Clark's truck lights on the bucket. Then I strip down naked and stand in the bucket to wash. That is the way you take a bath around here. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 42)
>
> [T]here are several [chickens] and several roosters. Roosters have this habit—one sits by the window and at dawn melancholically crows in a refrain reminiscent of a man falling off a cliff. The dog outside is just thrilled by this and barks his approval. The rooster thinks about this for a while—then to show he's no party-pooper he lets go again. This sends the dog in to sheer ecstasy. A little while later they pal it up and do a duet. By this time I usually wake up for the third time convinced that someone is being murdered at the foot of my bed.[32]

More significant and more sobering than the volunteers' introduction to rural life was their exposure to "the other America." The publicity accorded Michael Harrington's 1962 book of the same name may have made the volunteers intellectually aware of poverty, but their class advantages had insulated them from any real experiential understanding of the problem. No such comfortable distance was possible in Mississippi. The volunteers' generally optimistic, idealistic upbringing had not prepared them for the underside of the American dream.

> This was the most appalling example of deprivation ever seen by any of us who were canvassing. Upon approaching the house, we were invited on the porch which was strewn with bean shellings, rotten cotton sacks, pieces of a broken stove, and other assorted bits of scrap. . . . On a drooping cot to our right as we came in the door lay a small child (six months old). The child's eyes, nose, and mouth were covered with flies. Not being able to stand such a sight, I tried to chase them away only to be met with the reply of the mother of the child. "They will only come back again."
>
> The whole house seemed diseased, rotten, and splitting at the seams with infection. Nevertheless, the people knew what we were coming for, and the forms were filled out without our asking. . . . This is a scene that was burned into all of our minds and which will make quiet sleep impossible.[33]

> One day has passed in Shaw and the other America is opening itself before my naive, middle-class eyes. The cockroaches draw patterns across the floor and table and make a live patchwork on the bed. Sweat covers my skin and cakes brown in my joints—wrist, elbow, knee, neck. Mosquito bites, red specks on white background.
>
> The four-year-old grandson is standing by my side. I wonder how our presence now will affect him when he is a man?
>
> I saw other children today who bore the marks of the Negro in rural Mississippi. One had a protruding navel the size of the stone he held in his hand. Several had distended stomachs.
>
> Is America really the land that greets its visitors with "Send me your tired, your poor, your helpless masses to breathe free"?
>
> There is no Golden Door in Shaw. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 54–55)

These images had a powerful impact on the volunteers, especially those whose upbringing had failed to provide them with even an ideological awareness of the problem. One especially sheltered volunteer, raised in an upper-middle-class suburb of Chicago, remembers "crying myself to bed at night [in Mississippi]. . . . I was just seeing too much, feeling too much. Things weren't supposed to be like this. I was just a mess. I just remember feeling sad, guilty and angry all at the same time."[34]

In the face of these feelings—especially the guilt—the warmth, openness, and acceptance the volunteers felt from the black community was both confirming and confusing at the same time. Confirming because it communicated a kind of redemptive forgiveness that assuaged the guilt many of the volunteers were feeling; confusing because they didn't feel they deserved the special attention they were receiving. It all added up to a rich welter of feelings that left a good many of the volunteers overwhelmed. In a letter to her parents, Pam Parker struggled to communicate all she was feeling:

> I am starting to ramble because there is so much in my head and heart that I want to say but cannot. It has been a big week filled with so much enthusiasm and love that I feel overwhelmed. The girls I work with . . . have accepted me completely. They have told me this in a way they have responded in class, and some have told me this directly in their essays they have written me or in actual conversations. . . . This abundance of love and gratitude and acceptance makes me feel so humble and so happy.[35]

Even today this jumble of emotions is evident in the former volunteers' recollections of the summer. Elinor Tideman Aurthur movingly recalled the daily lunchtime ritual at the Freedom School where she taught.

> [T]he women from the church everyday would bring food for all the teachers. . . . I used to look forward to it so much, and the fact that they would give this to us everyday, you know, was just wonderful . . . they had fried chicken and deviled eggs and potato salad. . . . They would spread it out on the table and they would, it was so nice [starts to cry] . . . it was so touching . . . to be cared for . . . that [way] . . . I felt like I belonged; I felt like they liked me and they wanted me to be there and I, it was so healing, you know, knowing what the divisions were . . . and yet somehow you can heal . . . I don't mean to say that they idealized us . . . because I don't think they did, but I think there was a kind of love . . . and a kind of compassion for us that they showed. It was a daily demonstration of love and acceptance . . . they were feeding us; they were giving us nourishment.[36]

For many of the volunteers, the most immediate purveyors of this love and acceptance were the families that housed them. Sally Belfrage (1965: 36) describes her introduction to her summer hostess: "[Mrs. Amos] hadn't planned to house summer volunteers, but Cora Lou's guest immediately became to her another child . . . she hugged me, fed me fried chicken and cornbread and installed me in the back bedroom."

Midway through the summer another volunteer described her "home life" to her mother:

> I have become so close to the family I am staying with—eleven people—that Mrs. H. finally paid me a great compliment. She was introducing me to one of her Negro women friends and said, "This is Nancy, my adopted daughter!" I baby-sat for her one night and in general we have become very close friends. She is a beautiful mother. My favorite picture of her is sitting peacefully in a summer chair with her 2-year old baby girl in her lap; the baby, sucking her bottle, with one hand inside her mother's dress resting on her bosom. It is such a human sight; such love oozes from this house I can't begin to explain. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 48)

The hospitality of the local families was all the more touching for the risks they ran in housing the volunteers. Sheltering the "invaders" was grounds for harassment, dismissal from a job, or worse. David Gelfand relates an incident that took place while he was living with a prosperous black family in Meridian:

> [D]uring the five or six days I was there, there had been numerous . . . threatening phone calls and his [the black homeowner's] wife was quite upset about it. And one morning he came and woke me up. I was sleeping on the couch in the living room. And we had put

> a single piece of hair on Scotch Magic Tape across the hood, so you always checked before you got in the car. And the tape was broken. He had checked it. And the carport was right next to the kids bedroom—ages four to twelve . . . And so he said, "okay, let's not do anything but release the emergency break and roll it out to the road." And we did that and then opened the hood. And there were four sticks of dynamite tied [to] . . . the ignition coil.[37]

On occasion the volunteers were reluctantly asked to leave following incidents such as this. More often than not their hosts responded with a resiliency and toughness that impressed the volunteers. In his journal, Gren Whitman recounted the following early-morning encounter with the woman in whose house he was living:

> I am writing this at 6 A.M. Just now coming down the hall from the bathroom, I met Mrs. Fairley coming down the hall from the front porch carrying a rifle in one hand [and] a pistol in the other. I do not know what is going on . . . [All she said was] "You go to sleep; let me fight for you."[38]

Nor was this volunteer's experience unique. In their journals, letters, or interviews, many of the volunteers recounted similar incidents.[39] For a group not raised around guns, it was yet another eye-opening aspect of the summer, and one that would lead a number of the volunteers to rethink strongly held pacifist convictions.

Besides their "home lives," the volunteers took part in other aspects of black community life. Many volunteers went to church either on their own or with the families they stayed with. For many it was their first real church-going experience. As such, it often proved to be a learning experience for everyone involved.

