

# Miss. Summer Freedom Project – Part 11

*When I was writing the account of what happened on Monday the 10th I forgot a few things.*

Around 11 AM there were a great many young children at the Center. A group of us gathered together for stories & work on the blackboard in reading. Then I gathered some old newspapers & started shredding them & putting the pieces in a pan of water. Soon a crowd of curious children had gathered & was joining in the shredding. I told them were making newspaper stew. This went over big. We continued talking as we shredded; a few actually believed that we were going to eat it! As others came up to see what was going on, they were told about our strange stew. We had quite a time – the intention, of course, was to make paper mache, but the press of more important work prevented this. The children had fun any way. They formed the soggy mess into hamburger patties and meat loaves.



Me watching children make  
“newspaper stew.”

While we were engaged in this, Mr. & Mrs. Joe Carter drove up in an old Chrysler and asked about registering to vote. Since

it was about 11:30 at the time, I suggested that they come back after lunch as the office of the registrar closed exactly at 12, whether a person is through registering or not. I explained the process and gave them our sample sheet based on the Miss. registration form.

The Carters are an interesting couple. He has little formal education, being barely able to write his name. His wife has a little over a 6th grade education. He is out of work with 8 children to feed. They live just north of Shaw and like most Negroes, had heard of us as being the people to come to for help. Sunday night Joe Carter's old car had a flat tire in Shaw. A car from Colorado stopped to offer him some light to see. Officer Jenkins came over and demanded what they were doing. He spoke very sarcastically to Joe, telling him to get out of town or he would lock him up. This wasn't the first run-in that Joe had had with dear kind Officer Jenkins (sounds like the cop in West Side Story!) Not long ago the policeman had come out and arrested Joe for disturbing the peace. It was claimed that he & Mrs. Carter were fighting. Both denied this, but Jenkins ordered him to "shut up." He threw him into jail without benefit of a lawyer. The judge came the next day, but refused to listen to Joe's defense. He too told him to "shut up." Joe was fined \$30; rather than have him stay in jail and face a hopeless situation, his wife paid it. Like so many Negroes here, Joe seems like a victim of a system that assumes all Negroes are guilty regardless of arguments to the contrary. Many of the Negroes with whom I've spoken speak with great contempt of the white man's law and justice.

After lunch Mr. & Mrs. Carter drove up to the Center, and we headed for Cleveland in our two cars. North of town a mile Joe had another flat tire. We helped him fix it, but then the engine wouldn't start. He's had a broken water pump which forced him to carry extra water in two-gallon cans that he kept under the hood in front of the radiator.

The Carters, leaving theirs beside the highway, got into our

car, and we were soon at the Cleveland Freedom Center. Cleveland, being the county seat, this Center for voter registration information and processing. The Carters were given additional advice and instructions and forms to fill out requesting that the results of their tests be sent to them by mail.

We then went to the Courthouse and accompanied the Carters as far as the registrar's office. Going down the hall to get a drink, we could see her come out of her office to peer at us. I'm sure this didn't help an already hostile disposition toward Negroes who dared to get so uppity as to attempt to register.



The Bolivar Cty Courthouse, 10 miles north of Shaw in Cleveland. I saw this many times, but was not allowed to go inside with my passengers.

Roger & I did some shopping while we waited for the Carters to come out. We had been told that it often took a couple of hours for a Negro to finish the process, a usual Miss. tactic to discourage Negro registration, or at least to slow them down. The registrar refused to accept their written requests for copies of their tests so we returned to the Cleveland Center to report this. To round off the afternoon we did the project laundry. When we returned we found that the spare on Joe's car was now flat. Joe seems to be one of those fellows

who just can't win!

Thursday morning was spent in writing letters, including one to Gov. Guy (I'd sent one the previous day to Sen. Burdick) concerning the FDP's bid for the Miss. delegation's seat at the Democratic Nat'l. Convention. If ever the Negro, or the poor white, is going to get anywhere in this state he is going to have to find a political party that will champion his cause. This the so-called "regular" Democratic Party in Miss. will I not do. So passionately segregationist are they that they will I not even support their own national party.

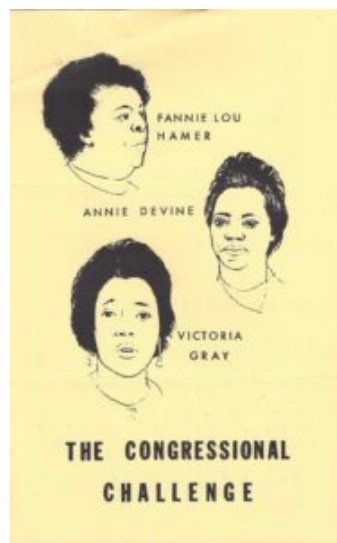
Their senators & governors have gone on record repudiating the national party and disavowing any connection. Goldwater, not Johnson, is the choice of this Party. Hence the attempt to form a new party, the F.D.P., to challenge the old, corrupt one. Since the Negro has had little chance to register in the regular election, the FDP has been collecting forms from as many adults as possible to show to the national party, as well as to the nation, that the regular party does not represent a majority of the people of the state but only a minority determined to use every means, including violence, to stay in its privileged position.



