

By Jim Krathwohl

Shortly after last spring terms exams an auto caravan of MSU students and faculty set off from East Lansing bound for the Deep South. Their goal was Rust College, a Negro school in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where they set up a four-week study skills institute. This was STEP, the Student Education Project, sponsored by Associated Students of MSU. Conducted for high school graduates entering Rust this month, the purpose of the project was to increase these students' study skills in preparation for college work.

The state of Negro education in Mississippi is deplorable. Dr. Robert Green, professor of education has been on leave from MSU for the last year working as Director of Educational Projects in Martin Luther King's SCLC, describes such situations as classes of 75 in rooms built for 25, overworked and poorly trained teachers, and the use of ten-year-old textbooks handed from white schools. One girl said, when I asked her about her high, school mathematics background, "We didn't have nothin'." It was the project's aim to give victims of these conditions at short but intensive boost before they- entered college. This would hopefully increase their chances for college success, enable them to get more out of their education' and ultimately allow the to compete for jobs on a more equal basis with white men.

STEP was directed by Rev. John Duley, Presbyterian minister in the United Campus Ministry, and by Laura Leichliter, student director and graduate student in sociology. Some 36 student volunteers were chosen from among the applicants. To raise the necessary funds (primarily to .pay for room-and board (students and volunteers) we kicked off a fund-raising drive in the middle of April. The project was supported by dormitories, fraternities and sororities, area churches, and many private donors. Financial aid also came from Midland where Dr. Carlton Krathwohl, director of testing for the project' is Dean of Students at Delta College

About 80 students attended the four-week institute, a little less than

half the entering class at Rust. The volunteers were divided into three departments. Twenty taught communication skills, reading, writing, taking notes. Ten taught mathematics, and about six conducted a recreation program, including tennis, badminton, baseball, and swimming classes. Dr. Frank Beeman, of MSU's Physical Education Department, headed the recreation program, and the communication skills classes were guided by Dr. Benjamin Hickock of the Department of American Thought and Language.

With only four weeks to work, our program had to be intensive. Starting each morning at 7:00 the students had two hours of math and two of com skills in classes of eight or nine. Each class was taught by a teacher-tutor team. Our afternoons were devoted to organized recreation, elective classes offered in art, poetry, drama, and music, and tutorial sessions. The tutorials allowed us to continually watch each student's progress, give extra help where it was needed, and push each student to his maximum capacity.

Taught on a remedial level, the courses were designed to find and remedy deficiencies in basic studying techniques. Finding these deficiencies was no problem. The majority of students scored in the lower half of the percentile charts on a test normally administered to ninth graders. Although a few of them wrote well, at least an equal number were virtually illiterate. Their main learning technique was rote memorization and they automatically attempted to learn everything in this way. One of our biggest problems was to get them to try to think, to understand what they were learning.

In the evenings there were often movies arranged for by the project, among them To Kill a Mockingbird and Raisin in the Sun. We were in constant contact with the students during these busy days. We ate our meals and roomed with them. They were eager, hungry to learn. Everything we could put before them they studied avidly. If we asked a class how many would come to an extra

session on how to take square roots, all hands shot up and as many would be there. There was a report of a girl who stayed up most of one night working on a problem her instructor had given her. Most of them worked their hearts out, and post-testing showed not great but definite and consistent gains in both mathematical and English skills.

On two Saturdays we loaded the groups into buses and went on field trips. We visited a Memphis art museum and zoo, and went to the University of Mississippi to see art studios, a computer, and the school of pharmacy. Most of the students had never seen things like these before.

Was the project successful? To begin with, the volunteers learned at least as much as the students. Just the contact between two such different groups and the new perspectives which came out of it were as important to them and to us as anything else that may have happened. Rust College is hoping to be accredited this fall, and it is believed that STEP may prove to have been helpful in this effort. Once it is accredited, the collage can acquire the funds which it needs so badly for improvement, and which are unavailable to a non-accredited school. Such changes as we were working for do not come overnight. But in the long run it is through education, and projects like this one, that the Negro in Mississippi will be able to obtain for himself the equality of opportunity he deserves.

