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Dear

The following, rather too lengthy "Mississippi Letter" is a rambling, informal discussion of my experiences last summer in Mississippi and the ideas which I have subsequently formulated. I am sending you a copy because of your active interest or participation in the civil rights Movement or because of the deep concern which you have or should have with that struggle and its future.

Because persons of every background, prejudice, and persuasion will receive this letter, there is hardly a word in it with which someone will not disagree or take offense. This is to be expected and, as far as I am concerned, welcomed. I say welcomed because this letter hopefully represents much more than an expression of some of my own personal ideas about the civil rights struggle in Mississippi. If telling you what happened to me and what I am thinking were the only purposes to this letter, I never would have taken time from the horrendous task of trying to stay in law school (I am in my first year at the University of California) to write it.

I write this letter in the hope that you will respond, passionately or reservedly, extensively or briefly, warmly or coldly. I am interested not only in criticisms, but in suggestions, not only in speculation but in realistic appraisals. For, it is my increasing belief that one of the most urgent steps which needs to be taken is to start a dialogue between persons of widely divergent points of view, persons who because of geography, occupation, interests, or differences of opinions, never before communicated with one another. It is appalling to me how little White Mississippi and Black Mississippi, the leadership of the civil rights movement in Mississippi (The Council of Federated Organizations) and the "white power structure" of that state, and those people everywhere who actively participate and those who have only a passive interest in the struggle for equal rights, how little each grouping understands the other. I hope this letter can provide some minimal channel of communication. Criticisms and suggestions should begin to flow between the poles of these three bipolarized sectors of the American public and from one sector to another. I especially hope that if you have taken no active interest in this struggle that you will, or that at the very least you will attempt fully to understand it and its goals and your own relationship to it.

Finally, I am also writing because I have not heard from you for some time and would like to catch up with what you are doing.

Sincerely yours,

*Stephen Bingham*  
Stephen Bingham

## MISSISSIPPI LETTER

"Is this really where you want to get off?" the Greyhound bus driver said in his New Orleans drawl as the lumbering bus approached an old, weather-beaten, obviously Negro-owned store. Few other buildings were visible though the land stretched flat in every direction, sowed in cotton and soybeans. This was the Mississippi Delta; the store was the center of Mileston, where I was to spend six weeks.

When the bus had come to a full stop, the door swung open, letting in a rush of hot, suffocating air. I hurried off and then stood by the side of the road while the bus headed on towards Greenwood. Clouds of dust, unwatered in many weeks, enveloped me.

I walked across the highway to the store where some Negroes were observing my arrival. They knew who I was and I felt at ease. One of the women there offered to drive me to the "Freedom House", which was to be my home. Across the paved highway, over the Central Illinois Railroad tracks and off through the fields on a dirt road. Set off the road about 100 feet, behind a partially forested area, were the Freedom House and the temporary community center. Neither building had running water nor any furniture. On the lawn were about 20 volunteers and staff, many of whom I knew, holding a meeting.

So here I was, back in Mississippi, the Magnolia state. It was "Hospitality Month" and there was a good cotton crop. My first venture into Mississippi the previous fall, a ten-day stint to help with a mock election in which a Negro was running for Governor of the State, had not really given me more than a cursory glance at the State, though I did spend one night in jail for "loitering". I felt very much the uncertainty which anyone might feel coming from a fairly comfortable New England upbringing and Ivy League education such as I had had.

The problems which a white northerner of my background might face in Black Mississippi were not unanticipated. All the volunteers, numbering over 600 in the first two groups, had spent over a week at one of two consecutive "orientation sessions" sponsored by the National Council of Churches at Western College for Women at Oxford, Ohio.

The three major purposes of the orientation session were: (1) to familiarize the volunteers, and some of the staff too, with the relevant historical, political, and socio-economic issues which would make us not only more effective in our work but give us a greater understanding of its meaning; (2) to acquaint us with the specific jobs each of us was to do and with the specific area where we would work; and (3) to prepare us to cope with any of the multitude of problems which might arise, for example, being attacked, living with Negro families, staff/volunteer relationships, etc.. We were taught the "nonviolent

position", a fetal-like position one falls into when being attacked, and were told we must accept non-violence as a tactic if we wished to go to Mississippi. We were told that we must work effectively while at the same time being very, very scared: the many staff workers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) there told of their own personal experiences at the hands of rednecks, jailers, and the like. We were told of the murders which had occurred in the recent past, of which the press had taken no cognisance, of murderers who roamed at large, untouched by the law, and perhaps, in the society which is Mississippi, untouchable.

There was a certain disturbing tone to the orientation session. It was extremely hard for anyone, and impossible for most, to assess rationally his individual decision to spend the summer in Mississippi. Every student learned that Mississippi was a much more dangerous place to spend the summer than he had ever imagined. He was told that people would not return, not that they might not return. Yet, through it all, a scant few decided against going. Why? The press and many other observers generally concluded that these students had an extraordinary dedication to an ideal, enabling them to face danger and even death. What that ideal was, no one was quite sure. But they seemed to feel that, whatever it was, it had captured the hearts and minds of this new generation of students in a way that truly surprised both northerners and southerners who still tended to look on contemporary college students as the silent generation.

I discovered, however, that no one was weighing risk against need in personal terms. When discussing the realism of death in Mississippi, one did not speak about his own death, but about someone else's. Of course, no one could have ever been completely prepared intellectually and emotionally for Mississippi. As we all soon learned, Mississippi cannot be described; it must be felt, breathed, seen, heard. But, nevertheless, it seemed to me that a oneness of mood and temperament, so essential once we had actually departed for the South, took over at Oxford too soon, preventing rational but personal decision-making in that crucial week. This was seen no more clearly than the time Bob Moses, COFO's project director, rose during the second week to tell us what the risks really were. When he was through, no one applauded; each was absorbed finally in his own feelings. But, as if out of fear that they might decide against going, they all rose as one person and sang the moving freedom song, "We Shall Overcome". Many went to Mississippi therefore espousing what Bob Moses espoused, hating what the staff hated, believing what others believed because others believed it.

Some of us were to go to Southwest Mississippi, a part of the Deep South which strikes fear in even the veteran civil rights workers. Southwest Mississippi is Natchez, famous to some for its beautiful ante-bellum homes, famous to others because it serves as a weapons distribution center for the Ku Klux Klan, receiving automatic rifles, submachine guns, and hand grenades from Louisiana for use in Mississippi. Southwest Missis-

Mississippi is where the poorest of whites live almost on the same level as the Negroes. Southwest Mississippi is the center of Klan activity. This is where some of us were to go. We were told of a power struggle going on in the State between the KKK and the White Citizens Council, centering around their differing ideas on the use of violence. In its renaissance, the KKK once again believes strongly in the effective use of violence to combat integration. Of those indicted for the triple murder in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and for the numerous bombings throughout the Deep South, many were members of the Klan. The White Citizens Council has fought this trend, expressing concern with the "image" of the state, so important for economic growth. The White Citizens Council, composed mainly of businessmen and professional people, primarily city-based, has its center of power in the Delta as well as the larger cities. Very little civil rights activity has been conducted in the Klan territory of the southwest. The argument was that if the civil rights workers did not go into southwest Mississippi, it would be interpreted as capitulation in the face of violence. The tactic of violence would have passed the test. Our presence in that area would show that we were not afraid to go into the most dangerous territory. To all of us, this made sense at the time. It still does, but I now question the idea of a power struggle.