> Today we went to church. It is the only social event around here, and I enjoy it very much. It is a very spontaneous sort of meeting—the music comes from whomever feels like singing. But I admit it felt a little awkward when the lady standing next to me asked what religion I was and I said I was an agnostic, and she asked if we baptized or sprinkled in our church?[40]

Even among the volunteers who regularly attended church or temple in the North, few had any experiences that prepared them for the sights and sounds of the rural black church. The cool cerebral propriety of Reform Judaism or the liberal Protestant denominations common to the volunteers—Unitarian, Quaker, Methodist—contrasted sharply with the sweaty immediacy of the Southern black Baptist tradition.

This tradition was also very much in evidence at the weekly mass meetings, held to generate support for the voter registration drives. Part religious revival, part political rally, the mass meetings were also a social event of the first order. They were an occasion for rekindling the faith of the veterans and attracting new recruits to the cause. They were also a time to celebrate an exuberant and immediate community, the likes of which most of the volunteers had never before seen.

> The meeting had begun . . . with freedom songs and Brother Williams, who led a prayer and delivered a short pep-talk. An old man in shirtsleeves, he communicated with the soul of the crowd, arousing their enthusiasm, laughter, or indignation in a Southern patois so impenetrable that it took me half the summer to make out all the words. Biblical verse was stirred in liberally. "Of one blood He made all nations," Brother Williams would quote. "So if those people are so separate, who all these bright [light] Negroes?" The crowd would sway with reaction, in tune with him as they never were with a Northern speaker of either color. "Seem to me the white man done hisself some integratin' at night." . . . "There's a law 'gainst shooting' deer," he would say, pausing. The audience knew what was coming. "There's a law 'gainst rabbit." "Yes, yes," some voices answered. "There's a law 'gainst possum." "That's right." ". . . but it's always open season on Negroes!" They would laugh wryly, as they always did, as though the joke were new. Brother Williams, winding up to a shouting finish, would finally threaten, "If you don' register to vote you goin' to hell, that's all they is to it!" Then he would lead them in a hymn. . . . The moral came through the music and the people gave themselves the message of the meeting. Words could never rival its effectiveness, but there had to be words. [SNCC veteran] Stokely [Carmichael] spoke to them that night, grabbing the tension already built up and manipulating it to give them courage. "We've got a lot to do this summer," he told them. "While these people are here, national attention is here. The FBI isn't going to let anything happen to them. They let the murderers of Negroes off, but already men have been arrested in Itta Bena just for threatening white lives." He urged, cajoled, and ordered them down to Martha Lamb, the registrar of Leflore County and sole judge of the test she administered. Some had been there before, some of them more times, literally, than they could count. "What do we have to do?" Stokely asked. His audience knew. "REGISTER!" they shouted.
>
> There were more songs, and finally we stood, everyone, crossed arms, clasped hands, and sang "We Shall Overcome." Ending every meeting of more than half a dozen with it, we sang out all fatigue and fear, each connected by this bond of hands to each other, communicating an infinite love and sadness. A few voices tried to har-

> monize, but in the end the one true tune welled up in them and overcame. It was not the song for harmony; it meant too much to change its shape for effect. All the verses were sung, and if there had been more to prolong it, it would have been prolonged, no matter how late, how tired they were. Finally the tune was hummed alone while someone spoke a prayer, and the verse struck up again, "We shall overcome," with all the voice, emotion, hope, and strength that each contained. Together they were an army. Across the room I saw Clara; she had somewhere found a yellow dress to wear. There were tears on her cheeks. (Belfrage, 1965: 52–53, 55)

Nothing embodied the power and appeal of the black community better than the mass meetings. And perhaps no aspect of the summer made so profound or lasting an impact on the volunteers as those sweaty nights in Mississippi's black churches. One volunteer remembers

> finding myself in those churches. The thing I remember more than anything is the sweat. It was . . . so therapeutic. I was literally thawing out . . . loosening up, letting go. It was just so different from the way I had been raised; you know, to be proper and demure and all that. . . . It [the release] was just a great feeling. This whole stiff, uptight way I'd been raised felt like it was melting away.[41]

In contrast to the sterile propriety of their Northern upbringings, the immediacy and strong communal base of the black community attracted many of the volunteers. However positive this attraction was, it served only to reinforce the growing sense of alienation from white America that many of the volunteers were beginning to feel. The anger and guilt triggered by the oppression and poverty they were witnessing was already pushing many in this direction. Now what one volunteer termed the "warm, womb-like" appeal of the black community was pulling them in the same direction.[42] There were more profane pulls operating on the volunteers as well.

For every volunteer who fondly remembers church services or prayer meetings, there is another who will wax poetic about the "incredibly funky joints I hung out in that summer."[43] It is as if the traditional tension in the black community between the sacred and the profane are encoded in the volunteer's recollections. The "profane" memories, however, are no less powerful for being voiced a bit more reluctantly. They, no less than the "sacred," capture the exhilarating sense of discovery and adventure that came with the volunteers' exposure to a more sensual way of life. In the interviews, several of the volunteers struggled to describe this way of life and their reaction to it.

> [I]t was a constantly sensual experience . . . I mean . . . I was young and impressionable and not very experienced sexually . . . I don't know, it was . . . transporting . . . having sex in a field in the countryside where all you see are stars and I don't know, it just blew my mind. I don't know how to describe it . . . I was frightened by it and awed by it.[44]

> [I]t was a real romantic trip. It was heavy and Faulknerian and I was, you know, over-intellectualizing it all, I suppose. But it was really affecting—the kudzu [a vine common to the South] and the heat and the blackness of the black people and the whiteness of the white people, really very pale skin . . . it was so intense.[45]

Later this same volunteer described a typical evening's social routine in Mississippi:

> We frequently . . . [did] not eat until very late and [then we'd] go to a little place called Bodina's Cafe and have beer and chicken . . . and greens and grits and stuff and then dance . . . all this great stuff on the juke box . . . and we danced in the back and we drank a lot of beer by the quart. It was great . . . and a lot of it was very intense. A lot of romances . . . very sort of free that way.

The theme of sexual liberation runs like a subterranean current through the volunteers' letters, journals, and interviews.[46] It was not yet the full-blown ideology of "free love" that was to take hold a few years later; social action and personal—including sexual—liberation were still seen as incompatible by many. Instead it was a discrete, often tentative experimentation that anticipated the explicit connection between personal and political liberation made later in the decade.

Although the extent of sexual activity on the Summer Project might surprise some people, its occurrence has previously been discussed by a number of authors (c.f. Evans, 1980; Harris, 1982). Neither the fact nor extent of this activity, however, seems especially surprising when one considers various aspects of the project. Perhaps the most important of these was simply the ideology espoused within SNCC, emphasizing the notions of freedom and equality. The project was held to be the living embodiment of that ideal; the "beloved community" that would serve as a model of what a true egalitarian society was to be like. The members of that community were expected to be free; free from the restraints of racism and consequently free to truly love one another. For many volunteers, then, interracial sex became the ultimate expression of this ideology, conclusive proof of their right to membership in the "beloved community." As Harris (1982: 67) observed, "the coupling was considered not so much license as one more small expression of a liberation that was taking place on all fronts."

