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P.O. Box 275,
Ruleville, Miss.
July 27, 1964

Dear Friends!

I am starting to get those parting blues. Only a week to go. Looks like my cases won't come up to court for months. Confidentially I am sort of happy about that because I'll have to come back down for trial. I suppose I'll be leaving this Fri. or Sat. on the long bus ride back to the "civilized" Northland. I'll bop out another letter sometime next week so y'awl will know I made it back to the "City of Brotherly Love". Man is it frustrating to leave now. You'll see why when I tell about what happened last week.

The week started out pretty slow with canvassing in Drew and Indianola. I met in Drew a guy who was an exemplary Uncle Tom. He was a deacon in one of the churches and said that the preacher told the people not to mess with us. We got into a long biblical argument about whether people should sit around and get along as best they could while waiting on the Lord or try to change things to more nearly meet his design. I think I got the best of the argument, but then he talked about how well he got on with the white folks. He said, "Why it was just the other day that Mayor Williford congratulated me for being a good Negro." I could see that he had so deeply identified with the present system and the ways it left open for Negroes to get ahead that he wasn't open to ideas of change. The Negro kids I was canvassing with were disgusted. The man's wife gave me a sort of whimsical smile from the door. I read it (maybe wishfully) to mean "You can't talk any sense into that old man." We got a few more folks in Drew registered on the Freedom Forms but people were scared. One of the leaders up there came down to get part of our shipment of clothes and food to distribute up there. There were hard feelings about how she distributed it. The ladies who went to jail are having a hard time. Mrs. Moore with a very large family is now really destitute because her husband was fired after she went to jail. Many people expect us to bail them out. One of the boys from Drew had the police following him every where he went after he returned from jail. He came down to Ruleville for a few days and has stayed because he can get meals and a place to sleep here. The movement attracts many who can't make it very well where they are because of personality problems. The question is how much energy and resources can we exert in helping them and still meet the tasks that have to be met. So far we haven't been able to give these people much constructive attention. It's a problem but not overwhelming as yet. It is just frustrating to know that you can't be an effective case worker with our resources and thus must continually avoid promising help or getting really involved in peoples personal problems. However, I find this broad attack on the system much more satisfying than the case work approach.

In Indianola we had a real break-through. A Negro Baptist Convention for this area voted unanimously to let us use a three-room brick school-house which they own but don't use. (I think the argument used to get such consensus was that if they let us use the school we wouldn't be after them for the use of their churches all the time). Mac was elated to finally have a base for constructing a movement in the county seat. I talked to the minister who had presented the proposal at the convention. He had talked to the mayor, who said that they were going to have to pay taxes now. I told him that our lawyers had said this was illegal. He said the mayor had promised no police harrassment if they paid taxes. The minister was all for paying the taxes and avoiding trouble. Mac would have nothing of it. He said, "Man, we got them where we want them now. We'll just let them squirm."

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On Tuesday afternoon 150 high school kids came out to a meeting. The next day many of them helped us with canvassing. On Thursday we had a Mass Meeting at the school at 7 p.m. As we were waiting outside for the meeting to start we noticed the two Negro policemen talking to people across the street. Then they tried to come over onto church property. We informed them that they were not wanted and they drove off to consult with the chief. At 7:30 the meeting started with singing. The room was packed--perhaps 250 people! Mac could hardly believe his eyes. He had expected 15 people or so. Some of the other staff talked for a while about the Freedom School. Over 100 signed up to participate. Then as Mac was ready to start the Negro policeman barged in the door. Mac went over and asked him to leave explaining that this was private property and he had no right to be there. He refused to leave saying that he was there to protect people. The crowd, particularly the old ladies were getting edgy. Mac asked them if they wanted the policeman there. The answer was a resounding "No"! He is an old fellow with an unsavory history of intimidating, and beating his own people. This was undoubtedly a new and unpleasant experience for him. As he was ushered out the door by some volunteers he drew his gun and said "I'm going to kill somebody". Mac said "He drew his gun!" This intimidated the policeman and he put it back in the holster denying that he had drawn it. He had a conference with the chief who was outside with some 15 white cops and deputies in their white helmets. The chief ordered Slim back in and sent a number of other police to make sure he got in. While this was taking place the women had gotten to their feet and were milling around, edging for the back doors. The teenagers and college students stood firm and we started to sing "Ain't going to let nobody turn me 'round." When things quieted down I was able to get some of the ladies who had slipped out to come back in. The air was filled with fear and excitement.

With this setting Mac started to speak. It was a tough speech. He didn't try to play down the danger. He congratulated the people on their courage, spoke of those who had died and called on all present to be ready to die. He said that there were people on the Indianola Police Force who should be out picking cotton. This was met with great applause and laughing, even by those directly in front of Slim. He said that the chief in Greenwood had once admitted that the reason for hiring Negro policeman was that they could kill other Negroes without causing a "Racial Incident". "That" he said, "was why they hired Slim". Another rousing response. He talked about how it was pitiful the way Negro men grew up and thought themselves men but when they met a white man of the same age they stepped down before him to the role of child again. He talked about kids needing to see their fathers as heroes. But in Mississippi the Negro isn't left any dignity or honor. He told them about how scared he had been of the Delta. How he had gotten off a bus for Chicago because it was headed through the Delta. He encouraged them to go down to the courthouse the next day. (18 went, a very large number for a new town). He talked about the educational system which cripples Negroes by not preparing them for the nuclear age. While students at other colleges in the country are learning about how to build rockets to the moon, the students at Miss. colleges for Negroes learn how to shoe horses.