The White Citizens Council comprises the "men of stature" in the community - businessmen, lawyers, ministers, etc. These are people who have a natural distaste for violence and even at times seriously worry about the effects of brutality by law enforcement officers against civil rights demonstrators on the economic growth of their area; witness the economic decline in Birmingham and St. Augustine, not to mention the generally unfavorable climate throughout the entire state of Mississippi. Such persons worry not so much because of any real concern for the people being brutalized but because it detracts from the mythical image of racial harmony which most have built up in their own minds.

"We never had any problems until you northerners came down here and started to stir up our good niggers. Whites and niggers used to get along well together."

"Do you think they like working in the cotton fields 14 hours a day for \$2 or \$3? Do you think the maid making \$6 to \$10 per week for "cooking" (i.e. cooking, cleaning, baby-sitting, and whatever else needs to be done) really means what she says when she agrees with her employer that she is happy?"

"Of course they're happy. They wouldn't stay down here if they weren't happy, would they? After all, they can always go to Chicago."

And they do go to Chicago and elsewhere in the North, at the rate of about 300 per day. They're happy...? So much for delusion.

The KKK, on the other hand, is composed mainly of those whites who, were it not for the existence of the Negro, would be

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on the bottom of the economic rung. They are poor farmers, generally found in the hill country, often working an illegal still. Most don't have any personal risk at stake if racial disorders flare up. Hence murder, bombing, cross-burning are all seen as positive steps whose only effect is the beneficial one of deterring the civil rights movement. There are also complicated psychological motivations which differentiate the KKK from the White Citizens Council. The two groups operate in different parts of the state. The White Citizens Council, according to reliable sources, has pretty much abandoned the southwest and areas like Neshoba County to the more extremist KKK, while, conversely, there is little serious threat to the White Citizens Council from the KKK in the Delta and in the more populous parts of the State, e.g., Jackson and the Gulfcoast.

The second important question raised by the original decision to go into southwest Mississippi was, whether it was morally, ethically, politically, strategically, or in any other sense, worth risking the number of lives which at the time it was thought probably would be lost by going into the specific areas contemplated? I neither intend to suggest playing a numbers game, i.e., if it's only five lost, maybe it's worth it but if it's ten, maybe not, nor even to suggest that there is an immediate answer to this question. I only suggest that the responsibility was there for the leadership to think through more thoroughly the relative values involved in such a scheme. For example, when someone asked whether it would be worth while if everyone was killed in a certain rural area, the answer was yes; others would follow. There was throughout all of this questioning a strong, and sad to say, realistic, feeling that only by the death of white northerners would the Nation ever wake up to the horrors of Mississippi. Most of us still feel that Mississippi would not be the changed place today in the eyes of the country if all of the three civil rights workers murdered in Neshoba County had been Negro. We began to see ourselves as possible sacrifices, horrible but perhaps necessary when a country refuses to recognize such basic wrongs within its borders. It is significant that while the federal government and others were searching for the three missing bodies, they found two bodies in the Mississippi River whose torsos were severed in half. When it was determined that they were only local Negroes, not any of the three civil rights workers, all interest in them ceased.

Fortunately, our southwest group had some extra time to think. We were told we would not go down at the end of the first week with the others; it was better to wait and see how the state reacted to the arrival of the first wave. Strange as it may seem, no one had any idea how the state would react. The majority of newspapers in Mississippi at first depicted a force of up to 30,000 beatniks coming into the state for the sole purpose of testing the public accommodations section of the new Civil Rights Act. (Those of us at all familiar with the Mississippi situation could not help but view the new Act with some bitterness; at that time the benefit of eating in a white restaurant seemed almost academic when the average Negro was making a little over \$600 per year; the

Act had only heightened the tension). The relatively moderate Memphis Commercial Appeal had a cartoon characterization of a COFO worker, which consisted of a dirty beatnik with sandals, beret, dark glasses, dirty clothes, Rumor had it that we all might be arrested on the border, as the State Legislature was then considering a bill which would make it a crime to enter into the state for the purpose of committing any crime; working in the field of civil rights is usually considered a crime in Mississippi. In a word, neither the Council of Federated Organizations nor the State of Mississippi had the slightest notion as to what the other would do. Such, unfortunately, is one of the most regrettable and unnecessary aspects to the civil rights struggle in Mississippi. Neither side has made the strenuous effort and, as of now, has no apparatus to do so, to communicate effectively with the other. Although there were plenty of leaflets floating around the State explaining accurately the COFO program, a real attempt should have been made, I think, to make certain that the State government knew precisely what to expect and where. The Governor, on the other hand, having been recently armed with the most sweeping peacetime powers ever placed in a governor's hands, should have made it clear that these were only to be used in the most dire emergencies. (By the end of the summer, the Governor had used very few of these extraordinary powers.)

During the week that the southwest group delayed, we decided to travel to Washington to try to bolster our support among congressional and executive personnel, especially in the Justice Department. Over 20 of us went, and spent two hectic days meeting as many congressmen and Senators as was possible. Disillusionment began to set in. Those unfamiliar with how congressional representation traditionally reacts to pressure could not understand the apparent lack of sympathy or concern. The results in the Justice Department seemed particularly disappointing to most. The previous week, John Doar, then assistant to Burke Marshall, the assistant attorney general for civil rights (Mr. Doar has recently replaced Mr. Marshall), a man whose own personal commitment to full justice in the South is unexceeded anywhere in the federal government, had spoken to the volunteers in training in Ohio. He had spoken, as he had to, as spokesman for the Justice Department. He had told us there could be no federal protection by the Justice Department of the F.B.I. Well, what about Title 18, Section 3052 of the U.S. Code, which had been mimeographed and given to all the volunteers. This section arms the F.B.I. with arrestive powers. Mr. Doar could only repeat what he had said. It was obvious that it was at that time the federal policy, as distinguished from authority, not to use the F.B.I. to arrest southern rednecks. But he could not say, We have the authority but we're not going to exercise it. (That the authority did exist has recently been indicated by a number of F.B.I. arrests in McComb and elsewhere in connection with bombing and church-burning incidents.) So our visit to the Justice Department got us no further than what had gone on at Oxford, or so most thought. I thought I sensed in our talks with Doar and Marshall their own concern with current federal policies on arrests, protection, investigation, and the

like. For, how could the Justice Department conscientiously carry on its voting suits and other legally-oriented work knowing that the voter registration workers who tried to make voting a reality in Mississippi, work which is under statutory protection, were literally in danger of their lives. But, the nuances of movements in governmental policy are not writ large on the walls of the offices of government officials and so we returned to Ohio a group more discouraged than when we had arrived. Personally, however, I was encouraged by the apparent undercurrents of movement in federal policy and especially with the fact that the Justice Department seemed not only concerned with the disappearance of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, but also with the immediate and long-range future of the civil rights workers in Mississippi.

