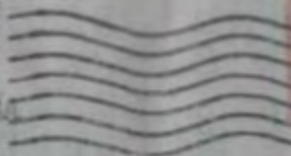


Dear Joe

Joel Bernard
Mary Holmes
West Point



WEST POINT, MISSISSIPPI
PM
1958
USA



Mrs. Louise de Sieyes
c/o E.T. Browne
64 Ave. Cardinal Micara
Anderghem, Bruxelles
Belgium

Please hold or forward

AÉROGRAMME • PAR AVION

FIRST FOLD

SECOND FOLD

DO NOT USE TAPE OR STICKERS TO SEAL
NO ENCLOSURES PERMITTED

*Bureau Box 1
230 Falden*

Dear Grandma,

West Point August 15, 1964

I spoke in my last letter of the meeting (statewide) of the Freedom Democratic Party that was to be held in Jackson on August 6. It marked the culmination of precinct, county, and district conventions held all over the state in which Negroes who had never before had the opportunity, elected their own delegates to the National Convention and participated in the political processes of government. Clay Co., in which I am working, sent several delegates and all of us went to the convention. It was quite impressive, with placards from about 35 counties showing where the delegations sat, and like all conventions it was very noisy, and disorganized. Most importantly, delegates were approved to go to Atlantic City, the platform was approved (very much like its Democratic counterpart, but, of course, with an emphasis on the racial situation), and the process of our attempting to be seated was explained. What we do is go before a credentials committee and present our case. If we are not approved we can get it brought to a vote on the floor, of all the delegates, by getting 11 states to approve a minority report. The man who spoke, and who supports us, is on the credentials committee. He seemed confident, Bob Moses, head of the summer project, didn't. Pres. Johnson is afraid he will lose the whole South if he seats the FDP. My own opinion is that we will not be seated, but will have won partial victory by exposing the terrible situation in Mississippi, and by forming some groundwork for progress in later years. Anyone is better than Goldwater!! Don't you agree? In any case, this election should prove interesting, both as a struggle between conservative and liberal, and as one over the whole question of civil rights. I plan to go to the convention in Atlantic City beginning August 24 and lasting about a week. Then I'll probably drop up to New York to see Mom and Pop -- and I hope you. I'm not sure of my exact plans, but I'll certainly call you.

FOLD SIDES OVER AND THEN FOLD BOTTOM UP
MOISTEN FLAP WELL AND APPLY PRESSURE TO SEAL

With the Convention in sight we have been pushing hard to fulfill our quota of Freedom Registration Forms, showing that Negroes in the state support the FDP. So we organized a group called the "roving team" to go to the rural areas of the counties in which we have projects, one county a day. About ten people, including me, were on the team. It was interesting because I had been doing most of my canvassing in the city. Out in the country the houses are quite far apart, and the sun beats down with ferocity, creating an atmosphere in which walking and any kind of work is unpleasant. It's hard to describe how depressing the life in this area is. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can describe the complete lack of escape that the people have. They're almost chained to their daily existence -- not even a movie theater, or a library. It's hard to imagine without seeing it. Just parched fields, and wooden shacks, and a dusty main street. The people are completely at the mercy of the local whites; I mean nothing at all would stop the murder of a Negro I, especially, could feel the uncertainty of life, as a civil rights worker, and these small towns are like something out of the frontier. One of the workers we were with has a grandmother there, and we stopped for a lunch of beans, spiced peaches, bread, and ice tea. And I ate it because I was hungry, and because it was good. No time to be my usual finicky self. Anyway, I was glad to get out of there and back to the "metropolitan" West Point.

Our biggest problem here is organization -- how to get the local people to do the necessary things (getting food, money, registering voters) without us. We hope to leave behind a local organization that can proceed from where we leave off, without our directions. I don't know if you've ever thought of the problems involved, I hadn't until a recent meeting. When people come we haven't been giving them enough preparation. We know we need people to be "block captains", that is, to talk to their neighbors about providing support, but they don't know how to go about organizing these things, so we're back to telling them how to do what they do.

I had an extremely interesting talk, while out canvassing, with an old Negro lady whose grandmother had been a slave. She was able to tell many interesting stories about slavery, and about slave life in general. It makes me think that it would be worthwhile to do some sort of oral history project, interviewing people with a tape recorder, and writing up some sort of a book on slavery based on these personal reminiscences -- a compilation perhaps.

Local harassment has increased, with workers put in jail for many stupid reasons. But I'm a k... Love... 10/1