The physical proximity of the volunteers to one another also made sexual experimentation that much more likely. The manner in which the volunteers were housed played a large part in this. Try as they might, project organizers were unable to place all the volunteers in private homes. Given the risk attendant to playing host to one of the "outside agitators," this was hardly surprising. To accommodate the overflow, a number of projects housed the remaining volunteers in the project offices, or in separate "Freedom Houses." Theoretically, only male volunteers were to be housed in this fashion, but the pace of project activities and the multiple uses to which the houses were put soon rendered this arrangement unworkable. Instead, a steady stream of volunteers—female as well as male—passed through the houses at all hours of the day and night. Said one volunteer:

> You never knew what was going to happen [in the Freedom Houses] from one minute to the next. . . . I slept on a cot . . . on a kind of side porch . . . and . . . I'd drag in some nights and there'd . . . be a wild party raging on the porch. So I'd drag my cot off in search of a quiet corner . . . [only to find] an intense philosophical discussion going on in one corner . . . people making peanut butter sandwiches—always peanut butter . . . in another . . . [and] some soap opera . . . romantic entanglement being played out in another. . . . It was a real three-ring circus.[47]

Another recalled the "kind of manic adrenaline high you felt living in the . . . [Freedom House.] You just never came down . . . you never were alone long enough to come down. . . . There was always a million people around."[48] When combined with the frequently electric atmosphere of the houses, the presence of so many people made romantic and sexual entanglements almost inevitable. As David Harris (1982: 67) wrote: "the pace was frantic and adrenaline leaked into all aspects of freedom house life. Among other things, being on the battlefront together led to a level of heterosexual experimentation unavailable in the more regulated college circles from which the COFO workers hailed."

The presence of white women and black men on the projects made such entanglements all the more likely. The reason was simple. Each represented the ultimate sexual taboo for the other. This meant two things. First, that members of both groups would be intensely curious about one another. And second, that the project's ideology of racial liberation would create pressures to challenge these taboos as vestiges of a racist society. Both tendencies were, of course, played out on the project. It seems clear from the interviews that the heaviest volume of sexual activity during the summer involved black men—both locals and project staff—and white women. There was also considerable activity between the white male and female volunteers, but a great deal less so involving white males and black females, and black males and black females. This latter point resulted in serious tensions within SNCC, the repercussions of which will be discussed later. For now, however, it is important to emphasize the powerful dynamics promoting relationships between the white females and black males. Evans (1980: 79) explains:

> For black men, sexual access to white women challenged the culture's ultimate symbol of their denied manhood. And some of the middle-class white women whose attentions they sought had experienced a denial of their womanhood in failing to achieve the cheerleader standards of high school beauty and popularity so prevalent in the fifties and early sixties. Both, then, were hungry for sexual affirmation and appreciation.

As one of Evans's subjects said, "in terms of black men, one of the things I discovered . . . [was] that physically I was attractive to black men whereas I never had been attractive to white men" (quoted in Evans, 1980: 79).

Finally, the danger, tension, and sense of exhilaration the volunteers felt in putting their bodies on the line served as an important aphrodisiac in Mississippi. The relationship between these feelings and sex is nicely captured in the following event recalled by a volunteer working out of Starkville, Mississippi:

> I remember one incident. . . . We were just having a normal kind of meeting in a little corner grocery store . . . and [the police] . . . drove up, a lot of cops, dogs, the whole thing . . . [and they] could have decided to beat the hell out of all of us or shoot us . . . it was . . . the real psychological moment of truth . . . and that moment could have gone either way . . . everybody was very afraid. . . . They told us to break up the meeting and instead we stood our ground . . . outside this little store [and] began to sing and . . . the psychological balance of power . . . [shifted] in our favor and they left. It was moments like that you felt . . . practically an erotic feeling . . . it was sexual in a certain way; you felt so close . . . you loved everybody in that place at that moment. In fact, there was a woman there . . . who I had been after all summer long . . . [but] she had been very cool. . . . The point of the story is that, in fact, I didn't sleep with her that night, but she said, "sure, let's do it." . . . It was a symptom of everything that was happening.[49]

On one level the function of sex in situations such as this can be seen as simple tension release. From the volunteer's account, however, it is clear that it was much more than that. Indeed it would be hard to think of a more sexually potent mixture of feelings than those of tension, fear, excitement, danger, and uncertainty. Add to that the close emotional bond created by external threat and you have all the ingredients for intense sexual attraction. So intoxicating were these feelings that there were even some volunteers who deliberately courted situations that were likely to produce them. In his journal, Stuart Rawlings describes one volunteer who "[walked] through a white neighborhood singing freedom songs at the top of his voice."[50] Another admitted that he "used to cruise through the white section of town at night. . . . Some of it was just wanting to be defiant. . . . But secretly . . . I loved the danger too."[51]

All was not transcendent community and sex under the stars, however. There was a reason why SNCC veteran Cleveland Sellers described Freedom Summer as the "longest nightmare of my life" (Sellers, 1973: 94). The volunteers left Mississippi with their share of scars as well. Perhaps the most frequent source of these scars was the volunteers' confrontations with White Mississippi.

Confrontation with White Mississippi

During the course of the summer, COFO compiled a running chronology of "hostile incidents" (reproduced in Appendix D). The list is twenty-six mimeographed pages long and covers everything from threatening phone calls to the disappearance of the three workers. Oddly, instead of being viscerally powerful, the list is curiously unaffecting. The sheer number of incidents simply overwhelms the reader, leaving one emotionally numb to the specifics of any given incident. A summary of violence during the summer has much the same effect. So that the following statistics:

4	project workers killed
4	persons critically wounded
80	workers beaten
1000	arrests
37	churches bombed or burned
30	black homes or businesses bombed or burned[52]

fail to inform in an emotional sense. To gain some empathetic understanding of these events, one really has to read the volunteers' own accounts of them. Only then does one begin to appreciate the combination of shock, anger, disillusionment, and fear the volunteers felt in the face of the violence and terror they were witnessing.

> I really cannot describe how sick I think this state is. I really cannot describe the feeling in my stomach when I hear a typical story of injustice. . . . I cannot describe the real courage it takes to stay down here. I cannot describe the fears, the tensions and the uncertainties of living here. When I walk I am always looking at cars and people: if Negro, they are my friends; if white, I am frightened and walk faster. When driving, I am always asking: black? white? It is the fear and uncertainty that is maddening. I must always be on guard. . . . When confronted with a crisis, then the action is clearly defined. But when I do not know what to expect, but always know to expect something, then the tensions mount and I think of courage and of how deep my commitment has to be, and I think of getting the hell out of this sick state. I live day to day. I wake up in the morning sighing with relief that I was not bombed, because I know that "they" know where I live. And I think, well, I got through that night, now I have to get through this day, and it goes on and on. Even as I write this letter we are told that our office might be bombed by an anonymous voice, "to get rid of it once and for all." (Quoted in Rothschild, 1982: 59)

> Yesterday while the Mississippi River was being dragged looking for the three missing civil rights workers, two bodies of Negroes were found—one cut in half and one without a head. Mississippi is the only state where you can drag a river any time and find bodies you were not expecting . . . Negroes disappear down here every week and are never heard about. Things are really much better for rabbits here. There is a closed season on rabbits when they may not be killed. Negroes are killed all year round. So are rabbits. The difference is that arrests are made for killing rabbits out of season . . . Jesus Christ, this is supposed to be America in 1964.[53]

