

June 8, '64

Dear People,

Said goodbye to the Mississippi this afternoon about quarter to one but I suppose I'll see it again soon.

Chicago ---- just had to put my book away to watch it go by. I really got a good cross section this time, and with mixed emotions. Feeling the familiar terror of childhood, and yet was enhanced by its beauty while repulsed by its filth. It's the same way with the people ----I was entertained and amused at their expressions (and expressionlessness) and the things they do, but repelled by the crowds and the bustle and bustle of it all. I know how you feel about traveling and "people-watching," Dad. I never come here, though, but what I think -of Carl Sandburg's poem, "Chicago", but I just thank my lucky stars we don't live here any more.

The man who sold me my ticket told me it would be better to change in Hammond so I'm leaving in two hours for Hammond!

The bus got in about 5:15 and I got over here at the Illinois Central Station about 5:30. The cab cost \$1.00 and then I gave my bags to a Red Cap, which will cost \$0.70. I don't know whether that's a good thing to do or not, but they were getting awfully heavy.

It's only 5:00 now -- I forgot about DST.

Guess I'll have some crackers and cheese-----

It's 7:30 now and I've had my "supper" and I called Mary --- if you remember, Mom and Dad, she's the one who always rode home on the train with me. She lives in Chicago Hts. and it cost \$0.30. to call, but it was so good to talk to her --- I was feeling a little lonesome and I'm all better now.

Jerry, I hope you'll pardon the financial reports --- they're really not too interesting to you, are they?

My gosh, this 'ol train's pulling out and it's exactly 7:30 -- first train I've ever seen to keep its word!

I'm sure glad I had that Red Cap carry my bags -- it was so much more convenient and much better on my back. It hasn't hurt at all today, Mom, except for a little after I got on the bus.

I think the train is going to force me to quit writing.-----

June 9

Had a bad night last night --- It's not that I mind sleeping on trains, it's just that I'm not used to air-conditioned trains and I was Ko--ld. I'm also not used to sleeping next to snoring men --- Such is life.

I woke up this morning and I didn't know where we were, but I knew something was different. I looked out at sandy soil, scrawny corn, and

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skinny cattle, I asked a man if we were still in Illinois, and he said that we were in Tennessee. That excited me, but I was so disappointed when he said I had missed going over a big, high bridge at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. So I watched for another hour and just saw more scrawny farms and dense undergrowth. In one field there was a whole line of colored people hoeing in the dirt and in another field I saw a farmer plowing with two mules.

(about 9:00 a.m.) We are now leaving Memphis. The same man pointed out the Mississippi to me and said that the opposite bank was Arkansas--- I wish I had a map.

I've gotten an awful lot of reading done and I've almost got the Civil Rights Bill memorized!

It's now about 12:30 and we're in Jackson, Miss. -- I just saw the capital building go by.

I think we get into Hammond about 3:00 this afternoon ----believe I'll be about a day early in Baton Rouge. That'll teach me to listen to travel agencies. You asked me what I would do if that happened, didn't you, Mom? I guess I'll just wait til I get there, like I said I would.

Today is a beautiful day, but I have a feeling it's getting hot out there --- the air conditioning no longer feels cold. When I get off the train, I'll probably die, like you said, Dad. It might have been easier if I could have taken it a little at a time. People keep mopping their faces when they come in from outside --- yes, I believe it's warm.

Watching Mississippi go by today was quite an experience --- 'course according to you, Jer, everything is an experience for me, right?

I saw fields and fields of that dry, reddish soil and the people working it --- the whole family even down to the little ones and the dog. It sure doesn't compare to that beautiful land we saw last Tues. does it, Dad?

I'd better explain that for you, Jer. Last Tues. Dad took me out to Miles to talk to Rev. Dindinger. If you remember, he was the one who had spent a week in Hattiesburg, Miss. doing similar work as that which I'm going to do. Miles is a little farm community about 16 mi. north of Clinton, and the farms around there are just beautiful. I mean it, they really are. The soil is so black and rich looking, the corn is so green, and the farm buildings are all white and clean. I never realized how pretty it was. Anyway, this doesn't even compare to it. I'm so glad that I've had the opportunity to see it though ---- I think train is the best way to travel.

For some reason, I feel safer on the train than -on the bus.

Saw a great, big, 'ol Baptist Church in Crystal Springs, Miss. Boy, they are big down here, aren't they?

