

Jul Bernard Please return as soon as convenient.  
"In Mississippi there is a town called Liberty",  
"In Washington there is a department called Justice" March 12, 1965

Dear Folks,

January 31 marked the first anniversary of the killing of Louis Allen in Liberty, Mississippi. He had been a witness to the killing of Herbert Lee in 1961 and had testified (because he was himself afraid of being killed that Lee had attacked the man who killed him..That man was E.H. Hurst, a member of the Mississippi legislature, and he had already threatened to kill Lee and the other people who were then doing voter registration work in Amite County. Later he told the FBI that he had lied ~~xxforxxhis~~ and asked for protection, which was refused. A deputy sheriff broke his jaw with a flashlight (he found out what Allen had told the FBI). Finally he decided to go North, but the night before/someone shot him three times with a shotgun, in his driveway. It gives me the strangest feeling to think back to what I was doing and where I was that day, and what I am doing and where I am today. I was pretty secure, knowing what I was going to be doing for about the next five years, and if I was unhappy then at least I was <sup>in</sup> hopeful about the future. Now I'm not at all sure what I'll be doing ~~inxx~~ the next few months and when I do go back I don't think I'll ever feel the security of purpose that I felt before. After all, in a university you observe and study the world and here I'm in it. A phrase that I once read keeps running through my mind -- "a portion of unimagined existence." I'm not sure how much tension I feel every day, not much probably in West Point, but at times, when I see how slow and hard things are and how much slower and harder changing things is, I think I can't wait to forget all this, go back, and read. But I'm sure I would want to get back as soon as I left since what's happening here is so relevant, or ~~at least so unignorable.~~ <sup>at least so unignorable.</sup> What I mean is that this is important not only on the large political or "social" scale but important because I, personally, feel an awareness of problems I never dreamed existed, and these problems are not only problems of ~~the~~ people here but my problems as a white person, trying to work in a black movement. They are the problems of the Southern white people here, some of the ~~most~~ warmest people in the world, ~~with~~ who have a <sup>side</sup> ~~side~~ so vicious in their nature that if it could be fully revealed it would shake an one with horror. I read somewhere of an interview, in Alabama I think, where the person interviewed said "We killed two year old Indian babies to get ~~this~~ this land, and you want us to give it to the niggers." There can't be any statement that <sup>better conveys</sup> ~~conveys~~ the depths of savagery and guilt that Southerners feel.



main are those  
But of course the/problems here ~~in the~~ that of the Negro, and these are problems of trying to assert themselves in white-dominated society. I'm not speaking just of assertion in the sense of changing the society through civil rights action, but of day to day living, trying to support a family, or socializing in a beer joint. I'm not sure that this is coming through clearly, probably because it's not clear in my own mind. I also want to apologize for the beginning of this letter, in reading it over it seemed a bit journalistic, but you can probably appreciate how hard it is for me to sit down to write a letter, especially to begin it. But the case of Louis Allen is interesting in other ways because, at least to me, it illustrates how every Negro in Mississippi is brutalized by a system that forces them not only to degrade themselves by teaching them to believe things that are not true, but even to violate standards that they know are true -- all to perpetuate the fiction of racism. After all, Allen ~~was~~ just happened to ~~be~~ witness to an ~~act~~ murder, was then forced to lie about what he had seen, and when he tried to right himself, killed himself. So every Negro, whether or not like Lee, who was urging people to register, ~~he knows what he's doing~~ he is taking, runs the risk of running afoul of the system.

~~What~~ Clay County and West Point are deceptive. I always want to ~~think~~ think of Mississippi in degrees. So, for instance, Greenville is "liberal", so is the coast. And Amite County or Tallahatchie are "bad". This is really a measure of overt violence toward civil rights workers but it is deceptive because it ignores the fact that low wages, lack of opportunity, fear of loss of job, and the possibility of violence that will go unpunished weigh on the Negro even in "liberal" areas, and on a great many whites. West Point is dominated by people of the business mentality, racism seems to be of secondary importance. Of course the leaders must pander to the prejudices of the mass of people and certainly wouldn't want to rock the business boat by, for example, encouraging Negroes to vote, or getting rid of such a cheap labor supply. But the library has been integrated, because the librarian wants it that way, and the Federal pledge for school desegregation will be signed because money, State or federal, is good. And the people in stores where we shop are very courteous, even though they know who we are, generally because they want our money. They cash our checks at the ~~same~~ supermarket and once, when the manager wasn't around to okay it, one cash register lady said to another, "It's okay, you know they've got plenty of money!" (hah). But, on the other hand, crosses have been burned and it's probably true that anyone who would do that would go farther. The next County south is ~~Calhoun~~ Lowndes, main city Columbus, and there