> Tonight the sickness struck. At our mass meeting, as we were singing "We Shall Overcome," a girl was shot in the side and in the chest. We fell to the floor in deathly fear; but soon we recovered and began moving out of the hall to see what had happened. . . . When I went out I saw a woman lying on the ground clutching her stomach. She was so still and looked like a statue with a tranquil smile on her face. I ran to call an ambulance. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 119)

While the presence of so many reporters in the state muted the violence to a degree, there was still no shortage of celebrated atrocities. In

Greenwood a local activist, Silas McGhee, was shot in the head while he sat in his car out in front of a local club. Three volunteers raced him to the hospital only to be told they couldn't bring him in because they didn't have shirts on. They had taken their shirts off to bandage McGhee's head.[54] On the evening of July 8, the front wall of the McComb Freedom House was destroyed by eight sticks of dynamite. Miraculously, the workers sleeping inside sustained only minor injuries.[55] In Hattiesburg, two days later, five voter registration workers (including a rabbi visiting from Ohio) were attacked and severely beaten by two local men armed with lead pipes.[56] And so it went, day in and day out, an endless string of incidents that lent a brutal and frightening texture to the volunteers' lives.

Had the volunteers been in their home states, they would invariably have turned to the police for protection from such incidents. Obviously, this was not practical in Mississippi. Often the police were implicated in the very incidents they were called to investigate. For instance, it turned out that Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price had coordinated the kidnapping and murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. Even acting in their official capacity as law enforcement officers, the police spared few opportunities to harass or terrorize the volunteers. The following two affidavits filed by project volunteers recount typical incidents:

> On July 9, 1964 Mary Lane, George Johnson and I accompanied Phillip Moore to the Greenwood Police Station. His purpose was to swear out a warrant against one of the local whites who had beaten him on the street. While Moore was thus occupied in another room, Miss Lane (Negro), Johnson (white) and I waited in the station room. There were three officers present--Desk Sergeant Simpson, Officer Logan and another unidentified officer. Logan was not in uniform–evidently off duty.
>
> Logan took a long knife out of his pocket and started to sharpen it, [directing] a running stream of threats at the three of us. He asked Johnson how he liked "screwing that nigger" (indicating Miss Lane). Then he said, while sharpening the knife: "sounds like rubbing up against nigger pussy." He poked the knife up against my ribs a few times; then he held it out toward me, told me to put my hand on it and asked: "Think it's sharp enough to cut your cock off?" Then he looked at Officer Simpson and said "You'd better get me out of here before I do what I'd like to do." At no time did Simpson or the other officer make any move to restrain him or protect us.
>
> Shortly thereafter, he walked over behind the desk and took out a pistol from his trousers pocket. He brandished it in our direction and spun the chamber, then tucked it in his shirt front. He walked over to the door. Miss Lane was standing about eight feet from the door in front of him with her back turned to him. He took out his gun again, pointed it at Miss Lane for a few seconds and put it in his pants pocket. Then he opened the door with his left hand and simultaneously reached out and gave Miss Lane a shove with his right fist, knocking her several feet across the room. He swore at her; then Officer Simpson joined in and told Miss Lane: "Nigger, you get your ass away from that door." Miss Lane refused to move, explaining that she wasn't in the doorway, especially since Logan had knocked her practically across the room. Both the officers shouted threats at her, threatening to throw her in jail if she didn't move.
>
> We went out about 15 minutes later and found that the tires of my car had been slashed. We went back in and reported the vandalism to the police but to no avail. (Quoted in Belfrage, 1965: 126–127)

> I pulled over and stopped, even though I heard no siren and had no definite knowledge that the following car contained police . . . and waited until the man in the car arrived. He came up to the truck and told me to get out. I asked for identification. He didn't show me anything, but told me to get out of the truck. I got out . . . and he and I walked to his car. Eric also got out and we received a . . . lecture while he was writing a ticket for speeding. . . . A highway patrol car arrived. . . . A third car then pulled up, which was unmarked and contained one man not in uniform. We could tell he had been drinking because of his actions and because we could smell the liquor.
>
> After a short interchange between him and the first man, the first man left and the third man took me back to the car of the highway patrolman. He opened the car and told me to get inside. I got inside and sat on the back seat. He told me to move over and got in. All the doors and windows were shut. He said, "I can't kill you, but you know what I'm going to do to you." I answered, "No, sir." At this time he pulled his gun out of his holster and started to hit me on the head with the gun butt. I put my hands up to protect my head and rolled into a ball on the seat. Over a period of about a minute he hit me about four times on the head and about eight to ten times on the left hand. He also hit me about three times on the left leg, twice on my right hand, and once on my left shoulder. All of this was with the gun butt. . . . Three of them then went up to Eric. They had a conversation with Eric which I could not hear and one of the men raised a gun and struck Eric, knocking him down. He got up and was knocked down again. I had been sitting in the car through all of this. I felt the blood on my face and on my arm. The man who had beaten me then came back to the car and sat down in the back seat. He picked up a flashlight and hit me across the mouth with it. I then

> rolled into a ball again and he put the gun to my temple and cocked it. He said, "If you move, I'll blow your brains out."[57]

Arrest often held a special kind of terror for the volunteers. As generations of Mississippi blacks had learned, there was virtually no end to the physical and psychological brutality Southern jailers could inflict upon a prisoner. In this the volunteers achieved equality. The police accorded them the same treatment.

> Upon entering [the] cell block we were taken to "nigger bull pen." Then [we] were shoved inside and officers said, "Here they are, get'em boys." This is very unusual practice for whites to be put into the Negro section. The Negroes expressed confusion and fear. They were moved to beat us. Five minutes later, two officers took us into a white cellblock. This was about 12:30 A.M. Wednesday. At the white cell, the officers tried to incite white prisoners to take out their aggressions on the volunteers. ("It's wooping [*sic*] time.") The officers left and white prisoners gathered about. R——— opened a conversation with one, and eased some of the tension. At this point, a Mexican spoke up and R——— spoke to him in Spanish to help develop a rapport. After several minutes, a Mississippian announced that he hated all niggers and nigger-lovers and that COFOers were there to be beaten by the whites. However he was going to let us go.
>
> We lay down and listened to the argument, that lasted about three hours, on whether or not to beat us up. Sporadically, police officers and trustees would enter argument, attempting to incite white prisoners to "do justice." Morning arrived without real incident.
>
> About 10 A.M. officers took us out of the cell into fingerprinting rooms. As they were fingerprinting and [taking mug shots of] me, the officers told ——— sordid stories about brutality that had been imposed upon fellow COFOers since the day before . . . and that a fellow white girl worker had been brutally raped and was on her death bed. At this point R——— fainted. Upon awakening, the back of his head bleeding, we both were escorted to the lobby where attorneys from COFO in Jackson were waiting. . . . Local police refused to return personal papers, mainly handwritten notes, and denied they had even taken them. . . . In a subsequent interview, FBI agents expressed no interest in the mental harassment which occurred during the 12 hours spent in jail. . . . When taken to jail, R——— had been told he was being arrested on a vagrancy charge. The following morning the sheriff said there were no charges.[58]

Even when nothing happened, the possibility that something might could turn an evening alone in jail into an exhausting experience. In a letter home, William Hodes described his feelings during just such an evening.

