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Guide to the

Ruth Schein. Mississippi Freedom Summer Project collection

1964

Sc MG 113

Processed by Andre Elizee.

Summary

Creator: Schein, Ruth

Title: Ruth Schein. Mississippi Freedom Summer Project collection

Date: 1964

Source: Unknown. Acquired in 1977. SCM77-44

Abstract: Personal papers consisting of correspondence and other material related to Schein's role and activities in Mississippi, a personal account of the Summer Project, and an incomplete article about her experiences as a volunteer. Four participating organizations of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) are represented through speeches, field reports, minutes, fact sheets, news clippings, and various printed matter, as well as data concerning the Freedom School operated by the COFO. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party material contains documents related to the August 6, 1964 State Convention of the party which elected delegates to the 1964 National Convention of the Democratic Party in Atlantic City, N.J.; draft minutes; membership lists of nominating and resolution committees; voter rolls from the National Convention; and one copy of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Newsletter related to the Congressional challenge.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Ruth Schein. Mississippi Freedom Summer Project collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Andre Elizee; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

Creator History

The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was organized in 1964 by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of four civil rights organizations -- the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Congress on Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference -- to carry out a

unified voter registration program in the state of Mississippi. Both COFO and the Summer Project were the results of the "sit-in" and "Freedom Ride" movements of 1960 and 1961, and of SNCC's early efforts to organize voter registration drives throughout Mississippi. Sit-ins The first "sit-in" was organized by four black college students at a segregated lunch counter in a Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1961. The students were denied service and thrown in jail by the local police. A few weeks later, sit-ins were organized at snack-bars in six large stores in Nashville. The demonstrators were again denied service, and the overwhelming majority of the local black community reacted by boycotting these stores. The sit-in movement spread quickly throughout the upper South and some neighboring Northern and Western states: Ohio, Illinois and Nevada. In all, four thousand black students were arrested. In November 1961, the United States Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of restaurants. It was as a result of this sit-in movement that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was organized by college students. The Freedom Rides The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in February 1961 with the expressed goal of desegregating public transportation in the South. The first Freedom Riders left Washington, D.C. on May 4, 1961 and went as far south as Birmingham. Denied both protection and permission to enter the state of Mississippi, they flew to New Orleans on May 17th. Meanwhile, two SNCC workers, Diane Nash and Ruby Doris Smith, had organized a second Freedom Ride that would continue the march from Birmingham to Jackson. This time, the Freedom Riders got off the bus in Jackson, escorted by National Guardsmen, and were arrested while trying to use white restrooms and waiting rooms. Further dramatizing their case, they served a full two month jail sentence, instead of paying a nominal fee set by a Jackson court. Alarmed by the escalating violence in Mississippi, the Federal Government, along with many liberal organizations and national civil rights leaders, called for a two year moratorium on the Freedom Rides. A debate ensued among the members of SNCC over the effectiveness of "direct action" tactics in desegregating the deep South. Robert Moses, SNCC coordinator in Mississippi, and a group of SNCC field secretaries reached the conclusion that the only road to black empowerment in the South was in radically altering the racial composition of the electorate. Thus they organized a voter education and registration drive in Pike, Amite and Walthall counties and the town of McComb in Mississippi. Mob violence was unleashed against the SNCC workers and eligible black voters who responded to their call. In spite of harassment from police and county officials, SNCC's initiative within the next two years spread throughout the five congressional districts, establishing voting leagues and civic groups all over the state, and laying the groundwork for COFO's concentrated voter registration effort in the summer of 1964. The Summer Project In 1963, COFO had less than 200 staff members, most of them SNCC field secretaries, working in Mississippi. As the result of the refusal by city and state officials to register eligible black voters during the summer COFO launched a Freedom Registration and Freedom Vote programs which ran parallel to the official elections in Mississippi. Eighty three thousand Freedom votes were thus registered. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was also launched in the same spirit, by SNCC militants and native black Mississippians, in the summer of 1963. The following summer, COFO and the MFDP launched a new Freedom Registration drive in an effort to unseat the Mississippi Democratic Party at the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City that August. Robert Moses, now director of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, believed that a dramatic increase in the number of volunteers working in Mississippi would qualitatively affect the development of COFO's programs. In addition, the presence of hundreds of predominantly white students from the North in the cities and among the rural population of Mississippi would command the attention of the federal government, the media and the whole country. He also believed that the presence of these students might also reduce or curtail the violent reactions of state, county and local authorities, the Ku Klux Klan and local white citizens groups towards the civil rights workers and the increased militancy of the black Mississippians. The Freedom Summer Project began in late June and ended in mid-August 1964. Seven hundred students and other volunteers gathered in the small town of Oxford, Ohio for a two week training program organized by SCLC. They included, in addition to a network of legal and medical teams, dozens of religious leaders who volunteered to assist the young civil rights workers. Experienced SNCC-members conducted classes on non-violence, voter registration and Freedom