There seems to be a great deal of confusion and lack of understanding of the federal government's role in the southern civil rights struggle. It is imperative to assess its role, more especially now than ever because more and more civil rights groups are calling for large-scale federal intervention in the South. It is recognized by most commentators that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 received its initial impetus from the church-bombing in Birmingham which took the lives of four girls. Most today calculate the time of the changed government attitude towards the function of the F.B.I. in the South as the time immediately following Allen Dulles' visit to Jackson in the wake of the triple murder. That there should have been such correlation is no coincidence. Unfortunate though it may sometimes be, our government is one of opinion-response. I recall that last spring it was said that if the Mississippi Summer Project does no more than awaken the entire country to what Mississippi is, it will have accomplished an enormous amount. That is exactly what was accomplished by the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. A hitherto recalcitrant press (Claude Sitton and John Herbers of the New York Times, Karl Fleming of Newsweek, Nick von Hoffman of the Chicago Daily News, and a very few others excepted) had simply failed to tell the story of the Black South and what was happening to civil rights workers there. When 99% of a country does not know what is going on, they of course do not care. The government therefore had no mandate to exercise maximum statutory authority.

I lingered a day longer in Washington and had the opportunity to fly back out to the Ohio training session with Bayard Rustin, one of the most sensitive leaders in The Movement. Two thoughts which he expressed to me then take on a particular importance in retrospect. One was his almost idealistic feeling that no one should go into the South as a civil rights worker without a total "intellectual and moral commitment." He himself recognized that this is an impossibility but he nonetheless wished it were possible. It is easy to argue that there is nothing wrong with sending down the uninitiated and only partially committed, as most of the summer volunteers were, because by the end of the summer their commitment would surely be a total one. What makes this argument tenuous at best and sacrificial at worst, is that as the summer

got under way, no one had any idea how many people were going to be killed. How much of a commitment should be required of one who must be prepared to die? The other thought which was on Rustin's mind last June was how dramatic a change the Summer Project represented from anything the southern civil rights movement had ever known before. White volunteers from the North were going to participate in what was a truly "Negro movement". He sensed dangers not merely in that many of the southern Negro staff members, whose lives had taught them to distrust if not hate the "white man", would accept the volunteers reluctantly, but he was also afraid that the whites would accept the Negro leadership without question. Though fully confident in that leadership, Rustin saw the possibility of reverse discrimination. Fortunately, his fears proved largely unfounded. Most decisions are by consensus, not fiat, in both SNCC and COFO.

It is imperative to discuss COFO's leadership, for there is much ignorance of its composition. I must begin with the person who is almost entirely responsible for my own involvement - Robert Moses. A short, slightly built, very soft-spoken New Yorker, Bob is a graduate of Hamilton College, with an MA in Philosophy from Harvard. After spending a couple of years teaching at Mann School in New York City, Bob went to McComb in 1961, the first of the "new generation" of civil rights people to go into Mississippi. This is not to say, as many mistakenly suppose, that there had been no civil rights work in Mississippi, prior to 1961. There had, especially after 1954 and the desegregation decision. Many courageous lives were lost in those years; the saddest aspect of these deaths being that in a real sense they were in vain. No northern newspaper, no official in Washington, no one on the outside, was concerned with what was going on in Mississippi. At least the parents of Andy, Mickey Schwerner, and Jim Chaney can always know that those lives were not lost in vain. People throughout the country were finally aroused and as James Silver said in Mississippi: The Closed Society, change within Mississippi will not be self-generated but must receive its impetus from outside the State.

Anyway, Bob went into McComb and began voter registration work which a hardy band of individuals, led by Jim Forman had begun over in Georgia. These were the early days of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Bob starts, one thinks, from a position that he is living on borrowed time. He has brushed with death on countless occasions. He is philosophic about it all, though. He is only one of many, he tells himself; while his loss would have probably had a more devastating effect on the student movement than anyone working there, he feels that he is expendable. He has not, nor will he ever, overcome his fears when he is in the South but he has mastered them to a remarkable degree. One thing we were all told in Ohio was to always be afraid; otherwise one is likely to be reckless. But, never let oneself freeze of fear. Then one loses one's effectiveness. Well, that was the way Bob was. I was perhaps never so struck with his self-composure as when we were arrested together in the fall of 1963.



We were both taken to the station for driving our two cars through non-existent stop-signs in Clarksdale. At that time, and also the next morning, after I had spent a night in jail for "loitering in violation of a midnight curfew", when I attempted to cross the main street of town to enter a hotel, Bob was barraged with a brutal verbal assault by the policemen. He almost seemed oblivious to the whole thing; it had obviously happened so many times. He had, at such times, a quiet confidence in his rightness and personal courage that seemed to have pulled him through extraordinary trials.

Then, there is Aaron Henry who is a remarkable product of Mississippi. Raised in Clarksdale, in the Delta, Governor Henry (as those of us who worked with him a year ago like to refer to him) is a truly charismatic person. He is currently the head of COFO and the State NAACP; he is a mediator and conciliator of the first rank; he is all things to Mississippi Negroes. He has a genuine concern for the problems of Mississippi, not merely racial ones but those which affect Negroes and whites alike: poverty, education, etc.

The rest of the leadership consists mostly of Negroes born and raised in the South, mostly in their early twenties, some in their teens. I have been concerned, as have others, that there is a very definite problem in respect to influencing policies. Those who have been in the movement for a good while carry on a steady dialogue out of which comes almost by magic most of the general policy guidelines. There are five regional, and various local project directors who make day-to-day decisions. However, this summer proved that those who have no long-term and intimate connection with the movement are unable to communicate effectively with the leadership of the movement. They may talk to the leadership but their ideas are seldom considered seriously. The problem is particularly serious because the SNCC workers often say, not without justified self-righteousness, to these new-comers, "Where have you been for the last two years while we've been working and starving and living in jail."

Generalizations about the summer volunteers are inevitably subject to exceptions. Many remarked that we were an immature group, which obviously was true in the sense that most had no idea, even after the benefit of an orientation, of what we were going to have to deal with. We had, unfortunately, no fair idea of the "white southerner". We were taught that there is a white power structure which must be crushed, eventually and inevitably, with the aid of the Federal government. We were told about the rednecks, the economic bottom of the white society, those who would kill Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. We were told of the closed society, as James Silver in his new book, Mississippi: The Closed Society (a must reading incidentally, for anyone who would try to understand the state of Mississippi today) has described it but we were given no understanding of those whites who have been the victims of that society. We were told to read Lillian Smith's

I fear that we had little understanding of the white Mississippian. In defense of the approach taken at the orientation session, it should be emphasized that our purpose was to spend the summer with the Negro people of Mississippi who had, through their statewide organization, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), asked for our help. There was no time for us white northerners to play both sides of the fence. We were being assigned the task of talking to Negroes about the importance of voting and the need to try to register. (The second group of people to go to the orientation at Ohio would be teachers in the freedom schools and persons to run the community centers.) Perhaps it would not have been possible last summer to do what is going to have to be done, namely to begin to bridge the enormous gap between the two Mississippis.

Actually, an effort was made in this direction, a fact unknown by most. There was a "white community project" designed to do three things: to conduct research into the peculiar economic problems of the South; to work with the "poor whites" of the South in an attempt to help them associate their problems with those of their Negro brothers (in poverty); and to communicate in some way with the "white power structure" or at least with those who had some influence with the white power structure. Two prerequisites were necessary for such a program to succeed at all: (1) different people would have to carry out the three aspects of the white community project; and (2) it was necessary to divorce the white community project from any overt "civil rights" activity, at least for the time being. Unfortunately, neither of these prerequisites were fully met, the second not at all. The original Brochure outlining the Mississippi Summer Project had a very noticeable blurb about the white community program. How could such a program, so radically exciting in its inception, ever succeed if whites knew that the workers were sympathetic with - indeed associated with - the civil rights workers? Much useful information came out of the program, but mostly in the way of research. It was difficult for the workers to maintain their anonymity anywhere. The program was further jeopardized by the fact that many of the students were northerners, the original design having been to include only southern whites in the project. (Needless to say, it is difficult to find an adequate number of southern white students).

