

Memorandum

January 14, 1964

The SCLC Executive Council, COFO Summer Program Committee
From Charles Cobb

Re: Summer Freedom Schools in Mississippi

It can't be denied, just about universally recognized that Mississippi education, for black and white, is grossly inadequate in comparison with education around the country. Negro education in Mississippi is the most inadequate and inferior in the state. Mississippi's superstitious educational system is also burdened with virtually a complete absence of academic freedom, and students forced to live in an environment that is geared to suppress intellectual curiosity and different thinking. University of Mississippi Professor James Silver, in a recent speech, talked of "social paralysis...where non-conformity is forbidden, where the white man is not free, where he does not dare express a deviating opinion without looking over his shoulder." This "social paralysis" is not limited to the white community, however. There are Negro students who have been thrown out of classes for asking about voting, or the freedom rides; Negro teachers have been fired for saying the wrong thing; the state of Mississippi destroys "smart niggers," and its classrooms remain intellectual wastelands.

In our work we have several concerns oriented around Mississippi Negro students:

1. The need to get into the schools around the state and organize the students, with the possibility of a state-wide coordinated student government developing.
2. A student force to work with us in our efforts around the state.

If the responsibility to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions: Here students need to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question.

In the summer program for Mississippi now being set, it seems as if hundreds of students from some of the best universities and colleges in the North will be coming to Mississippi to lend themselves to the movement. These are some of the best young minds in the country, and their academic value ought to be recognized and taken advantage of.

I would like to propose a summer school during the months of July and August for SOU to SOU'tenth and eleventh grade high school students. In order to:

1. Supplement what they are not learning in high school around the state.
2. Give them a broad intellectual and academic experience during the summer to bring back to fellow students in classrooms around the state.
3. Form the basis for state-wide student action such as a school boycott.

These students would be recruited from various projects now existing around the state. Possibly, in late spring, one staff

PERSON could be assigned to travel around the state orienting these students for this summer school. I emphasize both the already stated students because of the need to be assured of having a working force that remains in the state putting to use what it has learned.

The curriculum of this school would fall into several groupings:
 1. Supplementary education, such as basic grammar, reading, math, typing, history, etc. Some of the already-developed programmed educational materials might be experimented with.
 2. Cultural programs such as art and music appreciation, dance (both folk and modern), drama, and possibly creative writing workshops--for it is important that the art of effective communication through the written word be developed in Mississippi students.
 3. Political and social education--relating their studies to their society should be very much a part of this curriculum.
 4. Film programs.
 Special projects, such as a student newspaper, or the laying of plans for a state-wide student conference, would play a vital role in the program. Special attention should be given to the development of a close student-teacher relationship. Two or three students to a teacher might be good, as it offers the chance of challenge. The overall theme of the school would be the student as a force for social change in Mississippi.

The Freedom School should have a special appeal for many of the students planning to come to Mississippi this summer as it would be a program they could follow through from the beginning to the end--which development would have more definition. Some of the new ideas, whatever they are, now circulating in educational circles, might be incorporated into this program.

In terms of where the school is to be located, the problem of housing is an important determining factor. Ideally, the students should be housed in dormitories as this would give them the opportunity for many informal discussions and exchanges of ideas. We can find out state schools and probably most of the private colleges will be using their dormitories for their own summer programs. I think, though, that we should at least investigate the possibility of using some STATE institutions in the state, in Greenville, for instance, the Negro Central high school building has been abandoned and is not in use. It is possible that we could get it. Also, a number of this kind would probably meet with the least resistance in Greenville. A lot of work, however, would have to be done in arranging housing in private homes. The staff program would have to be assigned specifically to this task.

In an aid to recruitment, a brochure outlining the proposed program should be distributed to students around the state; an application form should be written along. Names and letters for the attending students should be free.

If we are concerned about breaking the power structure, then we have to be concerned about building our own institutions to replace the old, white, bourgeois ones which make up the existing power structure. Education in Mississippi is an institution which must be reconstituted from the ground up.