

# Miss. Summer Freedom Project (Part 10)

More on Tuesday, August 11.

We finished canvassing Choctaw—all but four or five signed up (to join the Miss. democratic Freedom Party). The whites scared them but their desire to strike out at the system overcame their fears. An old woman, however, refused to sign. Two different couples talked with her; they used about every argument possible – appealing to her pride as a Negro, to a concern for the children's' future, to her religion – but all to no avail. They told her there was a minister who could talk with her, but she said, “I don't care if you got two preachers with you. I ain't goin to sign!”)



We stopped at several places west of Choctaw and signed up several. As we were leaving one place we spotted “Choctaw Charlie” walking down the road. He is a well-known character engaged in moonshine & bootlegging operations and, supposedly, not quite right in the head. To tease him the kids leaned out the window & asked him to sign one of the Freedom Dem. Party registration forms. “Well, I don't know –don't have no money with me.” “That's all right. It doesn't cost anything, Charlie.” “Well, I think I wait & think about it.” And off down the road he shuffled.

This was a mistake, as we soon learned. Charlie (a white, it should be added) wasn't entirely devoid of his faculties. Shortly thereafter while we were parked by the side of a dirt road, a dark blue 63 Comet raced up to us and stopped by our side. There was Charlie sitting in it. The driver, a wizened, tough-looking little fellow leaned over and snarled, "I just want to say one goddamned thing to you. You better be gone from this road before I come back! Now go on, get out of here!"

He started to pull away in the opposite direction, and we got out to take down his license number. This must have made him madder, for he slammed on his brakes, and backed around hurriedly into the driveway, where he got stuck. This struck us all as being very funny, so we burst out laughing in spite of the possible danger. We climbed back into the car and drove off. We could see in the mirror that he soon freed the car, but he didn't follow us; either he thought that we had learned our lesson or that we had too much of a head start. We took a different route back to town just in case he wasn't bluffing.

The kids, of course, thought this was quite exciting, though I think all of us knew that if he'd had his gun along it might not have been so amusing. It's not too pleasant being cussed out & hated so, but we'd been prepared for this, so it was hardly as devastating to my morale as he'd hoped. If anything it had just the opposite effect – though this is as close as I care to come to violence.

Back at the Center we told our story to everyone, and I made out a report for our communications man to call into Jackson. We then dashed off to our meeting in Winstonville with Bradford & the lawyers. The lawyers had car trouble, holding up our meeting until almost 4 instead of 1:30 PM. It was worth waiting for.

Two lawyers came representing the (COFO Office) in Jackson. Like the ministers they were donating their time, usually for

a two-week period. The one lawyer was about to leave and so his replacement came along also. The "veteran" filled us in on the legal background of the project. The proposed library and theater integration is definitely legal, coming under interstate commerce.

They warned the youth of the possible consequences—of arrest and jail. There is no current fund to provide bail, so they would have to arrange this for themselves. They stressed that at this moment the students were more valuable out of jail than in because of the work in registration that was going on. They never spoke of if you're convicted, but rather of when you're convicted. They were convinced that the court system of Mississippi is the most corrupt that the world had ever seen. Justice cannot be found in a local or state court, and even Judge Cox of the U.S. District Court in Miss. is a segregationist who is hardly impartial. They felt—and they affirmed—that this was the opinion of all the lawyers who had come to Miss. this summer – that only federal intervention could clean up the state. That things are so bad here that at least 4 years of occupation by federal troops to allow the Negroes to be registered and a multitude of wrongs righted would be necessary. (they clearly were not Goldwater fans!)

Each lawyer who had come down was going to seek to bring back two more to carry on the work. They were apprehensive about the winter when most of them would be gone; there are only 3 lawyers in all of Mississippi – all Negroes – who will handle 'civil rights cases! Much of the case load will be in the Fall when many of the Summer Project cases will come to trial or appeal, so they hope to secure more lawyers then, perhaps persuading a foundation to donate funds for their maintenance for longer periods.

They hope to have far more lawyers next summer to take offensive against the many Jim Crow laws & practices. They believed that many of the prosecutors & the states attorneys were very inferior and thus could be far more subject to legal

harassment than they had been. They suggested that the students enter the library quietly, sit & read, or ask for a card. If refused, leave, go to the Center and write out an affidavit. Then go again and again until a pattern of discrimination could be proven to form the basis of a federal case. This the students intend to do beginning this Tuesday.



Shaw's segregated library,  
located in a storefront.

They thought that the idea of a boycott is a good one, just so nothing is printed and distributed, as this is illegal. They spoke of a supermarket in Jackson that had fired a Negro & refused to hire more. Negroes stopped buying in the store, leaving it almost empty. Within a day the management was negotiating with the leaders and an agreement was reached.

They also told us of a case in which a C-R worker was falsely arrested for speeding. Four witnesses were ready to testify that the officer was lying, but it was clear that the hostile court would decide upon a verdict of guilty if the case were pressed. Thus a plea of guilt was entered and a fine of \$10 (instead of the \$100 if the case were argued) was paid.

Wednesday night Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer spoke at a mass meeting in Shaw. The crowd was smaller & not as warmed up as the one in Cleveland, but she was still effective. By the end of the speech, almost the same one as in Cleveland, she'd won them over and they were cheering & clapping. She had originally intended to stay over night because of the danger of mixed

groups traveling at night. That very day she'd received a death threat over the telephone. She decided to go home after all. Doug Marr drove, and Judy, Roger & I went along with the ride. We talked of the Freedom Movement and of the hardships ahead. Her courage and faith showed through every word. All of us felt we were in the presence of greatness.

*Next time: We get to know a black family whose luck seems always to be bad.*