Though these efforts were made in the direction of bridging the enormous gap between the two Souths, there is no question but that the whole Mississippi Summer Project aggravated white Mississippians. Most of us strongly believed that it was inevitable that this would happen no matter what approach was taken, but it is truly unfortunate that this happened to the extent it did. While, as I have mentioned above, some of the blame for this necessarily rests with the COFO leadership in not communicating their intentions more specifically and directly, much blame rests with the responsible leadership of Mississippi. I try to believe that Governor Paul Johnson has a deep respect for law and order, if at the same time, being reluctant to bring basic and urgently needed social changes

to Mississippi. Why, I keep asking myself, if this is true, was he unwilling to ever tell the people of Mississippi, as he surely could have done, what the Mississippi Summer Project involved. He may not have known all the details of the Summer project, but he knew enough. He did go on statewide TV at one point to urge the citizens of Mississippi to leave things up to the local and state law enforcement officials. Never once, however, did he make any attempt to counteract the really vicious newspaper accounts, emanating from Jackson, Memphis, Meridian, and other smaller towns.

There is little doubt in my mind that the prime requisite for the preservation and perpetuation of the 'closed society' is an obedient news media. One has to see the news blackouts of national news broadcasts picturing police brutality towards civil rights demonstrators to understand the depth of control. That an obedient press is so essential is best evidenced by the most extreme measures taken and still being taken to force Pulitzer-prizewinning Hazel Brannon Smith, editor of the weekly Lexington (Mississippi) Advertiser and a Jackson weekly out of business. A native Mississippian, Mrs. Smith nonetheless believes strongly in a free press which reports all sides of the news fairly. As the result of her accurate reporting of the murder of a Negro in cold blood on a Saturday night in the streets of Lexington, Mrs. Smith found herself faced first with economic harrassment and then with the birth of a rival White Citizens Council-supported newspaper, the Holmes County Herald, which quickly drew away most of her advertising. At this very moment she is very near going under, and is in desperate need of funds.

As to the failings of Governor Johnson, I have groped for answers. The only one I have come up with is that, being a superb politician, Governor Johnson felt the need to walk a very delicate line between the vitriolic rednecks, who are a significant portion of the population of Mississippi, and what he knew was his responsibility as the governor of Mississippi. It is understandable that Mississippians did not and do not appreciate the incursions of outsiders, particularly whites. Below I will attempt to answer some of the objections to such carpetbag interference. What bothers me here, however, is that, recognizing that this group of students et. al. were going to go into Mississippi and work with the Negroes, and no one was going to stop them (surely those who have meted out punishment of the most unspeakable kind to civil rights workers only to hear them singing freedom songs in jail know by now that one does not drive away civil rights workers), why did the officials of the State fail so utterly in their most basic responsibilities, and thereby fail the white citizens of their state? The tragic events of Neshoba County are due less to the fact that civil rights workers invaded the state than to the climate of lawlessness which state officials had allowed to build up to make such an impossible tragedy a predictable reality. A system of law enforcement which is willing to literally treat anyone who is black, either in skin color or by association, as no more than dirt, should never be tolerated even by the most vehement segregationist. It will be many years before the basic philosophy of a segregated society is replaced. Until

that day arrives, white southerners must at least be willing to attempt to move in their society within a framework as nonviolent and legal as that of the civil rights organizations. No matter how much hatred one has towards the NAACP, or COFO, there is no one that can truthfully charge that they have tried to break the laws of Mississippi. I was once arrested for being out after 12 midnight in Clarksdale, in violation of a curfew. Curfew ordinances, however, have been declared an unconstitutional restriction of the rights of adults except in time of civil emergency. COFO workers were charged with the illegal distribution of food for eating food in their home in McComb. People are arrested for breach of the peace when they are beaten up by angered whites. The list could be pages and pages, (see appendix). There are virtually no infractions of any state or local laws by these workers. In fact, most are considerably more cautious, especially in respect to traffic laws, than they were in their home states. Furthermore, the history of the nonviolence of all the COFO workers is well known. For most, it is a rigidly enforced tactic of operation. For a rare and dedicated few, it has achieved a place in their lives far beyond the strategic value; it has become what Gandhi thought of as a moral force of immeasurable strength. The White Citizens Council professes nonviolence. I am not in a position to question that stand. But, why is it that such an influential group is unable to have effect on the activities of those who would use the arm of the law as a brutal weapon rather than as an impartial protector. I have heard countless well-meaning whites say, Why do you come down here to break our laws; they never ask themselves the bitter question, why do we allow our law enforcement officials to use the arm of the law in an illegal campaign against civil rights workers.

This all gets at a much more basic question which the whites of Mississippi, the "responsible" whites, the "moderate" whites, the whites "of good will", must now ask themselves. Of the numbers of whites I talked to who did earnestly recognize the grave errors which Mississippi has made in attempting to preserve an old order of society - The Southern Way of Life - none, literally none, felt they personally were in any way responsible for that society being the way it was. Nor did any of them feel he had any personal obligation to help improve that society. This to me is the most serious indictment I can make of Mississippians. It is true that it is only human to avoid unpleasant responsibilities. Nonetheless, when a society finds itself on the verge of violent destruction from within and from without, it must look at itself and ask why? Once that question has been answered, then the next question is, What do I do? It is not enough to wait until someone else (like COFO) acts, for whatever reason and motivation, and then react to him. It is late, and Mississippians must prove that they are capable, not only of adjusting to change, but of effecting that change themselves in the least disruptive and yet most deliberate way. The efforts of hundreds of Mississippian women last summer to pave the way toward the incredibly successful integration of a few schools in the State this fall is dramatic evidence of what can be done, and can only be done by native Mississippians. The joint statement by 650 men in McComb, though only a strong affirmation of their belief in law and order, was a courageous stand in a town of McComb's atmosphere. These are the kinds

of positive, as opposed to reactive, moves which I believe the overwhelming majority of white Mississippians believe in; it is now time to act in a concerted way on that belief and no longer to allow the dictates of a closed society to be the deciding factor.

Well, enough for the present in the way of exhortation. Perhaps a few more personal notes will serve to illustrate the climate in Mississippi.

The night before leaving for Mississippi, the group of about 30 who were to have eventually ended up in southwest Mississippi spent almost the entire night in one of the most extraordinary sessions I have ever witnessed or participated in. The subject was generally what had been gone over again and again, namely the job which we were to do and its value compared to the risks involved. The truly astonishing fact was that for the first time we were able to begin to view things in terms of our own beings. No longer were we saying what other people had said, or saying how we felt on the basis of what we thought we were expected to say. Finally, and it had taken two weeks in Ohio, we were exploring our own relationship to working in an area where, at the time, death seemed imminent for several, if not many. From one person to the next, the talking went, as each tried to express in his own words and listen to others do the same, why he personally had chosen to work in the southwest and how he viewed himself there. There were a few who obviously wanted to go into the worst area, for its sake alone. There were others who wanted to work with the particular staff members who were to be there.

"It seems to me that you only get one chance in your life in which to do something really worth-while. If you don't accept that chance when it comes.

"It's a dirty job. I'm scared as hell. And it's doubtful that, at the end of the summer, you'll be able to point to much constructive work done. But it's the idea of being able to survive there for the whole summer. (a staff member).