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**The Origin and Execution of the MSU/Rust College STEP Project
My reflections on it**

In October 1964 while I was serving as a campus minister at Michigan State University and involved with faculty and students in the struggle for the enactment of an open occupancy housing ordinance in East Lansing, Bob Green called me. He said, "Reverend Duley, I just got a call from a student of mine who dropped out of school this term to work on Voter Registration in Mississippi. She wants me to come to Canton for a rally with Jim Farmer. You get the money and we will go." I did and we went. This was the beginning of a whole new chapter in my life; direct involvement in the civil rights struggle in the South.

We flew into Jackson, rented a car and drove the sixteen miles to Canton. We met Bob's student, Mary Ann Shupenko, a nineteen-year-old MSU dropout from Detroit who had volunteered for the month of August and had stayed on to manage the office of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in Canton, coordinate civil rights work in Madison County, and take charge of voter registration projects, school integration drives, freedom rallies, mailings, security regulations and people in jail waiting for trial. We also met Fannie Lou Hamer, who in August had, along with members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, challenged the seating of an all white state delegation at the Democratic National Convention. We joined the rally in an open field outside of Canton. We sang a lot of freedom songs, and James Farmer, Director of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), challenged those present to register to vote and carry their neighbors and friends to the County Court House so they could register. In many ways Canton resembled Selma, Alabama. It was isolated, and the same forms of oppression and dominance were used to keep blacks "in their place." Besides this, the bodies of the three murdered civil rights workers, Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner, had recently been found in Philadelphia, Mississippi, some 54 miles east of Canton. The rally was really tense with walkie talkies being used to keep the leaders informed of the activities of the sheriff and his deputies. The rally came off without incident, and Bob and I were housed in the home of one of the black ministers in a small town on the outskirts of Canton. We sat up late that night, with the blinds drawn, talking with the pastor and some of the voter registration volunteers about the voter registration efforts and the intimidation tactics used to keep Blacks from registering to vote. As Bob and I got ready to integrate a bedroom in the heart of Mississippi, the radio was reporting thunderstorms, heavy rain and the possibility of a hurricane. About 4:00 in the morning I was awakened by the storm and told Bob I thought we ought to head for the airport if we were going to beat the storm and be able to get out of Jackson. We got to the airport by 5:00 a.m., turned our car in and rushed to the ticket counter only to learn that the airport had just been closed. Bob turned to a young white guy standing next to him at the counter and said, "Where are you headed?" He replied, "Louisville." Bob said, without hesitating, "Do you have a car? Let's drive to Memphis." It turned out that the young man was a recruiter for

the Transylvania University of Kentucky scouting for likely football talent. We left immediately and headed up I-65 stopping only once on the way for gas. At the gas station, Bob, dressed like an FBI agent, headed for the restroom inside of the station only to be told he had to use the one for "coloreds" outside. He bristled and balked, but it turned out the inside toilet really wasn't working. It was a very tense moment.

While on the way to Canton Bob talked about the need for M.S.U. to make an educational contribution of the Civil Rights Movement in the South. We asked around among the leaders and participants in the rally about Black colleges which were having difficulty financially and educationally because some of their students and faculty were participating in the Movement. Most of the people with whom we talked suggested we visit with the people at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. On the way home, Bob and I decided to follow up on that lead and see how M.S.U. might help.

In November Bob Green and I were back in Mississippi along with Laura Leichliter, an undergraduate who was the Director of Academic Affairs for the All University Student Government (AUSG), Frank Bianco, a graduate student and the Student Education Corps Coordinator. This time we were 49 miles southeast of Memphis at Rust College in Holly Springs.

