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Mississippi Health Center

I visited Mississippi this week with Dr. Geiger and in many ways I am probably still suffering from cultural shock. I came away with a fervent belief in the rightness of what we are trying to do there and a heightened understanding of the desperate conditions of the Negro population in the matters pertaining to health and to such luxuries as food, shelter and clothing.

As I believe you know, it is the hope of the Department of Preventive Medicine to secure the use of a partly constructed building which is the property of the now defunct J. P. Campbell College. We found at the last minute that the college was technically in receivership in the hands of a white attorney in Jackson named Nichols. Meetings were held in Jackson last week by key members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the sponsor of Campbell College, to see if it would be possible to have the college discharged from receivership. The chances of this happening seem to me to be very good. The white receiver simply wants to make sure that the Negroes are not going to be bilked again.

Dr. Geiger and I met with John Hatch, who is the department's man in the south at the current time, and I was mightily impressed with this man. As a Negro he has to put up with all of the inherent disadvantages of being a Negro in Mississippi, but at the same time there are some very great advantages for the university in that he is able to obtain information that otherwise would be denied us and he has been very skillful and astute in doing this. The three of us went out to look at the property and found a skeleton of a building (pictures attached) sitting in the middle of a cotton field in Mound Bayou. Mound Bayou is an all-Negro community and was settled shortly before the Civil War. At that time the proprietors were able to get the Illinois Central Railroad to give them 1100 acres of land with the hope that it would be the site of a future college. Over the years the land was leased and in the 1930's about 500 acres of it were taken for taxes. Of the remaining 600 acres, 500 were sold to get the college out of its current difficulties so that about 100 acres of land go with the current building. I was happy to learn, however, that the land was bought by local people in Mound Bayou and I am sure it could either be bought or leased back if the occasion ever arose.

We met with the Mayor of Mound Bayou, several Aldermen and a number of other city officials and prominent citizens. In addition to Dr. Geiger, John Hatch and me, S. L. Greene, Education Director of the A. M. E. Church and Reverend Davis, Pastor of the Charles Street A. M. E. Church in Roxbury were present. Dr. Geiger outlined the history of the department's investigation of various sites and pointed out the reasons why Mound Bayou was attractive. I spoke about the importance of the undertaking as a university project as opposed to a federal government project and assured them that if we came we would be there as long as possible and with as much help as possible. In reply to questions about hostility from a white power structure, I said that we were not naive enough to expect to come in to Bolivar County with white approval, but that the only thing that would keep us out would be legal, quasi-legal or legislative action. We explored many aspects of the project over quite a period of time with these people and I think we answered most of the questions satisfactorily. They are quite frank to point out that so much has been promised and so little has been given historically, that they view all offers somewhat warily. It did develop, however, that if we pick the Campbell College site, an arrangement can be made to get sewerage out there, to get water out there and to extend the telephone lines of the private Mound Bayou Telephone Company to the site. In addition, I think the local group of one sort or another using either existing mechanisms or new ones will be willing to pick up the old mortgages for such housing as may have to be constructed.

I also had a chance to visit the Taborian Hospital in Mound Bayou and to talk with the Administratrix there. This is a small 42 bed hospital operated by the Knights and Daughters of Tabor, a Negro fraternal organization and it cares for patients from several states in the south on a pre-paid medical plan basis. The hospital is in trouble with the state licensing authorities and as near as I can determine this has much more to do with race than it does with the quality of the hospital. There is another hospital, the Sarah Brown Hospital, also in Mound Bayou. These two hospitals are serviced by two resident Negro physicians, Dr. Lowry and Dr. Burton, both of whom I met and talked with. Obviously we are going to have to be most careful to make sure that anything we do in this area in the way of health service does not interfere with the patterns of care which these two hospitals and these two physicians have established. Dr. Geiger indicated our awareness of this problem and said that every effort would be made to make sure that any services which we offered would be supplementary rather than replacement of existing services.

We also looked at a building which was formerly the nurses home of the Sarah Brown Hospital. Prior to that it was the residence of one of the earlier mayors of the town. This is a fairly large brick building which needs some work, but which could serve as a temporary base until we were able to get a permanent base built. Whether or not it will be available is another

matter. It is used for nothing at the present time except to provide a place for a resident from Meharry to live at such times as he is on service at either hospital.