"It seems to me that there is a real chance that our entire group (one-third of the group was to go into a rural area to live) will be wiped out. To me, that just doesn't balance out with whatever kind of gain that represents."

"I'm ready to die. I can think of few things in this world that are worth dying for, but this is one of them." (He had a wife and a kid).

Every so often, someone would get up with a sort of blank, far-off look, and wander across the room or perhaps outside, quietly returning to his seat a few minutes later.

When we finally finished talking sometime shortly before dawn, we still did not know what would happen to us. We still

did not know what would happen to us. We still were not sure what the danger was. But in a very real, perhaps too real sense, we did know how we each felt as human beings facing what then seemed the real possibility of death. Somehow we were the stronger for that feeling.

For a variety of reasons, many of us never did get to the Southwest. Our arrival in the northern part of the State was intended to be a combination "holding action" and training period. The uncertainty created by the triple murder made the Southwest seem even more hazardous. When it finally seemed possible to move into McComb and Natchez, many had so many commitments in the areas in which they were working that it was difficult to leave. Some did, however, find their way to these two towns by the end of July.

After arriving in Mileston, in Holmes County, at the eastern edge of the Delta, a portion of northwestern Mississippi, so named either because of its shape or because therein lies the fertile black-belt soil deposits of the Mississippi River, where there are cotton plantations and farms, where attention from calloused black hands, where agricultural wealth reaches its height and depth in the United States, where weather-beaten houses dot the share-cropping lands, and "posted" signs on gateposts mark the plantation houses of the Negro workers, where the concrete slab runs straight through the expanse of cotton and soy beans, miraged in the 110 degree southern sun, under which laborers work 14 hours a day for \$2.00.

Unlike many areas of the country which are termed agricultural, the Deep South has not yet seen the true advent of automated agriculture. Cotton and soy beans are still "chopped" or weeded by hand - by black hand. Tractors are in use but most of the equipment which is used in large-scale farming operations is seen only rarely in Mississippi. The reason for this is primarily that nowhere else in the United States is there any labor supply as large and as cheaply available as in the Deep South, and particularly Mississippi. The Negro comprises this labor force. Accounting for over 40 percent of the total population of the State, the Negroes of Mississippi subsist on a level equal to one-fifth the poverty minimum set by the Federal government, or just over \$600 per annum. This compares with a figure just over \$2,000 for whites, or only two-thirds of the poverty minimum. (Figures for 1960, U.S. Bureau of the Census).

I spent my summer living in an abandoned house, originally built on New Deal funds, with several other COFO workers. Scattered around the neighborhood - if it could be called that - were about 20 others. We were three separate groups, one conducting freedom schools, one a community center, and about ten of us, voter registration work.

Adjusting to our new habitat was not as difficult as it was exciting. For all our fears about treatment from the whites, we had never had much time in Oxford to learn of the graciousness of

the Negroes with whom we were to live. Though I personally missed the opportunity to live with a family, and regret it very much, I got to know most of them well and was amazed daily by their calmness, courage, and compassion. It should be remembered, however, that these Negroes were active in the Movement. They were willing to accept us immediately and, considering what a man with white skin had meant to many of them, this was remarkable in itself. They went out of their way - to a point which was embarrassing for us - to make us comfortable. And yet, we were constantly reminded that we were in Mississippi: every home was well stocked with firearms; every time we drove up to a house at night, we sounded our horns to let the household know we were friends. I learned late that the thing which angered whites more than anything else was not the work we were doing, but the fact that we were living with Negroes. Though quick to admit that no whites would have let us live with them if we had asked, the whites I talked to were irrationally bitter that we would actually live with Negroes; none could believe that we wanted it. This is the kind of unreasoning, though understandable, attitude which I hope can be counter-acted somehow. It is a sad commentary on the "closedness" of the society that an outsider is immediately despised because he chooses merely to live in a Negro home. Mississippi would come a long way in achieving a degree of self-improvement if sensible whites were willing to accept this kind of behavior from civil rights workers or anyone else for that matter.

Each morning I would wake up near dawn and wash in the cold water of the pump out back, (90% of Negro homes in Mississippi are without plumbing), occasionally having enough initiative to heat some water on the little kerosene stove, our sole source of heat. Breakfast was usually pancakes. Sometime around eight a.m. we (i.e. the voter registration workers), would head off in two or three cars for carefully selected areas of the county to carry the word:

Hello, I'm Steve Bingham; I'm working with the Council of Federated Organizations.

Yassuh, Mr. Bingham. I'm Milly; Milly Williams. (The automatic response required of the Negro in order to maintain all the finish of a carefully structured society always hit me hard).

Have you ever voted before?

Oh, no Suh! (inevitably).

Would you like to vote?

Well, I don't know. I've been lame and don't get out of the house much. Besides, my husband decides these things. You'd better come back when he's here. (Anything to get me out of the house; the immediate fear which was apparent the minute I mentioned voting was the hardest obstacle to overcome, particularly

if, as in Tchula, Lexington, and some other towns, the sheriff, his deputies, or just car-loads of whites, would constantly drive by the Negro homes where we were conversing.

And so it would go; each morning until late afternoon we would find ourselves trudging from house to house in the broad expanse of the Mississippi countryside, fighting off the heat, the dust, the discouragement, the fear, going from one dingy shack to the next in the "nigger" section of towns, carefully marked by the abrupt ending of the pavement, of phonelines, electric lights, sewers, etc., etc. It was an entirely different world.

From the very beginning, we held "massmeetin's" the one way to get people to overcome their fears in the Closed Society. These meetings, of anywhere from five to fifty people were held in the various local churches, more and more frequently as the summer progressed. (It is these churches which elsewhere in the state have been burned). Each meeting usually began with a few freedom songs. The freedom songs are really the glue of the Movement. They bind people together as nothing else could in the state of Mississippi. A couple of staff or volunteers usually then told about the voter registration work in other parts of the county and explained its importance. Then names were solicited for visits to the courthouse to fill out the voter registration form. The reason these meetings are so essential is that the individual in the Movement stands out and is vulnerable. Vulnerable to what? Vulnerable to fire-bombing, being fired from his job, other harrasment. The arguement is that if enough people get involved, as happened recently in Selma, Alabama, when 125 out of 130 teachers marched on the courthouse, little is likely to happen to any one individual. It is ironic, though essential, to note that exactly the same reasoning applies to the white community. Where 650 businessmen in McComb can issue a statement condemning lawlessness, one businessman never could.