Just saw a Southern mansion! There are so many houses with great



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big pillars down here ---- I wonder if they are originals kept up or more probably reproductions. This one I saw looked like it might have been around a long time, though --- it was all cracked, etc. Probably was used for a court house or something.

This reminds me of something Miss Adams (Education Prof.) said once ---- you can read all the histories and geographies in the world, but there's nothing like seeing it. If I had lots of money all I would do is travel. Right, Dad?

June 10

We got into Hammond, La. yesterday about 3:30. There were about five of us waiting to go to Baton Rouge and there were no trains or buses going out at all. We thought this was very nice. So some man came along and offered to take us all up in his taxi for \$3.00 a piece. We decided it was the best we could do, until he decided to take another man, too. Seven of us in one car for 45 mi in that heat! I thought I was going to die for awhile.

I got out at the Greyhound station because some of the others were getting out there, too. So I called Ronnie Moore in Baton Rouge and he had gone to New Orleans. So I called the CORE office in Plaquemine (that's pronounced with just two syllables, Mom). They said that they'd come and get me but after waiting for an hour, I decided that they weren't coming. You cannot imagine how lonely and desperate I felt. So I called the office back and a girl said she didn't know where he had gone but to wait a while before I called a Hotel. So I got the name of a good hotel from the Information Desk and called it but after 29,000 attempts I gave up on trying to reach them. So I just called any one and made a reservation for the night. It was only going to cost me \$5.00 so I knew it wasn't going to be too sharp.

I waited for another hour and got a hamburger and then got a cab to take me to the hotel. The hotel didn't look too bad from the outside, but the room was lovely! The ceiling was cracked, the only light was a single bulb in the ceiling, the furniture was dusty, but there was a john! We have to be thankful for small favors --- there were clean sheets and towel, however. You can see why I didn't finish the letter last night. About 2 more thoughts about the people who loved me and I'd have been a goner.

I took a bath and was in bed by 9:00 and didn't get up until 9:00 this morning. I called the CORE office and they're supposed to get me here and I'm now waiting for the place to open so I can get some breakfast --- I'm rather tired of crackers and cheese for some reason.

This has gotten quite lengthy --- but it has been quite an adventure.

I'll try and call tonite ----

Love,

Peg.

June 10

Dear Peeps,

Well, today went much better, I am happy to report, and I really can't see wasting the money to call.

A couple of the guys finally came and got me this morning at the Hotel, after I had breakfast. That breakfast -- ugh! Molasses with pancakes? Uh h, I hate molasses! The choice was grits and ham and eggs. Probably should've taken that.

After we ran some errands in Baton Rouge, we went over to the office in Plaquemine. We crossed the Mississippi on a ferry -- the river was low, and it wasn't even as wide as it is at Clinton, which surprised me.

The office in Plaquemine is really funny -- it's in the back of an old hotel in the Negro section of town. It's just a little hole in the wall but busy --- I guess!

So far, I've met 2 guys (white) from New York and New Jersey and 2 guys (white) from San Francisco. Also, a girl and some guys (colored) from here in Louisiana. They all have had experience and seem to know what they're doing.

I was surprised when one of the guys was telling us how we were chosen. He said that this is a pretty select group here in La., and that the kids who were rejected for the La. project were accepted for the Miss. project (that's the one that's supposed to cover the whole state). I guess it's pretty dangerous in Miss., and they take anyone they can get. He said anybody is nuts to go to Miss. I still don't see why I was chosen without any experience or anything. Good looks, probably!

We grabbed a sandwich and then rode all over the countryside all afternoon -- I never did understand what we were doing, or why, but, I believe we crossed the Mississippi about 10 times. Maybe it was 70-11 times.

I've begun to get an inkling of the situation around here. They're putting a new electric fence around the East Baton Rouge Parish jail and "Mama Jo" said it was just for us.

"Mama Jo" is just the sweetest little ol' colored lady you've ever seen. She lives in Clinton, La. and has what she calls a "Freedom House", where kids stay when they're working in that area. She is 75 yrs. old and I believe she has talked every minute of it. We stopped to see her on our rounds today.

The place we're staying this week is real nice compared to the average Negro home. It's comparable to our house only a little older. She's keeping five girls: two in one bedroom, two in a porch converted bedroom, and one on a couch in the living room.