We were met by Dr. Earnest Smith, the retiring President and Dean William McMillan, who had recently been recruited from Bethune Cookman College to save the College from losing its accreditation. In 1960 the State of Mississippi decreed that all colleges would meet the same accreditation standards. The Black Colleges were given five years to make the changes necessary for accreditation. For Rust College this meant reorganizing and upgrading the library, hiring more faculty with Ph.D.s and improving the administrative procedures of the College. During the previous three and one half years nothing had been done. In addition, much of the financial support for the College, which was largely from Southern Methodist Churches, had eroded. The churches wanted assurances from the President and the Trustees that none of the faculty members or students were participating in the Civil Rights Movement. This is something the President would not and could not do even though the churches were withholding contributions in order to force him to keep the students and faculty members under tight control.

At the end of our two day visit we had an invitation from President Smith and Dean McMillan to work with Rust College by providing:

1. An M.S.U. librarian to the College for five weeks during the summer to begin reorganizing and cataloging the Library with the possibility that additional books might be provided by Michigan State University.

2. A graduate student in business administration to set up new admission and record keeping programs for the College.
3. M.S.U. professors to teach courses in the summer term for returning teachers so that the MSU professors' credentials could be counted as part of the Rust College staff credentials.
4. A five week residential study skills improvement institute for the entering freshman class in order that they might be better prepared to take full advantage of the education offered at Rust College.
5. A community educational improvement program for Marshall County's 8 to 18 year olds.

The invitation was presented to the AUSG Board for their endorsement by the four of us who had visited the College. The Board agreed to sponsor the program. This meant we were free to recruit students and faculty and raise money on campus for the program. Bob Green suggested, because I was a "Reverend," I should write Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a special delivery letter inviting him to launch this program, now called the STEP Project: "Student Tutorial Education Program." I indicated in the letter that I would call him within a week to ten days to answer any questions he might have about the program. When I called, I was told by his secretary that Dr. King would come to M.S.U. on February 11, 1965. The January 28 issue of the *State News*, M.S.U.'s student newspaper, carried a front page article about Dr. King's visit, a description of the program and a notice indicating that applications were being received for students to design and carry out the study skills improvement curriculum.

Laura Leichter served as the Student Coordinator and interviewed all of the student applicants. Twenty three undergraduates were recruited to serve as student teachers. Two were Afro-Americans, twelve were education majors. Twenty two other volunteers served in a wide range of capacities. Some were M.S.U. faculty members, others graduate students and some were public school teachers.

During the first year \$8,500 was raised to cover the cost of the program, which included transportation, housing and meals for the volunteers, room and board for five weeks on campus for the incoming freshman class, teaching and recreational materials and field trips.

A ten week orientation program was provided for the M.S.U. volunteers which included the development of curriculum and teaching materials with the aid of M.S.U. faculty members. Dean McMillan came during that time to provide an orientation to the college and the mores of Holly Springs, Mississippi.

During the orientation program specific class schedules were established for the Institute and for the Community Program. The four academic areas of communications, physical science, social science and mathematics were set up. Both the College Institute and the Community Program provided recreation in the form of swimming, badminton, volleyball, basketball, tennis and cultural activities such as music, art, speech and drama. Dr. Frank Beeman, Director of the Michigan State Intramural Athletic Program and his wife, Pat, carried the major responsibility for working with the MSU volunteers in the recreational and cultural aspects of both programs. He also worked over the four years of the program with the Rust College staff developing plans, making a proposal and securing federal funding for a new intramural sports building. The following M.S.U. faculty members spent the full five weeks teaching in the 1995 summer session: Milt Powell and Ben Hickok of the American Thought and Language Program, Stanley Idzerda, Director of the Honor College, John Foss, Professor of mechanical engineering, Wilbur Brookover, College of Education, and ~~Mr.~~ Jean Harvey, an M.S.U. librarian. Ruth Hart directed the reading program. She was a public school teacher and a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin. Jack and Marilyn Downs were public school teachers from East Lansing.

