

60th Anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, my journals, part 3



Freedom Summer took place 60 years ago, but my memories of my experience in what seemed like a different country are bolstered by the extensive journal entries I wrote at the end of each hot day. Last week I covered our arrival at the little town of Shaw up in the Mississippi delta, the 3-room shack converted into a Freedom Center, and the fear we faces—all drawn from Parts 2, 3, & 4 of the journal that was posted here ten years ago. This time I highlight events described in Parts 5, 6 & 7 of the journal.

In Part 5 I wrote of going out to talk with people in the rural area (On Sat. Aug. 7, 1964). We learned more details of the school boycott and some personal grievances, but the bulk of the narrative was about our visit to see Mack Carter, whom the Klan had tried to intimidate by burning a cross on his property:

We then drove west to talk with Mack Carter. We left the highway and drove for several miles over plantation roads – it was a twisting and bumpy ride, but an interesting one. As we drew near the Carter home we heard sounds of firing, a real comforting sound in Miss. We turned the corner in the road and saw him and his son practicing with their rifles.

He told us that he intended to be ready for his next group of midnight visitors with a warm welcome. He had 15 guns in the house and eight people to use them. His rifle made a deafening noise as he fired away at two cans set up next to the spot where the cross had been burned – a point about 200 yards away. He refused to give us any details of the previous night. The FBI had just been there (our office at the Center reports all such events to Jackson COFO right away) and asked him not to talk with anyone about it. He did say that he'd bought \$51 worth of ammunition at various stores & had informed the Sheriff and police of his purchases (a sure way of getting the news to the white community!).

In Part 6, dealing with events of Sunday, Aug. 8, I wrote of our worshiping at Shaw's segregated Baptist Church to get a taste of "white" worship—it went without any unpleasant incident. Then I revealed that not everything was "Kumbaya" among the Civil Rights student volunteers and the SNCC professionals:

After another of our impromptu meals we went up to Winstonville for a meeting with the Project Director John Bradford. Few wanted to go due to the feeling against John. Like other organizations COFO has its difficulties with personalities unable to get along. This should not be surprising in COFO since its members are highly individualistic non-conformists, or they would never be in such a Movement in the first place. John Bradford is the COFO appointed Director of the Movement in Bolivar County, but at first he did little directing. Like so many of the SNICK people he is highly intelligent and a very capable field man, but he has had only one year of college and very little ability for organization work and delegating authority. He is apt to make snap decisions (which are often right) or to brood about a problem without taking anyone into his confidence.

(What I did not know in 1964 was that many SNCC veterans were not keen at all on all the whites coming into their state, even though this was necessary in order to draw the northern press, and through their reports, nudge the Federal government to action. More on this later on.)

The meeting was tense at times but went all right. John is in a difficult position and the others don't always give him the cooperation they should. So, often they do not call him to inform him of some new development.

Aftr describing worshiping at a Black church Sunday evening, the next day I reflected upon the "Two Souths" that Roger and I encountred, a small portion of which is below:

Last night I was again reminded that there are two Souths, not one as usually portrayed. The first South is the one that receives most of the attention in the press and is thought of by most people when "the South" is mentioned. It is the South of lovely homes and genial, hospitable people full of "Southern hospitality", of courteous merchants telling you, "You all come back & see us." (An almost universal farewell). This is the lily white South controlled by whites, & for whites.

But there is another South, a shadow South that only recently has been receiving attention up North. It is peopled by an equally courteous and hospitable folk (It could be argued that they are more so in that they have so little to offer the stranger of material goods – & yet I have seen many of them go all out – such as yesterday when a family who had never met any of us sent word that we were invited to a chicken dinner. The homes of this South are miserable shanties, the educational level is a disgraceful low (exploding completely the myth of "separate but equal"), the economic level is as low if not lower – \$3.00 a day for chopping cotton, \$15 a week for a 36 hour a week domestic job, \$30 a week for a 70-75 (I am not sure of this

now that I reread it, though I do recall it was an extremely high number) hour clerking job! This is the South that has been held in virtual slavery by brutal tactics of terror and violence.

