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Dear Friends:

Meridian
The cycle has repeated itself, Godot-wise (or am I betraying my background too early in the letter?), and I once again find myself in the COFO office with nothing to do (despite some raised eyebrows in Chicago) but answer the telephone (non-violently) and write letters and read (Baldwin) and get my three and a half hours sleep when my turn comes. By now, I'm getting used to all sorts of names being thrown at me, either from angry telephones or speeding cars, but I must admit to having been taken somewhat aback last week when I was out canvassing (trying to get people to fill out Freedom Registration Forms, which will be our main weapon at the Convention: for the time being, regular voter registration has been dropped): it wasn't so bad seeing parents (white) running frantically into the street and pulling their darlingly pure sons and daughters off the street and behind locked fences as they saw us making our way down the road: in fact, it gave us something of a feeling of power, for the whole scene resembled so much those in the movies when everyone is running from the escaped tiger or the impending cyclone: and what could be more powerful than an escaped cyclone? Anyway, the surprise was yet to come, after the youths had been let out of their confinement and had been permitted to follow us (at a safe distance, of course: we not only smell, we also bite) on their bicycles: then amidst such literary witticisms as "You dirty white people" (we weren't sure who in our crowd this was referring to, the Negroes or the whites) came a long volley of "Yankee go home!"

And they say that we're "Communist inspired."

Besides such insignificances as that, Meridian remains calm, with the only real offensive being launched against us at the moment being economic: some of the people who are housing us have lost their jobs. But throughout the rest of the state, churches have been burning so fast and so often that I've been unable to count: one was completely destroyed yesterday just a few miles outside Meridian.

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School continues. My math class continues to stumble along (with the teacher stumbling along either ahead of or behind the rest): we tromped through infinity, a bit of set theory, the binary system, that match stick game made so famous by Marienbad (which, for some unfathomable reason, never happened to get to the Negro theater in town), and a few other such things. Finally, we got another teacher in who is able to teach (teach) algebra, and the class was divided today into the two sections that it was originally intended to be. So now I'm teaching ALgebra II, whatever that consists of. Actually, I've decided that it must consist of at least imaginary numbers, so that's what I began with today. Things seem to be going smoother now, although the class as a whole seems to have an aversion to the concept of graphing, which I find ^{un}able to eradicate, since I myself was always somewhat alienated by the process, which required the ability to draw a straight line.

French continues to go pretty well: we missed two classes this week because of a general assembly of the school and the arrival (unexpected) of two movieis from Jackson, one on the Freedom rides and one an abridgment (it seemed) of a movie version of

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Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust in which the Faulkner style was somehow lost. Our activities in Frnehc have been centering muchly about Sartre: Last week we read (with great success) The Respectful Prostitute: most of the students seemed to think that Sartre had portrayed the South pretty realistically (although I find parts of the play somewhat far-fetched). We had some good discussion on the play, centering around such questions as to whether judgments made about Lizzie (the heroine) (who was condemned by everyone in the class) stemmed from the fact that she was a prostitute or from her submission to the "white power structure." No one seemed to feel that her being a prostitute was particularly relevant in making a moral judgment of her, which I felt to be a sign of pretty good insight into the play. We also got into some discussion of the problem of non-violence and self-defense: almost everyone in the class favored self-defense when faced with death. Although everyone here agrees with non-violence as a political tactic, very few of the students I know seem to accept it as a "way of life." We started reading no Exit today: we'll get that done tomorrow.

Most of the rest of my time has been spent (spent) in a constant battle with the mimeograph machine, in an attempt to put out the "Freedom Star" (our answer to the Meridian Star, which is just what you'd expect a small southern newspaper to be). Also, in about a week, delegates ~~fer~~ from all of the Freedom Schools in Mississippi will be gathering in Meridian for a convention, which requires planning and organizing. And this week, the Freedom Democratic Party has been holding Precinct meetings in Meridian: the county convention is tomorrow night.

Chuck
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and either my own personal temperature or that of the outside world (or both) seems about 103, so I'll have to cut it a little short. The main purpose of the convention was to bring together the "leaders" from the student movement all over the state, and to turn out a platform. The results were mixed, and, perhaps most important for us, showed us what the ~~weak~~ weaknesses had been in our teaching program. I was operating the mimeograph machine for most of the convention, and so I didn't get to sit in on too many of the meetings, but I did see enough to surprise me about some things. The most disturbing was the problem of foreign relations: it was only through one last second speech that the group didn't come out in support of the Monroe Doctrine, demanding that the US put non-military pressure on all Latin American countries dealing with Communist nations (this, the students felt, did not contradict the ideal that the US support only countries which were supported by the majority of the people). And although it didn't come out in the final platform, there was a great deal of anti-Cuba sentiment, often voiced by the same people who insisted that the plantations in Mississippi should be divided up among the farmers (or rather, the workers on the farms) and that there should be a guaranteed \$3000 a year income for all citizens. In other words, there was a great deal of inconsistency, both within individual students and among the convention as a whole, and, as one might expect, the degree of inconsistency was proportional to the distance the particular issue lay from their own immediate lives (ie, the degree to which they had to depend on radio and television and newspapers for their information). I would say that in the future, more emphasis should be put on "non-Civil-Rights" areas.

Well, there's lots more to say, but I really can't say I'm in any mood at the moment to go any further with this letter. Unless I get a chance to write again before I return home (which is unlikely), I'll tell you about it all when I get back. I plan to be arriving in New York either Thursday or Friday, August 20 or 21 or whatever it is. It's possible that I'll be going to Atlantic City for a day or two the following Monday: depends on what plans COFO has for demonstrations, etc. It is also possible that I may get sent home early, since they are encouraging people to go home early to help put pressure on convention delegates. Four or five people were sent home yesterday, but I doubt that they're going to ask any more teachers to leave, since our last week is pretty important.

Pete