The appearance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on our campus on February 11, 1965, to launch the STEP Project stands, in my mind, as my most significant single contribution to the life of the University through my campus ministry. He came to us out of the midst of the Selma struggle, telephoning Selma from the Lansing airport prior to journeying to the University in the Oldsmobile caravan provided for the occasion. He was emotionally and physically exhausted when he arrived, collapsing when he got to the College of Education where he was scheduled to make a video tape for classroom use. Bernard Lee, his traveling companion, reassured the faculty members that he would be all right if allowed to rest briefly and if he could have a cup of tea. This was at 3:00 p.m. with his auditorium appearance scheduled for 4:00. He recovered and held a brief press conference in the Auditorium at 3:30 and was on stage before a packed crowd of 4,000 students and faculty who filled every seat in the Auditorium and lined the side aisles three deep with still more people listening from behind him in the Fairchild Theater. He did not give a canned speech but began by talking about the importance of the STEP Project and relating it to the whole Civil Rights Movement including what was happening in Selma. Jerry Wish, a graduate student with whom I had previously worked, called me to say it was the most powerful witness to the Christian Faith he had ever experienced. David Hollister, one of the M.S.U. volunteers in 1966 and now mayor of Lansing, marks Dr. King's appearance as a crucial shaping experience in his personal life, moving him to devote his life to public service. Many others were deeply moved by the experience.

The deepest impression that Dr. King made on me was the full attention he gave to every person, undergraduate or faculty member, who spoke to him after

his speech. He had the gift of being fully present to everyone who spoke with him, despite the fact that he had to leave immediately to return to Selma and the struggle going on there.

On Sunday, March 7, 1965, the participants in the voter registration project in Selma, Alabama, set out from Brown Memorial Chapel on their intended march of protest to the capital in Montgomery. When they were crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River on the outskirts of Selma, the 400 marchers were tear gassed, ridden over by the deputies on horseback and beaten with billy clubs--all in full view of the American and worldwide television audience. Bob Green called again, and he, Truman Morrison and I responded to Dr. King's call to the "Community of Good Will" for supporters to join in the march to Montgomery as they set out again on Tuesday, March 9. On March 9, a march was held to the bridge where the demonstrators had been beaten, a commemorative service held and then everyone returned to Brown Chapel. The full five day march was delayed until the full logistical support could be developed and approval secured from the federal courts for the march.

Tuesday night before we arrived, after the peaceful commemorative march to the bridge and back to the chapel, the Reverend James Reeb, a young Unitarian minister, and two of his friends went to a Black cafe for supper. On coming out of the restaurant they made a wrong turn and ended up in front of a hangout for white racists and thugs. The three men were beaten; James Reeb so severely that he died on the way to the hospital. We arrived the next morning and spent the rest of the week participating in the demonstrations, meetings and rallies in the Brown Memorial Chapel. During our brief time there, a group of Catholic nuns came to participate in the action in Selma. The appearance of these women in their religious garb sent a wave of excitement through Brown Memorial Chapel. Their presence brought a sense of hope to those gathered in the chapel, a sense that the Roman Catholic Church, with all of its prestige and power, had joined the movement. Up to this point the organized white church was not much in evidence in the movement. Later that week, Andrew Young recruited Bob Green and some others to slip through the back yards unobtrusively and set up a picket line around the Court House in protest against the unwillingness of the Registrar to allow blacks to register to vote. As Bob and Andy moved quietly through the back yards and alleyways, Bob sought to get to know Andy a little better, asking about his family and children. Andy's response was, "When I am leading a demonstration, I don't talk very much." They continued on to the Court House and demonstration in silence. A few nights later President Johnson gave his historic civil rights speech before a joint session of the Congress in which he advocated legislation to protect the right of the ballot. On Saturday we returned to East Lansing to continue our preparation for the STEP Project.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS PERIOD: Insights:

For the first time in my life I viewed the police, in unfamiliar territory, as the enemy; persons to be avoided in time of trouble instead of people to turn to for help.

In the aftermath of highly emotional experiences some people, Bob Green and Truman Morrison in particular, are loquacious. I am not very articulate and am limited in my ability to communicate the significance of the events. On our return from Selma, Martin Gal, who hosted a issue-oriented live show on WKAR TV, invited Bob, Truman and me to appear on the show to talk about our experience in Selma. I was mute but couldn't have gotten a word in edgewise if I had tried. Truman subsequently wrote a long article which appeared on the front page of the Towne Courier, the East Lansing weekly newspaper.

