

Wed (July 29, 1964)

Dear Mom and Dad,

To clue you in further about our surroundings, as you request in your letter received today. Our host family is pretty well to do, as things go around here. He is a barber and she is a midwife. They have a five room house not far from the office, and, as you know, across the street from the church that Nancy teaches at. I haven't been able to tell yet how many kids live there but I think only two, their grand-daughters. (Nancy knows more about this than I do). Anyway there are dozens of kids associated with the place. Their oldest granddaughter goes to a private school outside of Jackson; she is home for the summer, but we have her room; she sleeps in the den on a sofa. Two other summer workers have the main bedroom; our hosts sleep on a roll-away in the dining room.

The house is reasonably spacious, but its main flaw is that it's very hot. Of course there isn't much privacy, but we manage. And no empty drawers, so we are living from our suitcases.

There isn't much to do at night but read, and write letters. I can do this either in the office (as now) or at home; the trouble with the office is that there're bound to be major interruptions every fifteen minutes, especially from people who need rides somewhere. The office is usually a mad house during the day, but calms down at night. We are located in a store, or what probably was a res (the ribbon on this typewriter won't wind. Typical COFO property) (The other thing about our office is that someone has been very generous with some things, so we have a huge modern mimeo and two copying machines which doubtless cost a fortune and I have never seen anyone use). Anyway the office has an old-fashioned kitchen so it probably used to be a restaurant. The landlady owns a whole row of real estate and gives us the office rent-free, I think. It has two back rooms, so is pretty sizeable for most purposes.

We go about the town not at all, generally, except (Two typewriters later) We go to the post office, but otherwise don't go downtown. We do have to drive through downtown on our way to other parts of the Negro sections, since the Negroes seem pretty much to surround the central town. But you are right in thinking that we live largely a ghetto existence. Just about everything we need we can buy here, so we do. We haven't been to any movies or anything like that.

There is a place in town where we go for paper, which we use in remarkable quantities. No one seems to know who is supposed to dish out money when people have to buy supplies, but fortunately enough people came loaded with donations to make most of us who need to buy things, independent. Recently we have gotten a few small contributions (unsolicited) from Kalamazoo. The supplies from Teddy will be greatly appreciated.

As for books, here are some: ML King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, and, *Why We Can't Wait*. Louis Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*. C Van Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Richard Wright, *Native Son*, and, *Black Boy*. DuBois, *Souls of the Black Folk*. Baldwin, you know what (*Go Tell it on the Mountain* especially). All of these are in paperback, most in cheap (60¢) or so editions.

Also any biographies of famous or not so famous Negroes that you can find; this is maybe the most important thing. I don't know what there is like this, but you can think of the Negroes yourself.

As for our library, we have lost hope; we have hundreds of uncatalogued books,

(Joseph Ellin, July 29, cont)

maybe a thousand, and one or two thousand books on the shelf, but 1) we have run out of room in the library (the next store down from the office) and 2) the girl who was doing the library went somewhere else and no one has shown any interest in getting anyone to replace her, even though Nancy has volunteered to do it in her free time. I still have a trunk full of books we brought from Mazoo and Eklyn. But if you send any books we will try to deposit them somewhere. There was some talk about starting a library out at Palmer's, where we are, but I don't think that's going to happen either; but maybe we will be able to arrange something at the church.

I have been trying to write another letter to the Gazoo, but haven't got anywhere. Maybe I'll be able to do some tonight. I would really like Nancy to write something for them, but I doubt if she will. By the way, her schedule is changed now: she's teaching typing at night. Typing is a popular subject.

This weekend, or not really the weekend, but Sunday to Tuesday, I went to New Orleans. (We had a two-day vacation from teaching, sort of a between semester break, and quite a few people went down there). Nancy didn't want to go. I had a relaxing, moderately fun time. New Orleans is a pretty good city, I think, something like San Francisco in atmosphere though not very pretty. We got in touch with a few COFO people and fellow-travellers, with whom we stayed: NO is one of the centers of the out of state lawyers project (Memphis is the other as you know). We talked to the Unitarian minister and his wife; they are both sympathetic, but they're from Boston, originally. Some other people also talked to the counsellor for Methodist students at Tulane; in fact four of us stayed (one night) at the Wesley Foundation house on the campus. Tulane has a liberal student body, nearly half of which is from the north. In fact, the whole city is very deceptive; it looks completely integrated, but in the primaries last week, all the racists won. And out-state La. has some of the very worst places in the country.

Last week I talked to another Unitarian, in Hburg, a psychology prof at Miss Southern (did you know that this is a university town? It's about as obvious as it is in Mazoo). This man is a former Jew from New York, but southern orientation: schooled in Atlanta and Fla, wife from Atlanta, here in Hburg since 1958. He too seemed very sympathetic, but not very willing to say anything; in fact I don't think he made any positive remarks, but he didn't make any negative remarks and smiled in the right places. I invited him to Freedom Schools; he didn't say yes, but he did say maybe. (I don't expect him). Southern white people have absolutely no idea, but no idea whatever, what this project is all about; as far as they can tell from the press, there are a bunch of bearded beatniks down here to raise some peculiar kind of hell (or at best, some simple minded idealistic kids making fools of themselves). Back in New Orleans, one of the girls went into a jewelry store and received a spontaneous lecture on the theme, "We've got no problems down here," which included the line, "I'm a Jew and I know about persecution and believe me the Negroes here are well off." (This was set off by her revealing she's from Philadelphia. The defensiveness of southerners on the race question is incredible.)

You must write and tell all about Harlem and Bedford-Sty. We read the Times so we know details, but what's the reaction? The same kind of hysteria set off by the stabbings when we were there? The southern newspapers are absolutely exultant; as you can imagine; they use it as a lesson of what happens when you give Negroes some rights. Also the Red stuff is just for them; and they think it will elect Au H2O. (Plenty of people here, if letters to the

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editor are any indication, really think he will win; they all do believe that the country is on their side, but is held back by the Reds and symps in Washington.) I persist in remaining calm and not worrying.

Joe

copy of a letter from Joseph Ellin in Hattiesburg, Miss.