the reaction to COFO is somewhat different. The police harassment is greater. One night the project members from Starkville decided to go to the (integrated) theater in Columbus. The driver of the car was called on the loudspeaker/and they all want outside. He was arrested for improper parking (bond \$300). The others were let go and one drove the car (which was in the first driver's name) back to the Columbus COFO house. The county sheriff arrested him for auto theft when he got there (bond \$5000). He spent about five days in jail before the Justice Department <sup>got</sup> him out. A few days ago the Columbus project car threw a rod (i.e. needed a new motor, which wasn't worth it). On closer inspection it was revealed that someone had poured sugar in the gas tank, which meant that the car is no good. Columbus is an old NAACP town, about 1954 it had the largest chapter in Mississippi, 700. The NAACP was lead by Dr. Stringer, a Negro dentist. The white power structure completely crushed it. An economic boycott was launched against him, he was beat up by the Klan, and the movement crumbled. Now Columbus is impossible to organize, the people are too scared and the pressure is too great. In rural areas there is bound to be more violence because economic pressure is harder, but in the cities it's different. I ~~am~~ understand that Noxubee County, to the south of Columbus is even worse. It's overwhelmingly rural, 4 and 71% Negro (which makes it the only county in this area, except for Clay - 51% - with a majority of Negroes). Not one registered Negro voter in Noxubee and the last man who tried left the state ~~many~~ years ago. Reverend Lindsey in West Point has some churches down there and he goes there frequently. He just heard about the murder of a Negro there a year ago, but he can't even find out his name. He knows of several cases of peonage, where a white man gets a Negro out of the penitentiary and works the man, giving him food and clothing, and whipping him like a slave. So Noxubee is like a swamp, from which news reaches the outside world in dribs and drabs, and a fog of fear hangs around the people.

One of the most important things we did in Clay County was to run candidates for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee ~~the~~ (ASC) in early December. The ASC is theoretically controlled by the Agriculture Department in Washington. The Dept. sets the production quota for most crops for the entire US in a given year. So Mississippi gets annually its quota of cotton. Now Mississippi sets the quotas for the counties and the county ASC boards set the quotas for the farmers in the county. What this means is that the farmers must pay a penalty if they exceed their crop. Senator James Eastland owns about the biggest plantation in Mississippi and his allotment is tremendous, plus he gets, I believe, \$50,000 for the acreage



he doesn't plant. So big farmers make a pile. But there has never been a Negro on these ASC boards, even though every farmer, tenant, or sharecropper is supposed to get a ballot. Every county is divided into six "communities" and each community elects five people annually that form the community board. The person who gets the most votes in each community is a member of the county committee. As I said, the committees are responsible for crop allotment; in a larger sense they are responsible for conveying to farmers agricultural information. Naturally Negroes are discriminated against. Mr. Graves, in Tibbee, a Negro, has 130 acres of land, but his cotton allotment is only 5 acres. As a result he can't farm for a living. In some places Negroes are not mailed ballots, and this is especially true on plantations in the Delta, where the owner simply doesn't report his tenants (and, incidentally, often makes arrangements with the local draft board not to draft his fieldhands). The procedure for nominating a person is very simple -- six signatures of eligible voters (in the ASC election, not necessarily in the local elections) on a nominating petition. We didn't have the time or the contacts in all the communities to get candidates to run. WE managed to get two from Tibbee, and the precinct ~~was~~ there passed the word around the community. Since a voter can vote for five people there was much confusion and many Negroes voted for the two Negro candidates and three whites. The precinct endorsed one white candidate. When the results were tallied we had lost, our candidates gaining 86 and 94 votes, the <sup>highest</sup> ~~winning~~ white candidate getting 211. He was, however, the man the precinct had supported, and his win illustrated the importance that the Negro vote had. The people in the precinct were not ~~all~~ all discouraged, and realized that next year we would stand a better chance if we nominated five candidates, and if we spent more time <sup>on publicizing</sup> ~~and holding~~ classes on the ballots. It was more than coincidental that there were <sup>only</sup> five white candidates for the five positions, and it illustrates how matters of this kind are generally handled by committees that provide for little or no opposition. About a week ago the Times had a front page article on the discovery by the Agriculture Dept. that the Negro was being discriminated against in agricultural programs in the South. I suppose that it takes the attitude that nothing can be done about it. It makes me sick to my guts when the Federal government refuses to act ~~in~~ <sup>the</sup> cases of clear discrimination. Too many legalistic politicians up in Washington have made federalism and the laws a thing unto themselves. No argument impresses me less than the one that says the states have <sup>the</sup> police power. The reason that this tradition grew up was because the states were viewed as bulwarks against tyranny, or so I am told. But when men are being beaten, jailed, killed and