High points:

I was more afraid for my life during my time in Selma and the three summers I spent in Mississippi than I ever was during World War II as a combat medic with the 70th Infantry Division. In Selma, Alabama, I stood all night in the line of march in front of Brown Memorial Chapel, facing a solid line of Sheriff Jim Clark's deputies, who were equipped with helmets, tear gas masks and billy clubs. The next night the Chapel was evacuated by the police because of a bomb threat. The sight and smell of violence and death were everywhere and in the midst of it, people of faith were praying for peace and working for justice.

Holly Springs, Mississippi: STEP Project: Every summer we took all of the entering freshmen and our volunteers on a field trip to the University of Mississippi in Oxford. I personally made an appointment with the Chancellor, drove down to Oxford and arranged for the visit. Subsequent to my visiting Ole Miss and making arrangements, all of the Rust College students and our 25 volunteers rode as an integrated group the 30 miles through, what I viewed, as open, hostile country. We disembarked from the bus, gathered in the University Auditorium, were welcomed by the Chancellor, had an orientation to the University, visited the Library, the computer labs, and the Faulkner Memorial, ate lunch in the Cafeteria, and traveled back to Holly Springs expecting any moment to be attacked for our audacity.

Occasionally, I attended the Presbyterian Church in Holly Springs. On one of the Sundays I worshipped with that congregation, the pastor announced that the quarterly meeting of the Presbytery was being held the following Tuesday in Tupelo, Mississippi, and invited any of the elders in the congregation to accompany him to the meeting. I spoke to him afterwards and asked if I could ride with him and be registered as a corresponding member of the Presbytery. He said, "If there are not too many elders who wish to go, it would be fine." On the

appointed day I rode with the minister and two of his elders to the meeting and was enrolled as a corresponding member of the Presbytery but did not experience much warm southern hospitality or, for that matter, hostility either. I'm not quite sure what my motivation was for putting myself in that position, but it seemed appropriate at the time.

During the 1965-6 school year, Bob Green took a leave of absence from Michigan State University to work with Dr. King and the SCLC for a year. He worked with Andy Young, Dorothy Cotton, and Septima Clark in the Citizenship School at the Dorchester Center, in Dorchester, Georgia, just north of Savannah and then represented the SCLC staff in the leadership of the James Meredith march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi, during the summer of 1966. The second year of the M.S.U. Rust College STEP Project was in progress during that march. Bob Green came to Rust College a week before the march reached Jackson. As the son of a minister of the Apostolic Church of God in Christ, he is steeped in evangelical rhetoric and enthusiasm. He gave the equivalent of an altar call to the M.S.U. STEP volunteers to join the last day of the march. Even though all of the participants, on applying for the project, had committed themselves to engage only in this education project while in Mississippi, many of the students requested permission to join the last day of the march. I called a meeting of all of the volunteers to discuss the challenge. We decided to permit those who wished to do so to participate in the last day of the march. My only stipulation, since I was responsible for the project and the participants, was that those who were under 21 years of age and wanted to go, had to have permission from their parents. The whole family was with me in Holly Springs during the summer of 1966. Kathy had just completed her freshman year at Alma College. She and a close friend, Jim Krathwohl, who was a student at M. S. U., served as two of the volunteers in the project that summer. When Bob Green issued his "call" for volunteers, Kathy and Jim were among those who responded. The Beemans, with Kathy and Jim in their car, and a couple of other car loads of students left at 4:00 a.m. on Saturday to drive to Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi just north of Jackson. This is where the marchers were staying that night. I called John Brattin, an attorney in East Lansing who was active in the ACLU and supportive of our work, to alert him of these developments and to ask him to identify some attorneys we could call on if anyone got arrested. I told him we planned to cover the college phone during the whole time the students were gone and would call him if we had an emergency. Everyone returned safely by midnight that Saturday.

Your Recollections and Reflections:

What recollections do you have about your participation in the project?

Did the experience have an affect on your choice of a career or type of work?

Did it influence your future participation in struggles for social justice or peace?