

Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964 (Part 6)

The events chronicled below began on Sunday, Aug. 8, 1964

Sunday morning we arose, breakfasted at Joe's grocery store ([More on this later.](#)) & went to church. The local Methodists and Presbyterians were on vacation, so we went to the white Baptist service.



Quite a difference between the all-white Shaw Baptist Ch. & Black Chs.

We arrived midway in the service & were seated amidst a lot of stares near the front of the church. The building was very comfortably air- conditioned. The pastor's sermon couldn't have been more irrelevant. Entitled "Gone Away" it dealt with those who had left the fellowship of his church. He apparently felt threatened by the number who had dropped away. We could detect nothing of the concern of the shepherd for~ his lost sheep. Rather there was sustained finger pointing that must have really made those who had not "gone away" feel good & righteous & holy. We kept waiting for the Gospel to be proclaimed (not in terms of social justice or the like, but simply in terms of loving concern and a desire to go out after those who'd gone away) but the wait was in vain. He mentioned "service" several times, but only in general terms of "serving

the Lord." From the context of the sermon it is apparent that he understands service in terms of keeping the organization functioning.

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.

In the evening we went out to a Negro Baptist church just outside our county over in Washington County. We arrived early – guided by Mrs. Haynes – and sat down. The building was definitely not up to middle class standards – windows broken out, unpainted surfaces, floors with the dust & dirt beat into the boards, an odd assortment of benches for seats. There was a center pulpit with a communion table before it. An old

yellow easy chair served as the "bishop's chair" and a nondescript wooden chair on either side were the elders' chairs. The pulpit Bible was almost falling apart.

The pastor arrived a few minutes later, looking like he had stepped out of a picture book on the Old South. Dressed in dark suit, high collared shirt, black & white sports shoes, & carrying a brief case, he certainly stood out. As we were introduced by Mrs. Haynes as C-R Workers you could almost see his mind at work building his defenses. He knew we were doing good and that God had blessed us, but it was also true that a lot of churches had been burned and bombed, most recently in Greenwood. His church had been burned recently, and they had just been able to rebuild it. They would never be able to rebuild it again if anything should happen to it. We told him all we wanted to do was to speak, which he readily granted us permission to do .. He seemed visibly relieved that we were not asking to use his church as a base of operations in the area.

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.

It is the first South, the white South, that has pinned the label of "outside agitator" upon us. This is the South that hysterically charges us with being Communists or Communist dupes or tools. This is the South that piously & hypocritically accuses us of stirring up trouble & violence. This is the South that seeks to defend its oppressive, white-dominated Southern Way of Life through the White Citizens' Council and the police, and when these fail, by the Klan and threats & acts of violence. The Bill of Rights, the Four Freedoms – all which is right and true in the rather amorphous concept of the American Way of Life, is alien & foreign to this Southern Way of Life, or else applied only to the White Man.

The other South has welcomed us as wholeheartedly as the White South has rejected us. This is the South to which COFO seeks to minister. Many are afraid of the consequences, but even these in private express their support for us. Only a few would not have us here – these are the few who have secured good jobs which are completely dependent upon the good favor of the whites or else have climbed so high economically (as M.D. in Cleveland) that they no longer can remember or understand the problems and the frustrations of their less fortunate brethren. The others have coined an apt phrase to describe them, full of contempt & scorn, Uncle Tom. I have heard this phrase used at several meetings now, & it is always said & received with great derision. Uncle Tom is a person who

has, he thinks, gained the world, but in the process he has lost his soul. He is neither White nor Black. Although he should be the object of pity & love, the dynamics & passions of the current struggle in which a person risks so much even to attend a mass meeting or associate with a C-R Worker, will not allow it. I was reminded of all this last night when, after an excellent meeting of the parents of the children who are boycotting the school, an old man came up to me, introduced himself while shaking my hand and said, "I'm sure glad you folks have come. You all have done a lot of good since you been here. You have helped us a lot to stand up for ourselves." There you have in a nutshell any justification that COFO needs!

To be continued.