other people are talking about federalism it seems nothing less than criminal. What is the purpose of law if it doesn't protect people's liberty? How can people ignore violations of the law, blatant violations, and take the attitude that law is hit or miss, that it works most of the time? There's so much criminal and rotten in our government and society and most of it stems from indifference. And all the Anti-poverty programs and all the Civil Rights Bills won't solve this, because they're little more than face savers. First of all, the CR Bill hasn't meant a damn thing to West Point because there's no effective force to police it. For example, there are supposed to be job training programs in Aberdeen, but the employment office doesn't publicize the fact that ~~they're~~ <sup>they're</sup> integrated. So a few find out and go, but the rest don't find out about it. And so much of the initiative in these bills is dependent upon local people. How are Negroes supposed to organize to get federal funds to fight poverty? The people who might help to do this, even granting there were enough people who could be counted on to understand the mechanics of organization and were willing to devote the time, are dependent upon the generosity and benevolence of the white power structure, who aren't about to help. That's why a simple voting bill without federal registrars and a real attempt on the part of the federal government to encourage registration won't mean anything. There are simply too many extralegal ways to scare people.

Speaking of police power, West Point has <sup>been</sup> three Negro policemen. The local editor ~~unenthusiastically~~ <sup>unenthusiastically</sup> wrote that the thing had/ <sup>been</sup> tried in other cities and had worked very well. He neglected to say that they have no power to arrest white people and I doubt if they can do more than hold Negro people until white police can be called. They are all notorious Uncle Toms, and it's quite a frightening thing to see them in action, which is little more than patrolling the streets in the Negro area. Actually their purpose is to knock a few heads around at the weekend dances and make sure things don't get out of hand. I said frightening because their misguided zeal reveals how insecure they feel their position is. They seemingly forget whom they work for and the system they are upholding. The placing of Negro police was designed to mollify Negro opinion but it produced the opposite result -- since everyone saw how impotent the new police were, and most people were angered that Negroes now did the dirty work that had formerly been done by white police. At a football game this fall there was a small riot, players throwing their helmets, jumping on people with their cleats, pulling knives. In came the Negro police, menacing, threatening to bust anyone who got out of line in the head. One man started to leave, was in his car, when the



Constable decided to arrest him. The man didn't get out fast enough, and when he started to protest the policeman began to hit him with his club. The culprit's foot got caught in the accelerator and the car careened around, hitting another car. The accident was solely the result of the policeman's edginess. Actually they are pretty much a town joke. One of them, whose name is Golden, can't read or write. One day he stopped a kid for a traffic violation and, since he couldn't arrest him I guess, told him to write his name on Golden's pad. The boy wrote Golden's name down and Golden took it to court before he was informed of his mistake. Another time one of the policeman lost all his money in a crap game, went home, put on his uniform, and returned to arrest all the participants! They are really very timid in addressing us, and usually just patrol around, ready to inform the white policemen if we do anything.

Our most recent major concern has been collecting depositions in support of the Freedom Democratic Party Congressional Challenge. The Challenge stems from the election held last Nov. 3 in which 5 congressmen from Mississippi were elected. Since the great mass of Negroes ~~was~~<sup>were</sup> deprived of the right to vote the FDP maintains that the people elected have no business in Washington and should not be seated in Congress. Since the 3 candidates of the FDP ran in an open election, the Freedom Vote, they should be seated until new, free elections can be held. What the FDP has done is file a brief with Congress and ~~has~~<sup>has</sup> proceeded to gather the testimony of Negroes in Mississippi in support of this. You can imagine how difficult it often is for people to testify at these public hearings. Not only ~~did~~<sup>did</sup> we have lawyers (volunteers from the North) but the opposing side had lawyers, usually local, so it was a real confrontation between the Negro individual and the white power structure. A court reporter took all testimony and transmitted it to Washington. We were supposed to ~~have~~<sup>have</sup> the use of public buildings, but these were refused. As a result we used a Negro church in town. First, however, we had to go around the county to contact people, to make sure that they would testify. We decided to ~~to~~ make contact with people in Webster and Calhoun Counties, ~~in~~ although we didn't know anyone there, to see if we could get some testimony on the harassment there. Actually the testimony had two main objectives. The first was to establish the facts of harassment --murder, beatings, threats-- that had occurred when people went down to register. The second was more general -- to show the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that prevents ~~the~~ Negroes from participating.