> So there I was: alone in a Southern jail. First thing I did was check the layout of the cell in case I had to protect myself. I pulled the mattresses halfway off the beds so that I wouldn't hit any sharp corners as I went down. I planned to stay on one of the beds in the corner, so that I could get between two beds and a wall, and make myself hard to get at, except maybe by kicking. I was very jumpy, and was terrified at every door slam, phone call, and particularly key ring jingle jangle. My pulse was . . . over a hundred the whole three hours or so that I was in jail. . . . Then I was sure they would suddenly decide to drop charges and put me out into the hostile night. That would be really bad, because I knew that trouble was brewing all over the city. I could see the big police wagon outside my cell window, all ready to go. Cops with gas masks and sheriffs with rifles jump into cars and zoom off. I heard dogs barking, police dogs. I figured that I would refuse to leave the station until they gave me a phone call: "You didn't let me have one when I came in, so you might as well give it to me now," I imagined myself saying. Could I hit a cop to get rearrested, or would that beating be worse than the possibility of getting caught by a mob? You can see why my pulse wasn't normal. . . .
>
> I went home to bed, absolutely exhausted. The mental strain of being in there alone was just too much. While I slept, the office was shot into.[59]

The cumulative effect of these confrontations with the enemy was to wear the volunteers down. As the summer wore on, the physical and emotional strain grew progressively worse. "Fear *can't* become a habit," wrote one volunteer to a friend (Belfrage, 1965: 195). But in fact it had. The quality of Mississippi violence—random, savage—necessitated the habit. It was a means of survival. But it was achieved at the cost of physical and psychological exhaustion. Writing late in the summer, Sally Belfrage (1965: 195) acknowledged that "there are incipient nervous breakdowns walking all over Greenwood." Tensions within the projects only added to the strain.

The (Not So) Beloved Community

Given the dangers and difficult living conditions—heat, overcrowding—the volunteers were exposed to, a certain level of tension within the projects was inevitable. In an August 6 letter to her parents, Pam Parker put the matter in sharp relief:

> I am tired, as are most of the other people on the project. We live in an atmosphere of tension caused by outside pressure but intensified by our own [tensions]. . . . I don't think that this problem is particularly unique with our project. . . . One of the boys from the Atlanta group who came to Mississippi stopped by Holly Springs yesterday. He said that one of their hardest problems was the tempers within the group flying at one another. Imagine the frame of mind you would be in after a few days of traveling around the counties, never knowing when the sheriff might decide to stop you and find something to arrest you on or when a car or truck might begin to follow you and attempt to push you off the road. Add to that coming home to crowded living quarters and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, if there is any bread left when you come in late at night. Also add dusty roads all day long and very hot, humid days. These are the conditions under which [we] work.[60]

The ordinary range of tensions produced by these conditions, however, were supplemented by two other sources of conflict that were to have important ripple effects well beyond Mississippi. In fact, in Mississippi they were little more than undercurrents of tension against the generally harmonious backdrop of the "beloved community." Later, however, the seeds planted in Mississippi and elsewhere would ripen into two very open, very bitter conflicts that would dramatically reshape the face of the New Left and the structure of American society more generally. These conflicts, separately and in combination, centered around the volatile issues of race and sex.

Racial Tensions on the Project

In pure form, the "beloved community" was envisioned as a collection of truly color-blind, loving individuals. Try as they might, the Summer Project would never measure up to this ideal. To begin with, save for a handful of foreigners, all of the volunteers had been raised in an America profoundly shaped by racism. For nearly 350 years the political economy of the Colonies, and later United States, had depended on the labor provided by imported black slaves. To justify the forced enslavement of this population, a thoroughgoing ideology of racial superiority had slowly evolved to become one of the fundamental cornerstones of American popular consciousness. Having been shaped by that consciousness, the volunteers could hardly help but carry the traces of racism to Mississippi with them. They were not so much color-blind as supremely desirous of *appearing* color-blind. The project staff too had been exposed to American racism since birth. But their nightmare experiences in Mississippi during the previous three years had moved them well beyond the attitudes embraced by the volunteers. Many of the staff members had long ago dismissed the practicality of the "beloved community" as an organizational model for civil rights work. Rather than denying racial differences, their experiences in Mississippi had encouraged them to emphasize them. The racial tensions that surfaced during the summer reflect the very different and increasingly incompatible psychologies of staff and volunteers.

At the same time, the racial dynamics of the project only served to exacerbate the conflicts that had already been developing. The immediate sources of tension during the summer were varied. One important source had less to do with the volunteers than it did with white America's reaction to the project. The extraordinary media attention paid the volunteers merely confirmed the depths of American racism. It wasn't black Mississippians or even the abstract concept of civil rights that concerned white America but simply the safety of its sons and daughters. One little remembered incident early in the summer served to place this hypocrisy in sharp relief.

Following the disappearance of the three workers, President Johnson ordered several dozen FBI agents and 400 Navy personnel to Mississippi to aid in the search. In and of itself, this action confirmed the cynicism of the SNCC veterans. No such measures had been taken in the wake of the eight civil rights-related slayings recorded in Mississippi earlier in the year. The worst was yet to come, however. At the height of the search for the three workers, fisherman pulled two mutilated and badly decomposed bodies out of the Mississippi River. There was a brief flurry of media interest in the corpses until it was established that the bodies were not those of the volunteers. The two victims, Charles Moore and Henry Dee, quietly joined the ranks of Mississippi's anonymous black martyrs. Apparently there was nothing newsworthy about the brutal murder of two black men in Mississippi. While the SNCC staff was willing to exploit this hypocrisy and the media attention it insured, it could only have intensified their own anger and hatred toward whites. As the fair-haired objects of all the attention, the volunteers were convenient scapegoats. Not that the volunteers were always innocent victims in the unfolding racial conflict. For their part, a good many of the volunteers brought a kind of "missionary" attitude to the project that only aggravated existing tensions. Hints of paternalism and insensitivity show up with great frequency in the volunteers' letters and journals.

> The coordinator—the only Negro among us, left me with mixed feelings. She was practicing openness and full respect for others' ideas and genuine listening, but somehow seemed more to be going through the exercise than [making] a full-hearted commitment. She is not overly literate and showed failings in organization.[61]

> The COFO student leader of our project is unfathomable in his ability to not get things done—completely unorganized. The local leadership . . . will be cold to us. This would seem bad, but in reality it is fine with me because I'm on my own in effect, and I've taken on an informal position of leadership.[62]

> Several times I've had to completely re-do press statements or letters written by one of them. It's one thing to tell people who have come willingly to Freedom School that they needn't feel ashamed of weakness in these areas, but it's quite another to even acknowledge such weaknesses in one's fellow workers. Furthermore, I'm a northerner; I'm white; I'm a woman; I'm a college graduate; I've not "proven" myself yet in jail or in physical danger. Every one of these things is a strike against me as far as they are concerned. I've refused to be ashamed of what I cannot change; I either overlook or purposely and pointedly misinterpret their occasional thrusts of antagonism. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 202)

It was almost as if some of the volunteers had come to believe the view put forth by the national media; that it was *they* who had come to save the Mississippi Negro. One black volunteer remembers his white counterparts as "generally a good bunch, but there were . . . a few who just came in and wanted to take over. Their attitude was 'okay, we are here, your troubles are over. We are going to put your house in order.' "[63] One volunteer who fits this description recalls the tension that ensued as a result of his "insensitivity":