Occasionally, we would have brief verbal encounters with angry whites. We lived in a perpetual state, not of fear so much as rational apprehension. We realized that as long as we remained, there was no point in allowing our fear to control our movements; yet, we knew also that there were many things we simply could not do, like drive at night, or travel alone. Once, the verbal assault became physical for me. Canvassing in Durant, a medium-sized railroad town, I was accosted by two white men in a late model Ford. After a lengthy discussion about what I was doing and why, which failed to convince them or me that there was any validity in the other's position, one of the men, a heavy-set man of about 30 got out of the car and began to hit me with his fists. I immediately fell into the nonviolent position, which is similar to a fetal position to protect myself. He hit me for perhaps a minute without doing any damage and then they sped off. I managed to get his license plate and was even able to have him arrested. The trial was even more frightening than being beaten up. All the people in Durant who had harrasped us in any way were at that trial. I entered the "courtroom", which was simply the gener-



al offices of the small city building with a fellow worker, a Negro. This town, believed not in segregated seating in the courtroom, but an all-white courtroom. The mayor served as judge and also as town prosecutor, the regular prosecutor being out of town. The trial was informal. Having read the affidavit I had filled out to obtain his arrest, the Mayor then proceeded to question me. At the end of my testimony, and without giving my assailant any opportunity to offer any defense, the mayor suddenly declared him guilty and fined him \$60. The man said he would appeal at which point I fairly ran to my waiting car and left town at about 100 miles an hour, fearing that part of the crowd in the courtroom would follow. I never did find out the outcome of his appeal. The whole trial seemed contrived to me, however, and I seriously doubt that my assailant ever had to pay his fine, nor even go to the trouble of attending an appeal trial. I am not sure of this however, and I should add that it is highly significant that the mayor thought it important at least to go through the legal motions. This never would have happened a year earlier.

I should mention something about Lexington, the county seat, because it became our base for activity. It is a town of under 3,000, situated on the very eastern edge of the Delta, just at the point where the low flat rich lands begin to roll into the red-clay hill country, the "scudgy-vine" crawling up the hills by the side of the road, the bleak plantation houses giving way to often-times bleaker shacks perched on eroded hillsides. Lexington itself is a very typical Faulknerian Mississippi town, with four main roads leading to the center of town, which is at the intersection. An old, proud-looking red courthouse, two stories with a curious cupola on top, represents the seat of government in the county. The county registrar of voters is located there, as is the sheriff, the hall of records, and the usual assortment of other county offices. Daily, after the first couple of weeks, one of our cars could almost always be found parked outside, with one or two workers sitting under the Freedom Tree (so labeled, believe it or not, by the whites), patiently waiting while the registrar went through his ritual with one of the Negroes who had "gone down to register".

What are you in here fer?

I just came down to register, Suh

Register for what?

To vote.

You can't vote. Elections are not 'til November.

(Finally the registrar would get through these preliminaries which were designed to scare off the weak in spirit).

If the registrant knew how to read, he was given the form to fill out. It differs from registration forms in most states in that one is required to copy and write an interpretation of one of the 240-odd sections of the Mississippi State Constitution.

This provision was added to the voting laws in the 1890 Constitution, passed following the days of Reconstruction when the whites of the State were anxious to totally disenfranchise Mississippi's Negro voters. It is interesting that this 75-year-old Constitution was never submitted for ratification by the voters of the State because, prior to its adoption, Negroes could vote, and it was felt that the Constitution would never be ratified.

The way this section of the registration form deprives Negroes of the right to vote is simple: the registrar is the sole interpreter of whether the registrant's interpretation is a correct one. The U. S. Justice Department has compiled an extraordinary record of failing Negro test forms which are infinitely better than passing white forms. Many Negro college graduates have been declared illiterate by the standards set by registrars, some of whom never graduated from high school. The suits being brought by the Justice Department against county registrars usually enjoin them from providing different test standards to Negroes than to whites. This is the beginning of a radical political change in the South, for until now the voter registration work has been discouraging: hard as it usually is to get a Negro to overcome his fears and attempt to register, it is even harder once that Negro takes the test, for him to pass. The result is that still, only around six percent of the eligible Negro voters of Mississippi are registered to vote.

The number of registered Negro voters does not provide an adequate test of the success of the voter registration work, however. For, once a Negro has gone "down to the courthouse", often-times being photographed, and having his name printed in the newspaper, always being identified as an "uppity nigger", he is committed from then on to the work of the civil rights movement. Although in fact, there seems to be as much sporadic and unpredictable violence against Negroes in general as there is against Negroes active in civil rights, most Negroes feel nevertheless that once they have taken that big step - namely trying to register - they should become a participating member of the Movement.

It is essential to take cognisance of why white Mississippi reacts so strongly to the aspect of thousands of voting Negroes. Negroes comprise 42 percent of the population of the State, and in the Delta, by counties, sometimes outnumber whites three or four to one. By and large, they are completely uneducated, the few well educated among them often finding their way to Chicago or other northern cities. The result is a relatively ignorant population, at least so the whites think. The sword of Damocles which this represents to the whites, the threat to everything they know and want to preserve, is understandably terrifying.

What whites in Mississippi as well as elsewhere, including the north, do not realize is the most extraordinary fact that the Negro bears no deep-seated malice towards the white man. He may in many cases hate "white man" aggression, but the Negro in Mississippi is still generally willing to join the whites in attack.

ing the enormous economic problems which confront. Just recently for example, a county farm board in Holmes County elected a Negro chairman who has no intention of aiding only the Negroes, but simply of giving fair treatment to all. There will be some degree of ill will for generations. But, Negroes will not go to the polls in droves simply to vote for the man with the black skin. The remarkable progress recently observed in Tuskegee, Alabama, the only deep-southern town with more Negro voters than whites, should be told all over Mississippi. There are two Negro deputy sheriffs, as well as some Negroes on the school board. But the Mayor, the Sheriff and most of the other town officials are whites. They are elected by Negroes because they treat Negroes as equals before the law and provide Negroes with equivalent public services such as paved roads, sewers, etc. How long this spirit will last is anyone's guess. There is already black nationalist sentiment springing up in parts of Georgia, but fortunately thus far such feelings have been restricted to the North.

The Negro high school students in Lexington very quickly formed the Lexington Action Group, effective in voter registration work because of the local knowledge and contacts of its members, active out of a sense of latent discontent as well as desire to become a part of "The Movement", desirable from our point of view because the sooner local people can be motivated to take charge, the sooner can the "outsiders", the COFO workers, leave. This group was quite active throughout the fall, assisted of course by the staff and volunteers of COFO. Other similar groups were formed in Mileston, Tchula, and I think, Durant. These young people were extremely mature in their outlook towards the plight of the Negro in Mississippi, and realistic in their appraisal as to what could be done. They have been willing to take considerable risks, even to the point of temporary suspension from school this fall for wearing civil rights buttons.

In many ways I feel the unmitigated success of the summer was the Freedom schools, many of which are continuing throughout the year as a supplement to a very meagre education. It is only to be expected in the Closed Society of Mississippi that Negro schools do not permit free discussion, nor provide any sort of creative experience in the arts or letters. The result is a stifling atmosphere which has so far failed to really solve in any way the education crisis which is all over Mississippi. In 1954, it was decided to build several strategically placed Negro schools to make a stronger two-school system than then existed. The fear was that, following Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the government would attempt immediate integration of Mississippi schools since in many areas there was virtually no public education of Negroes at all. Many of these newer schools look better than some of the white schools from the outside. Several conversations with students and teachers in these schools however, revealed an appalling lack of equipment and space for the numbers of students attending. The students attending the Freedom Schools last summer fairly burst with enthusiasm at the planned programs of discussions, recreation, writing, art, as well as duller remedial work in the basic subjects. To me, the schools

were also successful for an entirely different reason. The volunteers who manned these schools were not the courageous, totally involved students of the picket lines and hard-core civil rights work. They were basically "Peace Corps types", from various colleges feeling their first commitment in the civil rights field. I feel this to be a success because, isolated as Mississippi is, it is going to require the constant and conscious awareness of the entire United States to help - not force, I hope - Mississippi to come the long way she must come. The experiences which these Freedom School teachers from literally every part of this country took home with them are as invaluable as they are exciting. Many of the freedom schools have become a continuing, year round operation.