Clay County is relatively flat land, good cotton land, as well as



being relatively industrialized. Between Clay and the fertile Delta lie Webster and Calhoun, miserably poor, the ~~land~~<sup>land</sup> gullied and eroded. There is little industry, most of the people subsist by farming. Both are much more violently inclined than Clay -- no "business" group in control -- because there are many more poor whites. The racism of these poor is a real tragedy because it seems to stem from a feeling of aggravated inferiority. They are equally as exploited as the Negro and are found where there are no large numbers of Negroes to do unskilled labor, or sharecropping. One would think that their interests would be congruent with those of the Negro, but racism has been exploited to such a degree that they form the ~~least~~<sup>least</sup> flexible group regarding racial attitudes. The little ~~information we~~<sup>information we</sup> had about Webster we got from ~~workers~~<sup>workers</sup> from Starkville who have worked in Mabin, from which town they regularly get run out by shotgun toting whites. ~~Further, we had the names of several people in the county from the files of the Justice Department.~~<sup>who had voting trouble</sup> By coincidence one of them was the father of a girl who lives right down the street from us in West Point. Eupora, the largest town, really looks poor, it's really just a widening in the road, with dusty poor looking stores on either side. It's hard for me to explain to you just how the people look, really two types-- scrawny and mean, with angular LBJ features, and heavy and mean. The town, too, is hard to describe, but it doesn't have the prosperous, ready for business look of West Point. Mr. Robinson, ~~one~~<sup>one</sup> man we wanted to see, lived in the rural, several miles from Eupora. He wasn't home but I got to see him a few days later when he was in West Point. It came out in our conversation that there was only one registered Negro in Webster, and he had never voted. Mr. Robinson has a very softspoken way about him and he said during the ~~conversation~~<sup>conversation</sup> that since he had some business at the courthouse the next Monday he thought he would register. I was really taken aback, and almost wanted to ask him if he was sure what he was doing. So I gave him a copy of the test and he went up and filled out the form the next Monday. It turned out that the people in Webster County would be able to give unusually good testimony of blatant discrimination in voting. The one registered Negro had been told that it would be better if he didn't participate, the only time that he tried to ~~vote~~<sup>vote</sup>. The other ~~names~~<sup>people whose</sup> we had had not been allowed to pay poll tax -- the sheriff took one aside and told him that "it wasn't time," and the others were scared off in similar ways. I spent several days in the county and spoke to several people who agreed to give depositions in West Point, since we didn't think it would be practicable to hold them in Eupora.

I also went to Calhoun County to see if I could find some registered



Negro voters. There seemed to be a few, ~~the two I talked to were~~  
~~retired~~ teachers. Both lived up in the hills, near the town of  
Wardman. In order to get there we had to go along great wide orange-  
brown clay roads, into wooded hills looking as much like Connecticut as  
Mississippi. Both men that I saw were obviously not "influential", even  
in the limited sense of "leaders" in the Negro community. Their isolation  
and age precluded that. One had registered during the First World War  
and had voted ever since. Both voted in the 64 elections. But both had  
been advised in 1953 that they shouldn't vote in the primary-- even  
though, ironically they had been mailed a ~~solicitation~~ solicitation from Gov. Coleman  
to vote for him--- because some whites in the next precinct were coming  
over to see that they didn't. They, too, said that they would testify.