Tonight we ate in "Jackson Nightclub" -- that was quite a deal. It was a rickety old place, but the food wasn't bad -- rich, but not bad. We had fried chicken and rice, beef stew which was very highly seasoned ('bout blew my head off -- even worse than Kansas hot stuff) and vegetable-type stew with "pigtails" (long-stemmed okra)



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My address will be 306 Ivey St., Plaquemine, Louisiana until further notice --- okay?

Boy, today was quite a day! I got picked up by the police and hauled down to the court house and questioned by the chief of police. We were out canvassing this morning right near the office just for practice, but we happened to be on the wrong side of the tracks -- and I mean that literally, too. See, the Negro section of Plaquemine is unincorporated so therefore, if we stay on the side of the tracks that separates "Dupont Annex" from the rest of the town, the city police can't touch us.

"This "Dupont Annex" is really a bad scene -- open sewers and everything. It's amazing how you can adjust, though, I'm kind ---- (ugh - great big 'ol cockroach just ran along the baseboard) --- what was I saying? -- I'm getting used to living in the slums? I guess that's what I was saying.

Oh, I just wish I could tell you the value I'm getting out of this -- I just love these people, and I'm meeting so many, many different kinds of people. They are from just everywhere --- Boston Minneapolis, San Francisco, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Alabama, Louisiana ("Lousyana", as they say it) and Canada. Can you imagine that? She is so sweet, and I just am fascinated by her and her accent. She's just darling.

The girl (colored) from Birmingham, Ala. goes to school at Wm. Penn College in Oskaloosa, Iowa. How about that? I keep (Oh-h that damn roach is so big !! He just scares the pea-waddin out of me!) anyhow, I keep saying -- strange world, this!

We canvassed all morning -- by this, I mean we went from house to house asking them if they were "redished" to vote (that's the way the ol' colored folk says it), and if they would be interested in it. Most of them already are here in town, but we'll probably find a different story out in the sticks.

This afternoon we had a meeting with the big wheels -- Jim McCain from the National office in New York, and Dick Haley from the Regional Office in New Orleans. They are both tremendous men-- I was really impressed by Dick Haley (they're both colored) -- he is a tremendous man -- you have no idea the calibre of some of these people. We hashed and hashed until again after supper about what non-violence meant to us and what our personal commitment was. This is really soul-searching, and I didn't realize it. There's really a lot more to this than "you white folks in 'de nort'" realize.

I am just so impressed and full of feelings I may have to stop writing soon.

The kids are all so great -- sincere! And some of the stories they can tell -- wow!

This movement is really alive, and I believe we're going to win someday. There's so much spirit to it that you can't possibly get or see, imagine, anything, by reading about it.

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Oh, I had another experience -- my first beer! I took it because this guy bought it, but I about gagged on it -- retch!

Well, remember, 306 Ivey St., Plaquemine, La., and pass it around ---

I loves y'all,

Peg

June 12

Dear Peeps,

Today was spent very uneventfully in lectures and discussions, except for tonight on the way home when it was my pleasure to discuss with the police again. We were walking home and they stopped us and wanted to see our identification again. They're either trying to learn all of our faces or they are just trying to let us know that they know that the movement is here.

Oh, I was supposed to mention that our mail probably gets opened before it gets to us, but I don't think that really makes much difference.

June 13

Another uneventful day of lectures. We are learning a lot, however. We learned about Louisiana rural communities, canvassing techniques, and jail discipline.

Tonight we had a work-shop on non-violent action. We were shown how to act on a picket line or a sit-in reaction by pulling us off the chairs by our hair and kicking us on the floor. It's really a pretty good technique. I didn't even know I had been kicked until I got up off the floor and felt the lump on my behind. I've now got an ugly purple bruise the size of my fist.

This afternoon the leaders from the surrounding parishes (counties) met and elected a freedom delegation to go to the national Democratic convention. There are 2 Negro males from the 5th Congressional District, 2 from the 6th district and 3 representatives at large. I sure hope it works --- it will dramatize the need even if they don't win any voting power.

We are not at liberty to divulge the information about the rest of our project (out-going mail is probably read too) but I will tell you all about it when I get home.

It was good to talk to you all tonight -- I was rather lonely and I miss you.

Love,

Peg.

P.S. Jer -- Mom told me tonight on the phone that I got 3 B's, 2 A's and 1 C (P.E.)