schools. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party The Freedom registration drive quickly gained momentum throughout Mississippi, and particularly in the Delta region. By late August, more than 60,000 new registrations were recorded. At the National Democratic Party Convention, the sixty-four delegates elected by the MFDP, including Ella Baker of SNCC, Aaron Henry of NAACP, Lawrence Guyot, the chairman of MFDP and Fannie Lou Hamer, challenged the Mississippi Democratic Party which, they claimed, violated the principles of the national party; they demanded that they be seated instead of the regular all white delegation. The MFDP enjoyed wide support from many liberal Northern delegates, and from members of the Credentials Committee at the Convention who proposed that both delegations be seated. The Johnson administration, however, opted for a weaker compromise, which would seat the all-white delegation while allotting at-large seats to Aaron Henry and Edward King and "guest" status to the remaining MFDP delegates. This compromise was overwhelmingly rejected, however. After the failure of the MFDP challenge, SNCC and other civil rights workers in Mississippi became disillusioned with participatory democracy, as well as with the support of Northern white liberals, although it would be several years before SNCC broke completely with its white supporters. In addition to the general and Freedom registration drives, COFO had a growing number of programs which were classified into two broad areas: educational and social. They included the Freedom Schools, Federal Programs, Literacy and Work Study, Food and Clothing and Community projects. The Freedom Schools were a major element of the Summer Project. In addition to basic educational skills, the schools exposed the students to broad cultural influences beyond the South. They sought to establish the groundwork for a statewide youth movement. By August 1964, there were forty-one Freedom Schools functioning in twenty communities throughout Mississippi, with over 2,000 students and 175 full time teachers. The Summer Project was successful on many counts. Its various programs -- particularly the voter registration drives, the Freedom Schools and the Community Centers (thirteen established over the summer) -- were intensively reported in the northern media, and broadly influenced liberal opinion and the New Left. It irreversibly altered the political stage in Mississippi, far beyond its limited scope and organizational strength. The participating organizations of COFO cooperated in a follow-up project in Mississippi in 1965, but soon afterward drifted apart as a result of wide conceptual, political and organizational differences. The first "sit-in" was organized by four black college students at a segregated lunch counter in a Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1961. The students were denied service and thrown in jail by the local police. A few weeks later, sit-ins were organized at snack-bars in six large stores in Nashville. The demonstrators were again denied service, and the overwhelming majority of the local black community reacted by boycotting these stores. The sit-in movement spread quickly throughout the upper South and some neighboring Northern and Western states: Ohio, Illinois and Nevada. In all, four thousand black students were arrested. In November 1961, the United States Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of restaurants. It was as a result of this sit-in movement that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was organized by college students. 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Alarmed by the escalating violence in Mississippi, the Federal Government, along with many liberal organizations and national civil rights leaders, called for a two year moratorium on the Freedom Rides. A debate ensued among the members of SNCC over the effectiveness of "direct action" tactics in desegregating the deep South. Robert Moses, SNCC coordinator in Mississippi, and a group of SNCC field secretaries reached the conclusion that the only road to black empowerment in the South was in radically altering the racial composition of the electorate. Thus they organized a voter education and registration drive in Pike, Amite and Walthall