Meanwhile Bob was contacting people that we knew in Clay County  
and asking them to testify. Some lawyers arrived from California (via  
Jackson), part of a group of lawyers and court reporters who volunteered  
to help with the depositions. There were two Negro and one white lawyer.  
We were quite afraid that conflict would arise between us and the lawyers,  
especially regarding the nature of the testimony to be given, that is, who  
would testify and who would not. The whole subject of voter discrimination  
is quite complex, I ~~mean~~ mean that there are many shades -- ranging from the  
most obvious harassment to the subtlety of having only one person at  
a time fill out the form or the registrar's absence during office hours.  
And too, there arises the ~~whole~~ question of who should vote -- that is, only  
those literate enough to pass the test if it is fairly applied? Is an  
unfair test (requiring constitutional interpretation) fair if it is fairly  
applied? Should only the literate vote? It seems to me that literacy  
standards discriminate against precisely those people who have need of  
representation most. What I mean is, is it fair to set a standard of  
literacy, for the state government to set this, and then not provide a  
segment of the population with ~~adequate~~ education enough to meet that standard? Clay  
County didn't have a high school before 1942, so figure it out, anyone  
over about 35 or 40 didn't have a chance to go to high school. And  
a years schooling consisted of 4 months in a county school "holes so big  
you could throw a dog through the walls." Even now they recess in the  
county schools so the kids can pick cotton for two months. I won't mention  
anything about the teaching, you can imagine. Mr Smith remarked that the  
reason he quit school in the ~~sixth~~ sixth grade was because he was the only one  
in his class. But this is really avoiding the fact that these people are  
perfectly of raising a family, contracting debts, paying taxes, bearing  
arms, speaking, thinking...



and can't vote. So Mr. Graves has failed four times on his constitutional interpretation.

Well, the lawyers were extremely nice and sensitive guys and they didn't throw out too much of the testimony we had collected. But no one from Calhoun was to testify because the testimony, the lawyers felt, wasn't strong enough. I felt that we could just as well show why others hadn't registered there, even though the people who testified would have been voters.

I am including a summary of the depositions, but would also like to add some observations and feelings of my own. We had 40 days to gather evidence and the hearings were held all over the state during the last week of the 40 days. The day before our hearings Columbus held theirs. I was disappointed with the results, even though we were all honored by the august presence of Mr. J.P. Coleman, former governor of Mississippi, chief lawyer for the opposition. The problem was that we didn't have enough witnesses, mostly COFO workers did testify, <sup>and</sup> many people, <sup>seeing</sup> that they would have to confront the white establishment, backed out. So when our day arrived my feelings were both apprehensive and hopeful, apprehensive because I was afraid they might destroy our testimony. (God knows how) and hopeful because I <sup>believed</sup> ~~expected~~ that ~~we~~ local people would come and witness the hearings and see Negro people standing up to the local whites. The greater the number of such confrontations, the more sure Negroes will feel about participation in the movement. At eight thirty in the morning a white Cadillac drove up, and out stepped a white lawyer. Soon the area around this small Negro church was filled with late model, mostly white, cars and it seemed that every <sup>person</sup> ~~person~~ connected with the politics of West Point was there. No Negroes, but lots of white people sitting in the church. Since we didn't have our <sup>other</sup> witnesses there, I testified. A few more Negroes came in as the testimony progressed. That day four people got to testify, so we had to put the remainder off for the next day. That day there were fewer whites and as the day progressed we had a very large crowd (50-75) of attentive Negroes, almost all of whom stayed for the entire day. At one point a jet flew over head, just as one of the opposing lawyers was asking a question. There was a boom that shook the windows of the church. The white lawyers, broken in midsentence, gave each other looks of complete and utter <sup>disbelief</sup> ~~surprise~~ -- in that split second everyone in the church, white and black, thought it had been bombed. When the two lawyers realized their mistake they were pictures of sheepishness, a sort of facial "hah, hah, of course it wasn't, not here, hehm, heh." Everyone's



laughter, everybody's understanding, intensified their discomfort. And the atmosphere ~~in~~ the church had changed, because the things the witnesses were saying were things that most of the spectators had experienced and the witnesses in turn received <sup>self-</sup>assurance from the response of the spectators. But the best moment was yet to come. Mrs Georgia Roby, a 74 year old woman was testifying. When the opposing lawyer cross-examined her he kept addressing her as "Georgia". Our lawyer remarked, "We trying to be as polite as possible to the witnesses; would you please address her as Mrs. Roby!" "Excuse me, I didn't know I was addressing her as any thing else." ~~And then the~~ The face every Negro in the room shone and every chest just puffed out and spectators turned to one another and smiled. By the end of the day it was obvious that we had drawn even Negroes who had not participated in our meetings, but who had just heard that testimony was being given and who came down to see. My only real <sup>disappointment</sup> ~~disappointment~~ was that the people from Webster County that I had contacted didn't testify. Partly this was the result of faulty communication but fear was also a factor. There was a lawyer from Eupora there to question the people who came from Webster and ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> evidently felt that the direct knowledge of the local white people would place them in too much jeopardy. Since we didn't have a real movement there it is hard to blame them, and I hope that when we do start moving there we will find that they are less afraid.