Everyone in town was aware of the fact that once we decide to go in, we want to start as soon as possible and that the question of a temporary base is one of great importance. Incidentally, if the Campbell College site falls through for the permanent location, we received an offer from the local Roman Catholic Priest: he said that he would see his Bishop and would lease us some of the church land. The church runs a mission in Mound Bayou and operates a parochial school there and it is a splendid looking group of buildings and I was much impressed by the priest.

It should be completely understood that Mound Bayou is by all relative standards, a settlement of substantial people who are proud of their accomplishment and who indeed face an interesting problem in that the creation of the health center will mean that whites will be living in the town for the first time. They are all aware of the fact that in many ways a choice like this means the end of an old era and the end of an old dream and the beginning of a new era and a new dream.

In general, I think we are going to have some unpleasant times in Mississippi over the next couple of years. The best we can hope for in Dr. Geiger's words is "neutrality and informal cooperation." We are a long way from that right now in my estimation and in my conversations it was difficult to identify any element of the white power structure which might be said to have this attitude at the present time. Dr. Geiger received this week a particularly virulent letter from a white physician who plans to practice in Shelby in association with Dr. Hollingsworth who runs a clinic there. The longer this can be kept out of the Jackson newspapers the better, but this is a situation which cannot go on forever. I understand that Senator Saltonstall through an aide has indicated that he would be willing to trade on his personal friendship with Stennis and Eastland if it would be of help and to me it makes a great deal of sense to consider the possibility of your having a meeting or luncheon or something with Saltonstall and the two Mississippi Senators so that the matter can be discussed informally with the hope perhaps of creating a greater understanding of university responsibility as opposed to that of the federal government. Inasmuch as the program is going to reach elements of the community which, as far as I can determine, the white doctors are not treating at all, their opposition is difficult to understand except in terms of the traditional concept of federal intervention. I suppose this is all a part of the fact that with Bilbo and Rankin gone and with Barnett temporarily in the shadow, it has been necessary for the state to admit there is such a thing as a federal government.

Finally, I think there is a great opportunity for the other parts of the university to become associated prolifically with this project. I had a long talk with L. S. Greene, Jr., the Education Director of the A. M. E. Church and indeed, I changed my plans so that I flew back to Washington with him. The church would like to get the college going again, but Dr. Greene, who is an immensely likeable individual with a great deal of talent, knows that this time it had better start with long and careful planning. I think that we can be extremely useful in the planning phase and when the college gets operating some years from now, all sorts of possibilities might be worked out. If we are still looking for a relationship with a southern college, this seems to me to be a supreme opportunity for we could be present at helping to evolve a new kind of southern college and indeed it is entirely possible that in addition to the A. M. E. Church there might be cooperation from the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church. I hope that either you or Len on a trip to Washington might talk with Dr. Greene who has his office in his home at 1461 North Gate Road, N. W., in Washington, (telephone 882-1823) or perhaps it might be worthwhile to have Dr. Greene come up for a meeting with our Committee on Negro Education. This is something that I hope will be explored with enthusiasm.

As far as I am concerned personally, the primary thing that was accomplished by the trip was to put me in close contact with that incredible state of mind which is known as the state of Mississippi. I feel very strongly that other members of the administration should visit this area with Dr. Geiger or Dr. Gibson in the very near future. It will help them understand fully the meaning of the figures in the case histories which we have read in Dr. Geiger's reports. It will indicate more clearly than any other single thing could do, that this is a university project. It will bring some form of sustenance to the Negroes who are looking to us for so much. It would also, I hope, provide a boost to Dr. Geiger although this marvelous man who is operating with such effectiveness and with such bravery probably does not need this sort of thing.

Mound Bayou is located exactly 120 miles from Memphis and I have attached to this memorandum a map, showing Bolivar County, Mound Bayou and the route from Memphis.

Frank A. Tredinnick, Jr.

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cc: Dr. Geiger, and Dr. Gibson