In Part 7 I recorded a series of interviews we conducted with sharecroppers about their abuse by whites. George was compiling these for a report on "Violence and Intimidation" which at the end of the summer he would turn over to the FBI. Here are just a few of them:

Just found my notes taken when we were at Choctaw interviewing people. We stopped at the home of Mr. Barney T. Mosely. His mother-in-law Mrs. Summer commented, "Barney himself said, 'They're scared of killings & beatings mostly - they're not too scared of losing plantation jobs since they aren't too much any how.'" (However, we were to find that some are afraid even of losing their \$3 a day.) While talking about the plight of the Negro farmer as compared to the large plantation owner, Barney commented, "Negroes just own patches, not much land." He stated that these usually are 40, 60, or 80 acres. (We also found several who worked 18 to 20 acres.)

While visiting in the home of Sampson Cox we learned that E.C. Fisher had lost his job for housing Wally. Mr. Fisher owns what must be the nicest Negro house in Shaw, a lovely green house located down the street from the Center. Also a Mr. Greenwood of Cleveland was fired because his wife was active in the Movement; he worked for the same firm that fired Mr. Fisher...

This from a Mrs. Haynes:

We went with her to her house; she soon proved to be a gold mine of information. She told us that the white employers are telling the Negro laborers to report to the C-R Workers

that the Negroes are paid \$1.25 an hour (actually 30 cents is the rate.). One of the worst employers is Earl Kegler. He has a number of Negroes who serve as informers. Two of them who live right in Choctaw are John Sack and Matt Tribbett; they have one of the better jobs – they receive \$5 for driving a tractor 12 hours a day...

Since he had heard so much about the Dan Sullivan plantation, George asked her about it. She claimed that he ran a "penitentiary place." "Folks can't work any place else but there. He scares them so they won't leave." He pays them whatever he wants, and he harbors a number of criminals. As this jibed with other reports we had heard, we tend to believe this. It is well known here that Senator Eastland's huge plantation in the next county harbors a number of Negroes who are kept there in bondage through black mail for past unprosecuted crimes, including even murder.

Not all whites were so cruel, we learned:

Bob Flannigan, she reported, is the only white man who has stood up for the rights of Negroes. She related to us an interesting incident that occurred in 1962: A white man attempted to break into a Negro's house to shoo~ him. As he broke through the door the Negro shot and killed him. (She told us with great feeling that God was with him since he only had one bullet for his gun!) He ran immediately to Mr. Flannigan's house where Mr. F. told him to wait. When the Sheriff came to arrest the man, Mr. F. said, "There better not be pin prick on this man. I've got enough colored men on my place to blow Rosedale sky high."

While they were talking a lot of white men came to seize "the nigger" who dared to defend himself against a white. "The road was just full of people," Mrs. H. avowed. "Mr. Bob kept him in his house and saved him. Mr. Bob said, 'He's in my home, and you aren't going to get him.'" And they

didn't. Thanks to the watchful persistence of a white man, an almost unheard of thing in Mississippi, the man received a fair trial and was acquitted. Mr. F. gave him enough money to leave the county. and the man went North to live. He doesn't dare come back to Bolivar County.

The abover excerpts are a small portion of Parts 5, 6 & &. For those wanting more dtails, here are the links to the Journal:

[Mississippi Freedom Summer Project 1964 \(Part 5\)](#)

[Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964 \(Part 6\)](#)

Miss. Freedom Summer 1964 (Part 7) • Visual Parables (readthespirit.com)

For you movie buffs, a good film that shows SNNC in its early days in Mississippi (1963) *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover, wonderfully depicts the clash between the fear of a father and the eagerness of a teenage son when SNCC workers come to their small town. See my review by clicking [here](#).