I'm not being exactly chronological which is Okay, I guess. When I got back <sup>to Mississippi</sup> ~~back~~ most of the project had just got out of jail, and the events leading to that <sup>give</sup> ~~was~~ an interesting illustration of justice in the Magnolia State. Carl Rice was a local youth who had participated in the movement, that is, helped during the Freedom Vote, and wore SNCC buttons to school. As a result of this the principal of the school had marked him as ~~troublemaker~~ <sup>troublemaker</sup>. One day two girls were fighting in the school yard and a ~~big~~ crowd gathered, including Carl. The police came and arrested Carl for inciting to riot. That night several COFO workers and students decided to protest his arrest. They marched to the jail, linked arms, and began singing (all this after they had not been allowed to see Carl). The police chief told them to move and they were arrested when they refused. Bail was set at three hundred dollars apiece, on charges of disturbing the peace. Meanwhile the police were trying to get their parents to bring charges against the workers for contributing ~~to the~~ <sup>to the</sup> delinquency of minors -- all refused. Carl's father worked for the city. When ~~his~~ trial came up he was represented by a local attorney. Reportedly he was warned to get out of town in four days, or he would be sent to



reform school for four years. It sounds amazing to us, doesn't it? But this thing is happening all over Mississippi, all over the country? To people who don't know their rights there is often little recourse. I know of a case where a boy was returned to jail, after being out on parole, because he was arrested <sup>for</sup> distributing literature without a permit, even though the case has not yet been tried! Then, to get back to Carl's case, his parents received a \$150 bill from this lawyer for his services, when he had been forced to get him in the first place because of fear for his city job. He gets about \$35-40 a week. The other people arrested, including the workers, were bailed out by people in the community, who put up property bonds. So, whatever else was accomplished by the arrests, <sup>they</sup> served to prove that the community could support us in a pinch.

As before, my only real contact with the white community is through the local librarian. She's real talkative. Every time I go there, (about once a week) she starts a conversation. One day it's an article in the Sunday Times, the next a book I've ordered, or what's going on in Columbus. So one day she asked me if the library in Columbus had opened yet. It was closed because the local Negro kids tried to integrate it. She thought it was a disgrace for the library to be closed. For her the ideal of the distribution of books, segregated or integrated, is paramount. She asked me if I could appreciate how much it meant to her to be able to keep the library integrated, (which it is only in theory, for only a few ~~Negro~~ kids know or dare to go there). She calls the library her "bailiwick", as is ever grateful to Mayor Barnes Marshall that he lets her do what she wants there. Anyway, I said no, I couldn't appreciate how much it meant to her because there seemed to be so much that she wasn't free to do outside the library. I suggested that she might try to publicize to the kids that it was integrated. She said she couldn't do that, i.e. that "they" wouldn't want her to do that. Exactly, I thought, and how can you feel appreciative of such things when you can't do anything to implement them fully, to say nothing <sup>working to change</sup> of anything else around you. She thinks that the present civic administration is the model of <sup>pro</sup>gress. I disagree. The town is business oriented, and therefore responsive to stability, not change, or only such change as is necessary for stability. , as I will show. The editor of the local newspaper was a strong supporter of Goldwater and it is interesting to see his change in stance in his daily column. For a few weeks before the deadline for the local school board to submit its plan for integration of the <sup>schools</sup> (or lose federal funds) one could see him attempting to convince ~~his~~ readers of the inevitable,