Mac spoke with all he had for 45 minutes. It was a relentless, militant speech. The audience overcame their fear, got indignant at the injustices, saw that there was something worth fighting and dying for.

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After Mac had finished a local man, trustee of the school got up. He used the religious idiom of the old folk. Some of the students in the back got restless. He said he knew the volunteers weren't communist the way all the papers had been saying, because he saw the mark of Moses on our foreheads. He told about going to Chicago himself. At first I thought he was trying to reassert his lost status by holding on to Mac's coat tails. He talked about how he had gotten off the train at the big station and look all over for the rest room. How he had said "yas sah" to the cops and all that. It was funny, relieved the tension and showed the people how to laugh at their present degrading relations with whites. People relaxed and realized that things are silly the way they are and can be changed.

One might explain the dynamics of the meeting by the analogy of body postures. At the beginning many people were scared, they shrank back with hands outstretched to shield them from the imminent blow. With Mac's speech they gradually got up off the ground and by the end were leaning forward toward the assailant with chest out-still a bit scared but determined. After the last speech they had relaxed and were standing calmly erect with a slight smile.

In Indianola I met some college girls from Miss. Vocational College at Itta Bena. They said there are 5 or 6 Negro colleges in the state which give a B.A. degree but that they are all at a low level of academic prowess. About the only job for a college educated Negro in the state is teaching. They have courses in office management, business administration etc. but they are a joke because everyone knows that the graduates won't be managing offices or anything similar. They have more practical courses such as automobile mechanics, etc. By and large however, students are preparing to be teachers. Since to be a teacher in this state one must swear that he is not a member of such subversive outfits as the C.P. or the NAACP, students are cautious about getting involved. Government scholarship have been taken away from activists. These girls will take the risk by helping to teach at our Freedom School in Indianola.

On Friday we discovered that the Mayor of Drew was calling together the parents of all the youths under 15 who had been arrested with us and then released. This was not an official hearing but just a conference. We were afraid that they would try to intimidate the people and maybe make them sign something. We tried to meet them before the meeting to say they didn't have to tell the Mayor anything and didn't have to sign anything. Two of our white volunteers including an NCC Rabbi from Rochester went down to the City Hall with one of the ladies and found the others already there. The chief threw them out of the meeting, like bodily. They went across to a gas station to call Jackson. The attendant overheard the phone conversation and asked whether it was about Civil Rights. They assured him that it wasn't but he reached in his desk and started loading his gun. They beat a rapid retreat. For one and a half hour we waited around for the ladies to get back home. As the time stretched on we started to imagine wild happenings. Finally they returned, reporting that the Mayor had offered to let the kids out on parole and get them lawyers from the Federal Government if they would just sign affidavits that they had never seen the agitators before, etc. They said, "they listened to the Mayor's music and didn't say anything". Finally he asked them if they had anything to say. There was silence. The third time he asked one of the ladies said that there was something she wanted to say. She didn't like the way the police beat up her boys. We were mighty proud of the ladies but should have realized that life in Mississippi prepares

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Negroes well for handling their white masters.

Saturday the student group met after being inactive for some weeks. They want to picket the school because of poor learning conditions and the refusal of teachers to register to vote. They have been frustrated so far by lack of the know-how to organize for such an action. Some of the volunteers are very reluctant to get in and tell them what to do. This time one of the girls took on the chairmanship and did a beautiful job. She is intelligent and dedicated but has problems with her parents who don't want her to get involved. Another girl was arrested with us. She has the get up and go to get the thing off the ground. In the last few weeks she has been talking to teachers and even to the principal about registering. The son of the local leader is full of ideas and good at getting a job done but gets carried away some times and loses track of practical problems. This time he was excited about forming current events clubs, drama clubs. The chairman suggested that they didn't have the manpower to do every thing at once, but that people interested in dramatics might lead a role playing session for the picket.

On Monday the kids got out on the lawn at noon and started to talk about the project. Soon they had a large group and started to sing Freedom Songs. The teachers were quite upset. One of them told his class that he would whip every one of them if they sang any more. There was a teacher meeting after school. The kids went on up to Drew after school and handed out a list of their demands to the kids there. They are hoping to get the protest coordinated so that there will be pickets at the three largest towns in the county on the same day. Oh how I wish I could be here!

On Sunday I went to the smallest of the white churches. This time there was no one at the door so I just walked in with some of the others. I doubt that I was noticed by many. The minister of the church is young but turned the pulpit over to his father-in-law who was passing through town. The sermon was about Job. It was long, low pressured and rambling. He talked about how men should raise their children in the Faith. Women should teach their daughters to love their husbands and their families. The divorce rate is increasing because women have failed in this function. He ended by saying he didn't know whether the country would be over run by communists or not but the concern of the church was to keep its people from the life of sin. As we were shaking hands with the minister on leaving, the young one asked me if I was new in town. I said, yes I was just visiting for the summer. If this told him that I was one of the invaders, he didn't betray the fact. I saw the man I had talked to a few weeks before but he ignored me. I don't know whether he feared that an acknowledgement of our acquaintance would have been too embarrassing, or whether he was taking on the new belligerent line of the Mayor who is now calling us communists.

I'll be leaving this Friday or Saturday so if you want to write please write me at
Friends Peace Committee
1520 Race Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19102

Thanks so much for the letters! Love, Mike.

"It was a pleasure to be your vicarious pen-pal. But seriously it has been an inspiration to be able to help this great work, even so indirectly.-- And so I greet you warmly and bid you farewell for now... Nicola Geiger, Worcester, Pa."