> [The black project director] and I absolutely drove each other crazy because I didn't understand him [and] he didn't understand me. I had all these skills and, you know, worked eighteen hours a day. ——— was real laid back and, of course, was being courted by the local women . . . and I was self-righteous as hell about all this. . . . So I was always after him about being immoral, irresponsible. . . . Hell, he was probably [overwhelmed] . . . by these college kids from the north. I mean, how the hell was he going to compete with that? . . . I just moved in and took over. I mean I wasn't trying to supplant him, I just did. I had absolutely no sensitivity to what that might have been doing. . . . And the more I took over, the more ——— withdrew. [It was] . . . this vicious cycle.[64]

Other blacks reacted to such paternalistic displays with less equanimity and more overt hostility. Sexual interaction often served as a vehicle for generalized aggression against female volunteers. Volunteers were subjected to angry tirades or long racial harangues. There were even isolated incidents of real psychological terror being inflicted on the summer workers. In his journal, Ronald de Sousa described an incident in which three black workers took a single white volunteer out on a lonely country road at night and "staged an elaborate show of . . . sell[ing] him to the Klan for 2000 dollars. They apparently managed to make it look sufficiently realistic so that the boy was really frightened."[65] While such occurrences were rare, the hostility that lay behind them was not. And while most of the volunteers and staff struggled successfully to overcome and manage the tensions created by this hostility, those tensions nonetheless served as a disturbing undercurrent on the project all summer long. The beloved community was not so beloved after all. Within a year it would cease to exist at all.

Sexism on the Project

Unlike the overt racial tensions that surfaced during the summer, any serious concern over sexual discrimination stayed well beneath the surface. It is not that various forms of sexism did not occur, only that they went unchallenged and largely unrecognized by the female volunteers. As one volunteer, Jan Hillegas, put it, "sexism was not something that . . . had been made conscious to me at the time, but looking back on it [Freedom Summer], that's . . . what it was."[66]

The two principal forms that sexism took during the summer involved the issues of sexual politics and discrimination in work. On the sexual front, women were subjected to considerable harassment and a clear double standard in sexual behavior. In her interview, one volunteer captured the dilemma nicely.

> It really was your classic "damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't" situation. If you didn't [have sex], you could count on being harassed. If you did, you ran the risk of being written off as a "bad girl" and tossed off the project. This didn't happen to the guys.[67]

In fact, a number of women *were* asked to leave the project for behavior that was considered unbecoming a project member.[68] The accounts of these incidents, however, always betray more than a hint of sexual double standard. In his journal, Ronald de Sousa described how "some people found it very hard to conform to the necessary discipline . . . in particular one girl was sent home last weekend after various incidents involving breaches of discipline in the field of social and public etiquette."[69] Not denying the importance of maintaining project discipline in a situation as volatile as Mississippi, it nonetheless remains hard to understand how a female volunteer could have violated "social and public etiquette" without the help of a male. Yet, there is no evidence that any man—staff or volunteer—was removed from any of the projects for sexual (or any other) reasons.

Nor was this double standard evident only in regard to the volunteers. Miriam Cohen Glickman remembers it being applied to project staff, as well.

> I remember huge tensions in the SNCC staff. . . . A lot of it was on who dated who. I remember . . . all these black guys were dating the white volunteers and then one of the black girls . . . had one date one night with a white guy. And I heard that the next morning four black . . . male SNCC staff were over at her house chewing her out.[70]

Apparently it was all right for the male staff and volunteers to be sexually active, but not female staff members. Indeed, a small number of male project staff and volunteers seem to have practiced a form of sexuality that bordered on sexual harassment. One volunteer who was serving as project director for a time remembers having to intervene in one such situation:

> [W]e ran into a problem [with] . . . a white guy; tattooed and kind of a rough character. . . . He was predatory. We had [this] situation: a very attractive woman volunteer came down and he started leaning on her . . . he wanted to get into her pants and he was telling her that she had to [do something]. I forget what the hell it was she had to do, but it involved going some place with him. And it would have been for several weeks. And she didn't want anything to do with this, but it was putting her in a tremendous bind . . . [because] he was physically threatening.[71]

As regards black males, the situation was even more explosive. Their very presence in Mississippi put the white female volunteers "at the center of an emotionally shattering crossfire of racial tensions that [had] been nurtured for centuries" (Poussaint, 1966: 401). Their status as the ultimate sexual symbol of a racist society made the female volunteers targets of a great deal of anger and hostility masquerading as normal sexual attention. Nothing less was at stake in their encounters with black males than the repudiation or reinforcement of racism. This created yet another emotionally and politically charged dilemma for the

female volunteers. They could either reject the black male's advances and risk being labeled a racist, or they could go along at considerable physical and psychological cost to themselves.

This is not to say that the female volunteers were always the victims of sexual aggression by black males. Although this may have been the most common dynamic, it was far from the only one. Like the black males on the project, the white female volunteers were bedeviled by complex and often contradictory desires that often prompted them to initiate sexual activity. Some, like a volunteer quoted earlier, found sexual validation in her relations with black men that had been denied by white males. According to SNCC staffer, Mary King (1987: 464), a number of the female volunteers also "found themselves attracted by the sexually explicit manner of certain black men in the local community and also on the SNCC staff. . . . [This] sudden exposure to the sexual frankness of some of the black men meant that a few of . . . [the female volunteers] fluttered like butterflies from one tryst to another." No doubt others encouraged or initiated sexual relations simply because they wanted to experience the forbidden fruits or stereotypic joys of interracial sex. For others, sex became a vehicle for expressing other less sexual needs. According to Rothschild (1979: 481), "sleeping with black men was a way to 'prove' their [the white females] 'commitment' to black and white equality; some women tried to demonstrate their liberalism in that way. It has also been suggested that white women expiated their 'guilt' about racism by sleeping with black men." The point is the white female volunteers were not exclusively passive in their sexual orientation during the summer. They, no less than the black males on the project, had a need to come to terms with the charged emotional legacy of black male/white female relations that was, and remains, such an integral part of racist America. Sex was merely one of the principal means for achieving this.

The imprint of sexism was also clearly evident in the very different work assignments given to the male and female volunteers. Overwhelmingly, the women were employed as Freedom School teachers, clerical workers, or community center staff. The bulk of the "really important political work" was left to the males. It is important to emphasize that these divisions reflect more than simple sex differences in preferences for work assignments. Table 3.1 compares the preferred and actual work assignments of male and female volunteers.