A further success of the Freedom Schools was the attempt, in all cases successful, to instill in the Negro a pride for his history and race. To some this might suggest of racism. Indeed, if Mississippi takes no dramatic turn for the better soon, it is conceivable that these Freedom school courses will have been the seed for black nationalist sentiment. However, the necessity that the Negro in Mississippi look at himself and be proud of who he is is more essential probably than any single attitudinal change necessary for the renaissance of Mississippi. The Mississippi Negro has been taught so thoroughly to think of himself as inferior that, as James Silver in Mississippi: The Closed Society puts it, he is inferior, culturally speaking. Charles Silberman in Crisis in Black and White, speaks of the Negro's total lack of self-respect. It is this self-respecting sense of equality which must be nurtured in the Negro if he is to be mentally and emotionally fit to become, not a member of the white society, for he does not want that, but a member of American society, that society being a dynamic composite of hundreds of smaller societies.

The community center in Mileston, originated as a renovated old house with several hundred donated books and some planned recreational and agricultural programs put on for the community. Around the middle of the summer, two California carpenters came to Mileston with tools and \$10,000 which they had raised and began a very fine community center building next to the church. Recently finished, this building will provide a focus for an infinite variety of activities, from full-length movies to athletics to dance lessons, for all of Holmes County. The two carpenters were helped throughout the summer by many of the local Negro citizens, which in itself provided a healthy spirit of community activity and responsibility.

A few remarks should be made about one of the most misunderstood aspects of the CORE civil rights movement in Mississippi - the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Originating out of a mock gubernatorial campaign in the fall of 1963, when Aaron Henry won 80,000 "votes" of disenfranchised Negro voters, the MFDP is a rival Democratic Party which claims allegiance to the national Democratic Party. One of the jobs we had as voter registration

workers this past summer was registering voters on the Freedom registration forms. These had many similar questions to the legal Democratic forms (when you register in Mississippi, you are automatically made a Democrat unless you indicate otherwise), but excluded questions pertaining to the Constitution. Near the end of the summer, precinct, county and congressional district meetings and finally a dramatic state meeting were held to elect delegates to the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. The legal requirements were followed as closely as possible. To make as strong a case as possible in their attempt to be seated, instead of the rival regular Democratic Party delegates, several legally registered Negroes attempted to attend some of the local delegate elections held throughout the state. They were almost all prevented from attending these meetings, thus providing conclusive proof that the Mississippi Democratic Party is, indeed, a lily-white party. The delegates went to Atlantic City and demanded to be seated. "Compromise" was worked out whereby two members of the MFDP, Aaron Henry and Ed King, a white person who is Chaplain and Dean of Tougaloo College, were made delegates at large. This move succeeded in enraging both the regulars and the Freedom Party. There has been much criticism from many quarters because the MFDP was not willing to accept this compromise. Surely the only answer it seems to me is that the MFDP was a moral challenge, or a challenge of conscience, in the basically amoral arena of politics. Politics is of course the art of the possible. No one ever gets everything. But a moral crusade loses its strength to the extent that it accepts compromise. Another reason why the compromise was rejected is that part of it provided that the Democratic National Committee tell the white Democrats to include registered Negroes in their precinct meetings, not a very relevant demand in a state whose only 6% of the Negroes of voting age are registered to vote. I personally do not agree with the decision to refuse the compromise. It seemed to me such an extraordinary victory in so many, many ways, that whatever might have been lost by accepting compromise as a solution would have been gained by the immeasurable increase in the status nationally, not only of the "radical", direct-action oriented southern civil rights movement, but of the national civil rights movement. For, after all, tens of millions of Americans viewed the spectacle which was the Democratic Convention on TV when the compromise was announced and were very much influenced by it.

The MFDP is making great strides and will perhaps in the future pose a real threat to the stable political structure of Mississippi. The political future, however, is uncertain. It is possible that, as a result of the Goldwater victory in the South, the Republican Party will become the racial center politically in Mississippi, with the moderates and others combining eventually with the Negroes to form a new Democratic Party. I think this is unlikely, however desirable it is. More plausible, it seems to me, is that as Negroes become a real political force, as they are registered in greater and greater numbers, they will become a real force within the Democratic Party and eventually help it to move into the mainstream of political thinking. As for

the Republican Party, I dare not guess.

I should comment on the "other half" of my summer. As a result of failing a course at Yale during the Spring of my last year, I had to do some additional work over the course of the summer. I therefore left the wilds of Holmes County around the first of August and went to Ole Miss in Oxford, centered in the hill country of northeastern Mississippi where I spent the month working under Dr. James Silver, whose book I have mentioned. While there, I did reading primarily in the period of Reconstruction, becoming more and more aware of some of the parallels which the two periods provide. Violence, then as now, was seen as the most effective weapon to be used against the Negro. Federal intervention was seen, then as now, as the ultimate weapon to be used against the whites. Moral indignation greeted those who would be scalawags in the South, then as it does now. Moral self-righteousness was evidenced in the oratory of northern statesmen who would transform the South, more so then but even to a degree now. There was perhaps in those days more the evilly pragmatic sense of the political usefulness of the Negro vote, but today more and more reference is being made to that 95 percent block which voted for LBJ. I have not really formulated any useful hypotheses about the future of the South as contrasted to the post-Reconstruction South, but I am anxious to know if northerners and southerners feel there are parallels to be drawn, historically.

My month at Ole Miss, was very academic and calm other than the time I integrated the cafeteria with Aaron Henry and several others who were attending a federal hearing in Oxford on desegregation plans for Clarksdale. I was not identified with civil rights during my stay there, as I really had to get a great deal of work done. It was interesting, however, to observe the campus and the students there. It all seemed so removed from the guerilla warfare going on all around. I used to wonder how much these students thought about their state and the changes which were so badly needed.

During my month in White Mississippi, I was hit very hard by all of the differences from Black Mississippi. One gets so used to living and visiting in dirty tar-paper shacks, built on dirt roads, far from the center of town; then to suddenly find oneself living in an air-conditioned apartment, playing tennis occasionally, eating good food all the time, and watching the Negroes walk down the street, knowing that so much as a smile might lead to almost anything if seen by the wrong person. I used to want to stop and talk to the Negroes in Oxford and tell them that I was a "civil rights worker, but the closed society works its powers over all, and besides, I would rationalize, I did have to get my work done. I could not afford to spend a week in jail.

One of the most extraordinary experiences I had during the entire summer came just before my departure. I went to visit a man whom I had met a couple of weeks earlier who owned a cotton

plantation in Tallahatchie County. Deep in the heart of the Delta, this area is known to be so "tough" that very little civil rights activity had even been attempted until recently.

I spent about three or four hours talking with this man who had over 100 Negroes living on his place in typical abject poverty. Trying to stay away from much discussion of the civil rights movement itself, we attempted rather to focus attention on the many agricultural and economic problems besetting Mississippi problems whose failure of solution has meant hard times not only for the Negro but for the white as well.