counties and the town of McComb in Mississippi. Mob violence was unleashed against the SNCC workers and eligible black voters who responded to their call. In spite of harassment from police and county officials, SNCC's initiative within the next two years spread throughout the five congressional districts, establishing voting leagues and civic groups all over the state, and laying the groundwork for COFO's concentrated voter registration effort in the summer of 1964. In 1963, COFO had less than 200 staff members, most of them SNCC field secretaries, working in Mississippi. As the result of the refusal by city and state officials to register eligible black voters during the summer COFO launched a Freedom Registration and Freedom Vote programs which ran parallel to the official elections in Mississippi. Eighty three thousand Freedom votes were thus registered. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was also launched in the same spirit, by SNCC militants and native black Mississippians, in the summer of 1963. The Freedom registration drive quickly gained momentum throughout Mississippi, and particularly in the Delta region. By late August, more than 60,000 new registrations were recorded. At the National Democratic Party Convention, the sixty-four delegates elected by the MFDP, including Ella Baker of SNCC, Aaron Henry of NAACP, Lawrence Guyot, the chairman of MFDP and Fannie Lou Hamer, challenged the Mississippi Democratic Party which, they claimed, violated the principles of the national party; they demanded that they be seated instead of the regular all white delegation. The MFDP enjoyed wide support from many liberal Northern delegates, and from members of the Credentials Committee at the Convention who proposed that both delegations be seated. The Johnson administration, however, opted for a weaker compromise, which would seat the all-white delegation while allotting at-large seats to Aaron Henry and Edward King and "guest" status to the remaining MFDP delegates. This compromise was overwhelmingly rejected, however. After the failure of the MFDP challenge, SNCC and other civil rights workers in Mississippi became disillusioned with participatory democracy, as well as with the support of Northern white liberals, although it would be several years before SNCC broke completely with its white supporters. In addition to the general and Freedom registration drives, COFO had a growing number of programs which were classified into two broad areas: educational and social. They included the Freedom Schools, Federal Programs, Literacy and Work Study, Food and Clothing and Community projects. The Freedom Schools were a major element of the Summer Project. In addition to basic educational skills, the schools exposed the students to broad cultural influences beyond the South. They sought to establish the groundwork for a statewide youth movement. By August 1964, there were forty-one Freedom Schools functioning in twenty communities throughout Mississippi, with over 2,000 students and 175 full time teachers. The Summer Project was successful on many counts. Its various programs -- particularly the voter registration drives, the Freedom Schools and the Community Centers (thirteen established over the summer) -- were intensively reported in the northern media, and broadly influenced liberal opinion and the New Left. It irreversibly altered the political stage in Mississippi, far beyond its limited scope and organizational strength. The participating organizations of COFO cooperated in a follow-up project in Mississippi in 1965, but soon afterward drifted apart as a result of wide conceptual, political and organizational differences.

Scope and Content Note

This collection was assembled by Ruth Schein, a New York-born legal secretary who participated as a volunteer in the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964. The collection is divided into PERSONAL and ORGANIZATIONAL papers and a GENERAL file.

Arrangement: Collection organized into three series: I Personal Papers; II Organizations; and III General

Key Terms

Subjects

African Americans -- Civil rights
African Americans -- Education
African Americans -- Political activity
African Americans -- Societies, etc
African Americans -- Suffrage
Civil rights -- Mississippi
Civil rights workers
Political conventions -- New Jersey -- Atlantic City
Political parties -- Mississippi
Political parties -- United States
Schools -- Mississippi

Geographic Names

Mississippi -- Politics and government -- 1951-
Mississippi -- Social conditions
United States -- Politics and government -- 1963-1969
United States -- Social conditions -- 1960-1980

Names

Schein, Ruth
Council of Federated Organizations (U.S.)
Democratic National Convention
Democratic Party (U.S.)
Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
Mississippi Freedom Project

Container List

Personal Papers

The PERSONAL Papers files contain correspondence and other papers related to Schein's role and activities in Mississippi, and an informative personal account of the Summer Project presented to the Morningside Garden Committee to Support the Mississippi Project, which sponsored her trip. Also included is an incomplete article, "Freedom Summer: Mississippi 1964 Report of a Volunteer," written during a speaking tour in Paris in the fall of 1964, and intended for publication in *Les Temps Modernes*. The collection documents other aspects of Schein's participation in the Summer Project, particularly during the Volunteers' Training Program and the period after the summer of 1964. The PERSONAL papers include a carbon copy of an affidavit relating an incident involving Schein and another civil rights worker, and a group of white men in a car who tried to run them over while they were crossing a street in Jackson in August 1964.

- b. 1 f. 1 Schein, Ruth - Personal Papers
- b. 1 f. 2 Schein, Ruth - Personal Account

Organizations

The four participating organizations of COFO are represented in the collection largely through speeches, field reports, minutes, fact sheets, clippings and various printed matter. The COFO files include a 28 page, incomplete "Running Summary of Incidents" which occurred in Mississippi throughout the summer of 1964, and data concerning the many projects, the Freedom Schools in particular, run by COFO. The MFDP folder contains documents related to the August 6, 1964 State Convention of the party which elected the delegates to the 1964 National Convention of the Democratic Party in Atlantic City: draft minutes from short hand notes; membership lists of nominating and resolution committees; voter rolls from the National Convention; and one copy of the MFDP Newsletter related to the Congressional challenge.

- b. 1 f. 3 Volunteers' Training Program
- b. 1 f. 4 Council Of Federated Organizations
- b. 1 f. 5 Congress Of Racial Equality
- b. 1 f. 6 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
- b. 1 f. 7 Freedom Schools
- b. 1 f. 8 Naacp Legal Defense Fund
- b. 1 f. 9 Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
- b. 1 f. 10 The Student Voice
- b. 1 f. 11 Post-Freedom Summer Material

General

- b. 1 f. 12 Clippings
- b. 1 f. 13 Printed Matter