

[1]

## MISSISSIPPI

MISS MARILYN RAPLEY, a Buffalo State College junior from Yonkers, New York is spending her summer in Mississippi working with the civil rights organizations there. The following is a letter she wrote on Saturday, July 11 to a member of the faculty here.

I arrived safely in Laurel, Miss. on Wednesday. Laurel is definitely a small, very typical, 1964 rural community, with a large portion of the adult Negroes afraid to speak to us, and a larger portion of the Negro teen-agers following us at our heels to lead them to uphold their rights under the new law. C.O.F.O. (Council of Federated Organizations), the organization sponsoring the summer project has explicitly forbidden us to become involved in testing the bill, and demonstrations so we are caught in the awful position of situating ourselves as dedicated civil rights workers who are turning their heads on the concern of many Negroes in the South.

I feel relatively safe, (Mississippi Negro fashion, of course,) in Laurel. There was one minor incident involving a white worker. She was picked up, arrested and found guilty of vagrancy. The following day I was walking down the street with this girl, one other Negro boy and three Negro girls, when we discovered we were being followed by the constable. The girl and I broke off from the kids, enrolled in our freedom school, and attempted, in vain, to head home. The constable picked us up, headed straight to the white community and proceeded to call the policemen. Two policemen arrived and began a series of questions and made a few insulting remarks. They threatened to arrest us. When the girl began to refute the statement of the constable who told the police that this white girl was walking around with a crowd of Negro boys. After taking our names and addresses, they released us.

One of the reasons I feel relatively safe, is because there is a small segment of the Negro population intent upon seeing us do an effective job and leave Mississippi well and happy. About five Negroes knocked on the mayor's door last week and explained the entire summer project, stressing the fact that white GIRLS and boys would be living in Negro homes. The mayor assured them that this was their constitutional right and he would do all he could to maintain law and order.

There has, however, been one major development in Laurel. When I arrived here Wednesday I found the entire C.O.F.O. staff in a semi-baffled state. It seems that our Program Director had been picked up by the policemen on Sunday, on no charge, and could not be reached or found. Our Program being Lester McKinnie. Following is a report up to this date.

The summer of 1961 thru to 1962 Lester carried off a one man voter registration drive in Laurel, and was the prize of the Negro community and the thorn, eventually to be removed, of the white community. Sometime during his stay here he was picked up on a traffic violation, or something. He was arrested, paid his bail and continued his work. His trial was never called. He returned to Tennessee for school. This summer he returned to Laurel to start a major project. He was picked up on Sunday July 5, 1964 on no charge, and was not even permitted to make a phone call. When the word got around town that he was arrested the C.O.F.O. staff immediately began calling the jails in Laurel attempting to locate him.

This was still going on Wednesday. No one in the county jails had heard of him. One of his friends in the community had gone to jail to find him on Monday night and was able to talk to him thru the windows. He was in an unprotected cell, the other prisoners were all being moved to another section of the jail, and Lester sensed and deeply feared impending danger. Pressure from officials in Jackson came in full force then. Wednesday night three lawyers from Jackson arrived and began a search and finally found him in the county jail. The lawyers found out that he could not be released on bond, he had not however been beaten, but was only occasionally fed. He was however wrought with fear and despair. The county official had told him he was to serve 3-4 months in jail, and from Sunday nite--Wednesday nite he sat with no hope of being helped. The lawyers, a part of a series of lawyers assigned to Mississippi for the summer, issued a writ of habeas corpus, and were successful in having the case moved to Jackson courts, and will there attempt to get it thrown out of court. The trial will be on Wed. July 15. I cannot, and will not predict the outcome of this. All of us in Laurel hope for one thing-justice, however we have only one foundation upon which to build, Mississippi justice-Negro style, and this throws a wave of realistic pessimism over all of us.

I am sure you would like a report of the incidents that occur here, and I will keep you posted on as much as I feel can be sent through the mail. There are incidents that occur that no one outside of small towns like Laurel ever know, but are and should be of importance to the world.

There are many of these incidents that I cannot feel free to discuss with you by mail. It is evident that our phone is being tapped and very likely that our mail is being tampered with. I will however write freely of some incidents just leaving out specifics that can endanger anyone. I am attempting to make a dairy of important events.

My opinion of Mississippi as a political issue-the only chance of it remaining a quasi-peaceful state is federal intervention. Life here, for an outsider looking in, is HELL. The people here are conditioned to it, but a strong vile taste develops in my mouth when I am forced to react-in a suppressed manner, at the sight of a white face-excluding the four white volunteers. I have been here four days and can truly bear witness to the terror and fear instilled in the hearts of the Miss. Negroes.

Never be on the streets at dark, pull your blinds down at night or turn off all the lights, don't sit on the front porch, be suspicious of a car that circles the house more than once.

I cannot write, I can only feel the pressure under which we must live. On my way down here Wednesday I had an important confrontation. I was traveling alone from Memphis-6 hour trip-and we stopped at a small bus stop about 30 miles below Philadelphia-fear would not allow me to move, but the confrontation brought tears.

I looked out the window and knew at this point I was one thing-a Negro-and knew that never had this realization stirred in me as it did at that point.

I must close now, and will write to you the latter part of the week. Will let you know the outcome of the trial.

Remind all my friends on campus, that the physical health of two white workers is of grave concern to all of us, however, the psychological death of thousands of Negroes should also be of much concern-so keep in touch and continue the support. My regards to all my friends. I am safe and happy and thankful for their support.

Marilyn

\*Money for her support may be left at R.H. 20.