

September 26, 1964

Dear Faculty Member,

Mississippi has been characterized by historian James Silver as a "closed society". That is, closed to change and closed to contact with the outside. A society is kept closed by intimidating into silence those of its members who are actively dissatisfied with existing conditions and practices. It is kept closed, further, by a quarantine policy which veils the conditions and practices and the techniques of intimidation from those who would, if they were informed, exert pressures for change from outside the system. It is the success of the quarantine policy which largely determines the kind and degree of intimidation that can be used effectively.

The question raised by Mickey Schwerner's widow--"How many sailors, marines and FBI agents would have been sent to Mississippi had James Chaney alone been missing?"-- is easily answered.

I am convinced that only the presence of federal officers and the belief that further incidents would produce demands for greater intervention prevented many more "disappearances".

Today, America's attention is absorbed by the approaching elections; the Northern whites who participated in the Mississippi summer project have gone home. The lines of communication are breaking down. The reaction has already begun.

This is apparent from the current history of one town (McComb) in one Mississippi county (pike). During the summer months there were 16 FBI agents in McComb. All but four left at the end of August. During the summer months there were 14 bombings in McComb, all but four since the end of August.

The homes, shops, and even churches of those most actively engaged in changing the patterns of the closed society have been destroyed. The victims of the most recent --but certainly not the last--bombings are the Quinn children, nine year old Jacqueline and five year old Anthony. The local police have been as unsuccessful in finding the dynamiters of the Quinn home as in the other thirteen instances.

The issue in Mississippi is neither seasonal nor quadrennial. It does not end with the summer project nor with the election returns. The immediate issue in Mississippi --and especially in McComb--is raised in the context of the struggle against the closed society. The immediate issue, in short, is that of survival--and it is a daily affair.

I am asking you to take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to write to the Justice Department and the President calling for federal protection now in McComb, for the return of the full FBI staff, and that federal presence be made known throughout the South where local officials are unable or unwilling to protect the lives of civil rights workers. It is only the pressure by those, angered by atrocities like the Quinn bombing, who show their concern that the lives of these brave people will be protected.

Sincerely yours,

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