

Wallace Roberts

July 1
3:30 P.M.

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by Wallace Roberts

Dearest,

Am sitting here in the Jackson office of COFO waiting around for a meeting to start. Project directors, communications personnel and Freedom school coordinators were all called in to Jackson today for various meetings. We had a coordinators meeting this morning ~~xxxx~~ and a re now waiting for the project directors to get through with their closed meeting so we can have a general one. From the looks of things we'll probably spend the night here although I could think of better things to do.

We have not made much progress setting up our school in Shaw because as I think I have told you the local SNCC worker in the area (Bolivar County) is in St. Louis or someplace and not to be found. Yesterday we found out that we have places for teachers to stay in Shaw. This is a great accomplishment. Now all we need is this SNCC worker, ~~xxxx~~, or some other experienced field worker to take us into the area. We'll probably end up going in with Charles McLaurin, the project director of Ruleville, (Sunflower County. At best we can move in tomorrow and have the school going a week from Monday.

Evidently some of the other schools are going much better, but the reason for this is not that I am disorganized but that those areas were much better developed before we all came south. Also I get the impression they assigned me to an "underdeveloped" area on purpose. They do not seem surprised that I've encountered this difficulty and, I guess, are hoping I can develop the entire town. All of this is only a guess and its probably wrong but it's the only thing I can figure out. My teachers are a rather frustrated bunch; they've spent the last three days helping to set up the Ruleville school for lack of anything else to do, and they are very anxious to ~~not~~ get to work on their own.

I haven't been able to write much in the way of factual reports ~~xxx~~ for the same reason as at Oxford-- this is I'm too emotionally involved. I'm angry and frustrated. Angry at the white Southerners and the system they have created; frustrated at the tremendous amount of work the Movement will have to do to "Overcome".

Let me try to illustrate. Some kids from a group called ~~ATTACK~~ ^{ATAC}, which is a segregationist group made up of white college students from Mississippi, came over to Mrs. Hamer's last night to explain their views to us. At first I was quite calm and said I saw no reason for the discussion; both parties were absolutely firm in their convictions, they both knew the reasons for the actions of the other group; therefore, nothing fruitful could come out of the discussion and it was a waste of time, just like a college bull session or cocktail party debate. They took only slight offense to this and assumed I ~~am~~ had an absolutely closed mind on the subject, which I do. They are wrong and we are right. The problem appears to be, however, that there is no hope ~~of~~ for the situation in Mississippi and the rest of the hard core South until there is some real communication between the ~~z~~ Rights groups and the white community. But I believe that this is only a superficial view.

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I have not had any real contact with the local white residents except these ATTACK kids and reading and hearing such things as ~~what~~ the statements made by Gov. Johnson and Sen. Eastland on T. V. My feeling is that we will never be able to communicate with these groups who are trying so desperately hard to defend the status quo. The only way effective change in the South can be brought about is by a strong effective effort by the Federal government to eliminate all discriminatory and suppressive laws and practices combined with a local black populist movement. This latter program is evidently the ~~x~~ ultimate goal of SNCC and COFO. Once they get enough Negroes registered and with decent educations to enable them to know what they want ~~problem~~ (and this will have to be done with Federal assistance) then Mississippi will have a black power structure instead of white. Of course it won't be all that simple; Part of COFO's program is to show the poor whites of Mississippi that they ~~xxxx~~ have a great deal to gain by allying themselves with the Negroes and together they should overthrow the existing system.

I've gotten off the subject. I originally intended to show how emotionally involved I've become. I left the conversation the ATTACK group and came back later. As I joined them they all were discussing guns, carrying them on racks of pick-up trucks, their possible use on Negroes and Civil Rights workers, and the good hunting (for animals etc.). At that point I said, "Trouble is it's always open season on Nigger-lovers." That stopped everyone on both sides as they were trying to have a rational, logical conversation without emotion, and I left because I was getting worked up and would soon lose my temper.

July 2 - Happy Birthday to me - Ruleville. To get back to what I was saying, I can't write rational, objective reports. My feeble attempts come out garbled and show no clear thinking. Lots of kids are just the opposite; they are regularly writing or calling newspapers or radio stations and turning in superficial but objective reports. They do not appear to be seriously affected by the situation, the complete oppression under which these people live, the poverty and squalor. For example, Mrs. Hamer's home is considered to be one of the better ones for Mississippi Negroes. Even by local standards it's not posh but just good. It's got a gas stove, refrig, ~~xxxx~~ standing (and empty) freezer, inside flush toilet, 2 outside water taps, 3 rooms (2 bedrooms, kitchen) each illuminated by a single overhead bulb. The house is quite clean considering especially the number of people who wander in and out of these headquarters. But it is run-down and grubby by my old middle class standards. Linolium is worn through where it is put down. The house rests off the ground about 12" on little stacks of bricks. There is hardly any fresh or frozen fruit, milk or good meat consumed but lots of chicken and other greasy fried food.

Well that's it for now. Found out ~~xx~~ just before we left Jackson that we would not be able to move into Shaw for two or three days at best. They accepted full blame for the ~~responsibility~~ failure to get an experienced field worker for us so all we can do is sit tight until we get one. It's rather frustrating to say the least.

Well, honey, be good, and remember I love you all very, very much and miss you even more. You're so strong and wonderful, and I'm such a lucky guy to have you for my own. Please write more often even if it appears you have nothing to say, I need your letters keep me going. Hug The Slugger for me and kiss my Princess.

Shut the Door

All my Love

Wally