Reflecting the overall importance of the Freedom Schools and voter registration to the project, it is not surprising that the vast majority of volunteers—male and female alike—were concentrated in these two areas. More revealing is the much greater disparity between the preferred and

Table 3.1 Preferred and Actual Work Assignments for Male and Female Volunteers[a]

	Females				*Males*			
	Preferred		*Actual*		*Preferred*		*Actual*	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Freedom Schools	48	(68)	56	(196)	37	(80)	33	(151)
Voter registration	22	(31)	9	(31)	32	(69)	47	(212)
Community centers	20	(29)	22	(79)	8	(18)	8	(38)
Communications	6	(9)	4	(15)	9	(19)	4	(17)
Research	4	(6)	6	(21)	5	(11)	4	(16)
White communities	0	(0)	3	(10)	6	(12)	4	(18)
Legal	0	(0)	b	(–)	3	(6)	b	(–)
	100	(143)	100	(352)	100	(215)	100	(452)

[a] The volunteers were asked on the applications to rank order their preferences for summer work assignments. Their actual work assignments were reported on a list of all applicants accepted as of May 30, 1964. This list was copied from the original, which is contained in the archives of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

[b] Applicants accepted for legal work were not included in the list from which these percentages were calculated.

actual work assignments given the female volunteers. It is clear that the project staff had a narrower and less political vision of women's, as opposed to men's, role in the project. Part of the logic underlying this vision is entirely understandable. Many on the project staff felt the mere presence of white women on the project was sufficiently threatening to the white community; to have them canvassing door to door was to only court disaster. The overall safety of the project would be better served, it was felt, by placing the women in less visible teaching and clerical positions.

The net effect of this policy was to reproduce traditional sex and work roles on the projects. The men would leave every morning and go off to work while the women stayed around the (freedom) house and cared for the children (students). Then "when they [the mostly male voter registration workers] came home you were to be out of the kitchen; . . . they were tired and they had driven long distances and worked under greater pressure."[72] In the same vein, Sally Belfrage's description (1965: 101–102) of a typical day in the Freedom House begins to sound suspiciously like that of that underappreciated jack-of-all-trades, the everyday housewife.

> It was impossible to be alone. All the other deprivations, the total lack of recreation, relaxation or release, might have been supportable if only there had ever been a chance to be alone. . . . Inside there were never less than two or three dozen people and children and staff, with constant interruptions and distractions, accumulations of tensions and numbers . . . that one wants a colored marker to make a poster—try to find one but they've all disappeared, the children took them; simultaneous discovery that most of the rest of the office supplies have disappeared as well; nag the man who promised weeks ago to build me a shelf with a lock; a field secretary arrives from Tallahatchie and sits on my desk—talk about what it was like; four children have a battle about who got hold of the book each one wants first—mediate and dry the tears, find a coloring book for the injured party; someone feeling bossy shouts about the children cluttering up the office with their coloring—discuss it, calm it down; a volunteer must go out this minute and hasn't time to see to the mimeographing of some leaflets for canvassing—find Matthew Hughes and give him the stencils; Samuel T. Mills, in an excess of helpfulness, has refilled the air cooler with water so full that it overflows—protect the books and papers being sprayed, mop up the puddle, stop people stepping in it, give Samuel something to do; . . . a voter registration worker has just found a place for the next mass meeting—add it to the big schedule at the top of the stairs . . . someone arrives from the field and has to have his shirt laundered because he's due for an interview with the FBI—wash it or find someone to . . . someone says all the typewriters are broken except the one I'm using and he has a historically important report to get out—give him the typewriter and continue the letter by hand; a volunteer cries that he can't find his spare pair of pants, which were right here last night, he used them as a pillow—see if they have been mixed up with the clothes for local distribution . . . Monroe strides in and denounces me because the library is in such a mess and I never do any work—explain about crowds and arithmetic textbooks, and find out if possible what's really bothering him.

But it was not simply that the female volunteers did different jobs than the males, but that the jobs they tended to do were seen as less important than those the men did. The major distinction here, of course, was between the Freedom School teachers and the voter registration workers. One of the voter registration workers characterized the difference in this way:

> I remember the voter registration workers being different from the Freedom School people. The voter registration workers were predominantly male . . . [and] adventurous, and they really wanted to do the nitty, gritty [work]. The Freedom School people tended to be women and I think . . . with some exceptions . . . tended to be more protective of their persons. . . . So they'd go to a Freedom

> School and they'd teach the kids about black history. I think it was a very important part of . . . that summer . . . and yet it wasn't the same kind of, if you want, macho adventurism that I was into.[73]

Not surprisingly, Linda Davis, a former Freedom School teacher remembers things a bit differently:

> There was very much a sense [that] . . . voter registration activity was where it was at. And since we had chosen teaching, we were sort of shoved to the side. . . . You know, here [were the] . . . guys running out . . . being macho men . . . you know, "we're going to go out and get our heads busted and we'll come back to here where you nurse us . . . and otherwise service us and send us back out again."[74]

For all the differences between these two views, there is agreement on one fundamental point: when compared to the voter registration workers, the Freedom School teachers were second-class citizens. And to the extent that women were predominantly teachers, they shared unequally in this second-class status. Just as women's work has traditionally been undervalued in society at large, so did it tend to be on the projects.

Reinforcing the reproduction of work and sex roles on the project was a kind of macho competitiveness that pervaded the project, equating status with arrests endured and beatings absorbed. For example, in a letter home, a volunteer who had recently been knocked down while canvassing reported that he was "proud to see my name finally get into . . . the official record of the day's harrassments."[75] Another, upon learning that two members of his project had been severely beaten, admitted that he "felt a sudden envy toward" both of them. "You see," he explained, "when we come down here for the summer, our friends at home all expect us to get beat up or at least have something exciting happen to us. If we have no incidents, our egos suffer no end."[76] This equation of status with violence made voter registration all the more attractive to many male project members. Voter registration was where it was at. Not only was it political and therefore important relative to the "nonpolitical" work the women were involved in, but its highly visible character made it dangerous to boot. These two qualities made voter registration "naturally" a man's, as opposed to a woman's, job.

The difference between these subtle forms of sexism and the racial tensions noted earlier is that the sexism never generated the overt hostility that the racial dynamic did. To the extent that they were recognized at all, these hints of sexism produced little more than a vague sense of resentment on the part of female staff and volunteers. Elinor Tideman Aurthur remembers feeling that the voter registration workers "were on the front line; . . . they were the ones who were really in danger and we were the . . . rear support system and I remember being content to be part of the rear support system, but that there was also a sense in which I didn't like it."[77] What their summer experiences had given the female project members was a vague, as yet unnamed, awareness of sexism that was to play a major role in helping crystallize an emerging feminist perspective among women in the New Left. It also gave the volunteers an ideological framework ideally suited to the construction of this perspective. The basic elements of radical feminism—with its stress on self-determination, community, and empowering the powerless—were already encoded in the rhetoric and practices of SNCC to which the volunteers were exposed during the summer. So the legacy of Freedom Summer for the women's liberation movement was not simply a matter of negative experience, but positive proscription as well.

It was perhaps no coincidence then, that the first public feminist critique to surface in the New Left was written by two female Freedom Summer participants less than ten weeks after the close of the project. The critique was one of thirty-seven position papers prepared for a November SNCC staff retreat at Waveland, Mississippi. By now the details of the paper and its presentation at Waveland are well known. The two authors, longtime SNCC staffers Mary King and Casey Hayden, submitted the paper anonymously, fearing that it might invite hostility and ridicule from the male staff. Their fears proved well founded. King (1987: 450) recalls the reception the paper was accorded:

> When the document on women was distributed informally at the meeting, the reaction to the anonymous position paper was one of crushing criticism. I had been right about the ridicule. People quickly figured out who had written it. Some mocked and taunted us. . . . As Bertha Gober's freedom song went, I felt as if I'd "been 'buked" and I'd "been scorned."