The convention of the Freedom Dem. Party was held in Jackson where delegates elected a slate of Blacks to run for state & national

legeslatures.

Part of the program of the FDP has been of an educational nature. Literature has been distributed concerning politics & government, mock elections held, and county & state conventions held. Every COFO Center has been involved in canvassing in order to get people to fill out the Freedom Registration forms. So far a little over 51,000 have been gathered, not really enough to make the strongest case for the FDP.



Cover of a leaflet describing the MFDP candidates.

Part of this failure is due to the fear of many people to sign and thereby jeopardize their job or home if word were to get out. Perhaps an equally large part of the blame rests with the COFO Volunteers themselves. The canvassing is not organized, nor is it systematic. I'm sure that parts of Shaw itself have not been covered; no attempt has been made to mark off sections of the town and county and to assign certain leaders to cover those areas. I'm told hat this is typical of other projects also.

Since Roger went with the youth in the morning to canvass, I

drove them in the afternoon. We drove west of Shaw in the region of Skenes. It was a tense afternoon since we were in an area where there are a large number of whites living. A white house or white car did not refer to the paint but to the color of the occupants! We spotted a number of Negroes chopping cotton so we stopped and the gang piled out to talk with them. They talked and talked. A car driven by a white couple came up from behind us, slowed down to look us over, and drove on. We watched it go on down the road and wondered if they lived nearby or would stop to tell about us. The kids were about a quarter of a mile out in the field so we began to get a little apprehensive as other cars drove by. Finally they returned and got back in with four forms filled out.

We went down the road where a white farmer had just pulled out with a combine. Instead of going into the field he turned around and headed toward us. We had already been looked over by several whites in the farm yard as we had passed, so as we approached one another we were a little tense – it would have been a perfect opportunity to stop us; we couldn't have driven around the machine parked in the road. However, we saw that a little girl was riding beside the man on the machine. Were we glad to see her!

We saw a lot of trucks with rifles in the rear windows; we were looked over a good many times like we were something from another planet. Actually the sight of a white and Negro (es) in the same car enjoying one another's company as strange to the native Mississippian as any Martian!

We had to be extremely careful about the houses we came to. This was territory where a number of poor whites lived; their homes were indistinguishable from those of Negroes. One house, which was so rundown that we thought it must belong to Negroes, was discovered to be white when a little boy came to the door to peer out at us.

Several times when the houses we were canvassing were close to white ones, I would drop off the canvassers, drive around and then come back to pick them up. The sight of a car with an out-of-state license waiting before a Negro shack aroused a great deal of suspicion.

One lady told us that her boss had told her, "Don't you have anything to do with those C-R workers or you'll be thrown out into the river!" She signed anyway. We pulled away to leave but she came out to ask us something else. It seems that her son a few nights before had gone out hunting with his 22 cal. rifle. The sheriff came & accused him of shooting another boy. The wounds in the boy's body, according to the mother, were far too large to be caused by a 22, but the sheriff disregarded this and arrested her son anyway. She has not been able to see him since. She asked if we could do anything, but when we found out that she was going to see a lawyer the next day I told her that we had better wait before becoming involved - that we might make things even worse if we entered the picture since we had not exactly captured the heart of Sheriff Capp. We asked her to call us to keep us informed - though we will probably have to check back on this ourselves. Her home was quite poor, but better kept up inside than the average. Some well done paintings by another son hung on the walls as did a certificate of graduation from grade school - all proclaiming the fond pride of a parent for her children who had gone further than she'd been able to.

We returned to Shaw with thirty some-odd completed forms. Eating supper at Amzie's in Cleveland we went up to the mass meeting in Mound Bayou, whereas some of the others stayed in Cleveland to see movies of the Montgomery bus boycott. Both groups were doomed to disappointment. The speeches at the mass meeting were poor, with the exception of Lee Smalheeds, & in Cleveland the movie projector broke down.

We were to meet around 9:30-10 PM for a party held by Amzie

Moore in honor of the COFO Volunteers. We went to the Center to get directions & learned that Lisa had just called from Shaw about two strange cars encircling the Center. We, along with John Black, raced back to Shaw to find – a false alarm! Lisa & the others had panicked over the mere passing of a couple of cars!

Back to Cleveland & the party. Good cool-aid punch to drink with lots of cookies & sandwiches to eat. We “older folks” & preachers sat or stood talking while the younger crowd danced to rock & roll music. It was an enjoyable time, though Roger & I were glad to go home to bed. We saw Lee for the last time & bade one another fare well. Lee & John didn’t get on too well, but I’m sure he added a lot to the project up at Mound Bayou – he certainly saved many a meeting from failure due to poor speaking.

*Next time Roger & I have a somewhat funny but potentially dangerous encounter at a laundromat.*