In talking with him, I began with a basic idea that one of the most urgently needed changes in Mississippi must come from the farmer who "employs" scores of Negroes as this man did. This change is in the wage scale. Currently thousands of Delta Negroes work virtually all the daylight hours in the cotton fields in the fall and almost as long in the spring and summer. Earning approximately \$2 to \$3 per day, the average Negro must support a large family with that amount. True, his children and wife work part of the time, particularly at picking time in the fall which, of course, interferes with the children's school. Most plantation owners assert, however, that it costs them considerably more to keep a Negro "on the place" than his wage would indicate. One plantation farmer estimated, with account being taken for medical expenses, unpaid loans, gifts, etc., that he spent \$18 per day per Negro. My suggestion was that rather than pay a mere \$3 per day, the farmer should increase that wage four or five times (keeping it for the time being under the estimated total cost, so as to make the plan more economically feasible, and stop providing what in essence are the bread and butter indicators of a paternalistic society. For, it cannot be denied that, as long as the Negro must go "shuffling and scratching his head" up to "Mr. Charlie" and ask for \$15 to get some groceries because there just is not enough for the new baby, the Negro is not going to ever have faith in his own ability to be independent economically and the whites are going to continue to hold the stereotype they now hold of the helpless (and hapless) Negro. This idea, one of many which I discussed with my plantation friend, intrigued him, though he did not think it would work. Civil rights advocates have sharply criticized this sort of approach because "you never can trust the white man." They argue that the Negro should seize opportunities and not wait for the white man to give him a chance.

My position is that until the Negro is a fuller man in the nonpolitical sense, it is of considerably less value to have him registered. True, Negro suffrage would mean extraordinary changes, particularly as regards local elected officials. But, the economic power will continue to rest with the whites. Negroes should not want nor should whites fear, that the Negroes will seize all that power for themselves. But both white and black should now, before the political scenery changes as it will, realize how much is at stake unless a successful sharing of the economic power can be effected.

I had the opportunity during the short time I was in Oxford, to meet a number of native white Mississippians and talk quite candidly about Mississippi and her problems. I learned many things about the attitudes of Mississippians which one can never know by working in the civil rights movement. The average White Mississippian is fiercely proud. He now recognizes that the elimination of segregation as a "way of life" is coming to Mississippi, whether he likes it or not. The "redneck", that quick-to-anger, poorly-educated, impoverished product of the segregated society, who murders, beats people, burns crosses, and is almost solely responsible for the climate of fear which pervades every home and every street of Black and White Mississippi, is not a "small but vocal" minority. On the contrary, the rednecks comprise a considerable proportion of Mississippi, enough that politicians must really take them into account before making rash statements in support of law and order.

Rednecks, notwithstanding, most white Mississippians, it was my impression are seeking ways in which they can give up what must be given up of their Southern Way of Life without it appearing as if they have given up anything. One of the best but unfortunately atypical examples are the Women for Public Education who argued not for law and order, not for desegregation, but merely for good public education as being more important than anything else, including a segregated school system. The results were astonishing. People did realize that it is self-defeating to give your children a worse education for the sake of maintaining segregated schools. Many in the North, especially civil rights enthusiasts, cannot seem to understand how important it is to the southern white not to lose face completely. Neshoba County has shamed him before all the world. Why must the future hold nothing in store for his children but further shame? The civil rights advocates sometimes answer that the southerner is to blame for the current plight of the southern Negro, that the Negro has waited one hundred years during which time nothing has been done to relieve the poverty or eliminate discrimination. Therefore the southern white should bear the consequences. To begin with, this reasoning has some basic fallacies. As civil rights workers are quick to argue when asked why they have gone to Mississippi and not worked on local problems, the blame for the Mississippi situation lies with us all, as a Nation, perhaps more with the southerner but nevertheless with us all. There is the history of northern slave-traders, and the politics of Reconstruction. Also, it is not valid to say that people have looked to the White South to change during the last one hundred years. No one really demanded any significant change until ten years ago. This has to be qualified by noting that many courageous Negroes during the past century have struggled for equality. But it was part of the consequence of centuries of slavery that these demands were completely ineffectual until the Nation began to respond. Finally, what value is it to continue to insist on placing all the blame on the white southerner, and rub his face in the dirt, as it were. For surely, when we come out of the current struggle and begin the long uphill job of building a "New South", it will be of little use to have a thoroughly shamed, reluctant to move, spiteful white population; no longer proud of anything which is southern, unable



to take credit for any of the positive changes, only existing as a reminder of the past, and yet still controlling most jobs, owning most of the capital, and ever still the most powerful force in southern society.

What is needed then is an anxious reappraisal by the supporters of change towards the problems of the white Mississippian. This is not yet an area for the civil rights movement to engage itself in. The time is still a long way off before useful dialogue can begin between the civil rights movement and the whites. But, for the many thousands of people who were personally touched by having sons, daughters, friends, etc., bring home their experiences, and yet are not embittered by what the South is, for the many who have relatives and friends in the White South whom they can communicate with on a more personal level, for the many who are engaged in businesses which have southern operations, for the many of the South who formerly turned their backs on the most serious problem facing the South, for all these people, the time is at hand when minds must be set in motion to construct a course of action, not in opposition to the civil rights movement, not in reaction to it, not in response to it, not parallel to it, but in harmony with it. For, to the skeptics, I can only say that the civil rights workers who have spent any time in Mississippi and seek to change it, love Mississippi nevertheless. Constructive change is necessary and it is possible. It will require recruits from sectors of American life, North and South, that never dreamed they would have a role to play in the movement towards a better and more equal society in the South. It is to these people especially that the hopes for a new emergent South rest. It is to these people primarily that this letter is directed and to whom I particularly request suggestions and help. Until those outside of the Movement are ready, willing, and able to lend their intellects and hands to this great task, then their criticisms will remain unheard and the future of the South will continue to remain in doubt.

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*

APPENDIX

Voter Registration Statistics, Civil Rights '63, Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, p.34. 1962:Registration.

Miss. County	White		Negro	
	No.	% of Voting Age.	No.	% of Voting Age
Amite	3,553	79.8	1	.03
Attala	5,311	70.6	61	1.5
Bolivar	4,603	45.8	612	4.1
Carroll	2,720	91.6	3	.1
Chickasaw	4,522	70.7	0	0
Clarke	5,000	83	1	.04
Clay	3,382	60.9	10	.2
Copiah	5,056	62	0	.3
DeSoto	3,551	66.5	0	.01
Forrest	12,665	55.9	23	.3
Grenada	3,591	61.9	125	3.2
Holmes	3,497	73.2	41	.5
Humphreys	2,465	73.7	2	.04
Issaquena	621	97	0	0
Jasper	4,113	77.2	6	.2
Jefferson	1,643	98.6	0	0
Jefferson Davis	3,600	98.2	76	2.5
Leflore	7,168	69.5	358	2.1
Lowndes	8,312	51	95	1.2

(First half of table of selected counties).

\* \* \* \* \*  
 Years of school completed by persons 25 or older, 1960 (percent)  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

	Years Completed							
	None	Grade School				High School		Median grade
		1-4	5-6	7	8	1-3	4	
Nonwhite %	8.4	31.3	20.2	9.1	12.4	11.1	4.2	6th
White %	1.2	5.9	7.6	5.6	14.4	23.0	24.6	11th
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Median Income for persons, 1950 and 1960. Source: U.S.

	1950			1960		
	State	Urban	Rural	State	Urban	Rural
White	\$1,236	\$1,826	\$973	\$2,023	\$2,622	\$1,065
Nonwhite	\$ 440	\$ 693	\$390	\$ 606	\$ 871	\$ 474
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18 U.S. Code, Section 242: Whoever, under color of any law ... willfully subjects any inhabitant of any State ... to the deprivation of any rights ... secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States ... shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year or both.