" 'Buked" and "scorned" as they might have been, King and Hayden's tentatively voiced feminism was not extinguished by the reception given the paper. A year later they would once again raise the issue, this time in a memo aimed at "other women in the peace and freedom movement." The second time around King and Hayden would find a much more receptive audience.

All things considered, it had been a remarkable summer for a remarkable group of people. As it drew to a close, the volunteers found themselves exhausted and exhilarated in equal measure. There simply had been no letup in intensity from the time they had arrived at Oxford. For the better part of two months they had been subjected to one emotionally draining experience after another. They had confronted their own mortality, experimented with new lifestyles, reveled in transcendent community, known terror, lived in poverty, felt the sting of racial hostility, and experienced the development of a radical new political consciousness. Theirs was an interesting dilemma. As much as they wanted the psychic barrage to stop, so too did they want the "high" to continue. In letters home the volunteers acknowledged the strong and conflicting feelings they were having:

> All I have to do is sit and the world piles in on me. I would like something simple, to go swimming once, or see a movie, or walk in a field, or go for a drive without having to look out the back window or just to sit somewhere cool and quiet with a friend. Only once might work. . . . I'm simply exhausted. I yell at everybody. No, I don't yell at anyone at all, I only think I do, but I can't. Madness, a constant agitation, unrest. It could all be explained by fatigue. . . . But there's a strange mechanism at work on us at night . . . when the children are gone, the chicken eaten, the mass meeting over, then there are still all of us left to egg each other on, everyone full and fed up with it but somehow longing for the next disaster. . . . All I've got is a fabulous depression, split in two—I can't bear another moment of it but it's impossible to believe that it can end in three weeks. How can I leave? How can I leave people I love so much? What made me think I could accomplish anything in this length of time? There's nowhere else I want to be. (Belfrage, 1965: 195–96)

The volunteers resolved this conflict in very different ways. At least eighty decided to stay in Mississippi indefinitely.[78] While there had been little encouragement from SNCC to do so and no official mechanism set up to retain people, these volunteers were not ready to leave in August. Their letters home reflected both their resolve and the anguish they were causing their families.

> I have been here nearly two months. I know the drudgery, the dangers, and the disappointments. I know what it's like to eat meatless dinners, to be so exhausted you feel as though you will drop, to have five people show up at a meeting to which 20 should have come. Yet I also know what it's like to sing, "We Shall Overcome" with 200 others till you think the roof will explode off the church. I know what it's like to see the organization which you have nurtured come to life and begin to function and create. I know what it's like to have a choir of little girls sing out, "Hi, Ellen," as I walk down the road and envelop me in their hugs.
>
> Only now that I know these things can the decision to stay be mature and meaningful.
>
> Furthermore, maturity does not develop from facing a familiar routine from year to year. Maturity comes from having to face new situations, from making new decisions, from coming to terms with a new world. . . .
>
> This summer is only the briefest beginning of this experience—both for myself and for the Negroes of Mississippi. So much of it will seem pointless if it ends now, or if it is taken up again in two years. A war cannot be fought and won if the soldiers take twelve-month leaves after every skirmish. . . . I have considered your parental qualms; really I have. But I'm afraid they cannot counterbalance the feelings of my duty here.[79]

> Many people, including those who supported my going to Mississippi as part of the Summer Project, and those who believe that the Summer Project has been an important thing, have expressed shock and disapproval at my decision to go back to Mississippi, and have attempted to dissuade me from returning. I have been amazed at this response.
>
> There is a certainty, when you are working in Mississippi, that it is important for you to be alive and to be alive doing just what you are doing. And whatever small bit we did for Mississippi this summer, Mississippi did ten times as much for us.
>
> I guess the thing that pulls me back most are the people who made us a part of their community. People I knew in Mississipi could honestly and unselfconsciously express affection in a way that few people I know in the North are able to do. They did not have to be "cool" or "one up" or "careful." . . . In Mississippi I have felt more love, more sympathy and warmth, more community than I have known in my life. And especially the children pull me back. (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 225–226)

The majority of the volunteers *did* go home. However, for many the decision to do so was just as wrenching as it had been for those who remained behind.

> August 6
>
> I had a very hard time . . . convincing myself that I should leave Mississippi. . . . It is so necessary that people stay, especially northern white students. Holly Springs has so much potential and could really develop into something much greater than it already is if there are the right leaders here. I would love to be a part of making the Freedom School into a real ongoing concern with the adults and kids of the community doing most of the teaching and leading themselves. However, I have come to realize that there is still a great

> deal that I need to learn. I feel that I still have a lot of growing up to do. But most of all I see what this kind of life can do to you and I think that I need a rest and a change of environment to prepare myself for a life-long commitment wherever I might be needed.[80]

Even harder than the decision to leave was the painful sense of dislocation many of the volunteers felt once they were out of Mississippi. They had arrived in the state in groups, buoyed by the exhilarating sense of community they had felt at Oxford. Now they trickled out of Mississippi one by one, alone and exhausted, without ever having an opportunity to process or come to grips with all they had seen and felt. If Oxford had oriented them to life in Mississippi, nothing prepared them for life after Mississippi. For many the transition was rough. Barely three weeks after writing the previous letter, Pam Parker struggled to express how she was feeling:

> I have been putting off writing my concluding thoughts on my experiences in Mississippi because I have been unable to sort out my thoughts and feelings since leaving. I will try to at least give you a picture of the reactions of one girl on entering the free, white world of her past once again. No one can go through an experience such as Mississippi without coming out changed. I do not believe that many of those who spent their summer in Mississippi will be able to go back to their old way of living.
>
> I am out of Mississippi and glad to be out for a while. I have always loved to take walks at night but never have I felt so grateful for the opportunity to take peaceful walks as these last few days. I could sit for hours on the porch of our friends' place in New Hampshire, soaking in the peacefulness and the quiet of the countryside. I feel so relaxed . . . but I am not relaxed, not completely. I wonder if I will ever relax fully again. . . .
>
> I have found that instead of Mississippi seeming distant from my life, it and all that it exemplifies in a magnified form of our society has become unbearably real to me.[81]

She was not alone in what she was feeling. On the very same day, another volunteer in another state echoed her sentiments: "I've felt depressed since I've returned. I don't know how much is personal, and how much it is a reaction to that place and the people I've left behind, and a heightened awareness of so much that is wrong up here" (quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 231). Contrast the underlying tone of these two letters with that expressed in a third letter written the same day by a volunteer who had stayed on in Mississippi:

> We were sitting on the steps at dusk, watching the landscape and the sun folding into the flat country, with the backboard of the basketball net that is now netless sticking up into the sunset at a crazy angle. Cotton harvesters went by—and the sheriff—and then a 6-year-old Negro girl with a stick and a dog, kicking up as much dust as she could with her bare feet. As she went by, we could hear her humming to herself, "We shall overcome." (Quoted in Sutherland, 1965: 117)

The psychic and geographic distance from Mississippi was great indeed. Even greater was the gulf between the volunteer's summer experiences and their previous lives. Bridging that gap would prove difficult for many, impossible for some. For many the old adage, "you can always go home," would prove a lie. For some of the volunteers there would be no "going home" except in a geographical sense. They had simply seen and felt too much to ever experience their world in the same way again. They had been changed in some very fundamental ways. The extent and significance of these changes would become apparent over the next few months.