while maintaining the rhetoric of <sup>resigned</sup> segregation. He explained how many sleepless nights were being spent considering whether <sup>her</sup> or not to sign. He reminded his readers that it wasn't a question of integrating, or not, but of integrating with federal funds or without. He urged all clubs to set aside one night so that someone from the Chamber of Commerce (white) could discuss the problems with them. So the moral question of integrating is presented solely on economic, on pragmatic, terms. Presumably, then, the pledge was signed, and the board agreed to degregate at the rate of one grade a year. What a ridiculously slow rate! I think that they've already had 11 years of disobeying the law since the Supreme Court decision, so they have their cake and eat it too, or, as Hubert Humphrey <sup>remarked</sup> satirically, "The federal government <sup>ment</sup> will walk the extra mile ~~in~~ before cutting off funds." Really! That sort of thing is calculated to give an illusion of progress. But, after all this softening up that the local newspaper has been doing, ~~NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN PRINTED AS TO~~ ~~THE PLEDGE WAS SIGNED!~~ THE PLEDGE WAS SIGNED! The Negro teachers have been informed, and word has gotten around, but the power structure is suppressing a full disclosure to the Negro Community. But even more than this...

Within the last couple of weeks voter registration has picked up tremendously, the mayor had a meeting with the Negro teachers ~~and~~, scarce believable, told them to go to ~~REGISTER~~ <sup>REGISTER</sup> REGISTER TO VOTE!!! No general announcement has been made to the Negro population at large, but word has gotten out. And with spring the work of our precincts (I'll explain shortly more about this) is paying off, more and more people going to register. What ~~more~~ else went on at the meeting? We just learned that the mayor said that the teachers should discourage parents from sending their kids to integrated schools, he said that, "We are not planning to send ours to yours." And there is talk about a "bi-racial committee". So what's going on? In many ways it appears that the local whites are attempting to make preliminary steps to thwart the work of the FDP in a new way, by recruiting the pseudo-leaders of the Negro community, by enticing them (and hopefully the vast majority of the Negro community, which looks up to these teachers, ministers, businessmen) into an agreement of "moderates" of the status quo, by making "concessions", which allow the well off Negroes to "participate" (i.e. vote). The outlines ~~are~~ are very tentative, but I feel that it marks a new phase in the struggle in West Point. A much more subtle problem will face Negroes in clay, one that deals with questions of leadership and who should lead, and why, and what their qualifications are. I spoke of a tremendous pickup in voter



registration. Actually, only about 100 people-- Negroes-- have gone to register since the beginning of the summer, out of an eligible voting population of 4,500. And of these 100, only about 15 have passed the test. ~~But~~ About 40, including <sup>some</sup> ~~the~~ teachers, have gone down in the last few weeks. But we'll still take a voting bill. Aside from the mayor's magnanimous grant of the franchise to Negro teachers, another thing that aided was the shutting down of Bryan Bros., a packing plant, for a week because of a shortage of cans. Since most of the Negroes that work there don't have time to go to register ordinarily, some went down during that week. Bryan Bros. doesn't take any action against employees who go to register, but it does take action against those who would like a union in. Just a few weeks ago they gave the employees a 7 cent an hour raise because union men were in town. The election will be held in July, I understand. So things ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> get even more complex -- I mean the reaction of the white community to social change -- as more things start to happen. And as you can see, there are pressures and counterpressures that overlap each other.

One of the pressures that we are exerting revolves around the testing of public accommodations and direct action in general. I am writing this a few days after we began to test public accommodations in West Point. I think that the testing is more important as an organizing tactic than in the end it achieves. I mean, most Negroes aren't going to pay \$5 for a room at a motel, even if it is integrated, but in integrating it you draw attention to a ~~social~~ <sup>social</sup> evil and give people a sense of accomplishment, even if they haven't participated directly, when they see that you are doing something to break down barriers. It is especially good in drawing kids into the Mississippi Student Union, since the excitement of direct action ~~draws~~ <sup>appeals to</sup> them. The MSU is designed to teach students about the movement and to ultimately get them to participate in the work of voter registration and political organization. We have about 30-40 kids involved in two communities, and hope to extend it to many more. The kids decided to test public accommodations about three weeks ago, and they wrote a letter to the mayor asking to have an ~~interview~~ <sup>meeting</sup> with him to talk about the problems of ~~public~~ <sup>public</sup> accommodations. Two weeks later they got a reply, saying that he would talk to them the following Friday evening, but in the presence of their parents. They quickly decided that since their parents weren't members of the MSU and weren't going to be testing public accommodations themselves; they would go it alone. 7 ~~people~~ <sup>students</sup> want to the meeting. I drove them up, but stayed in the car



while they met with him. This was, I am sure, the first time that the mayor had ever met with Negroes who frankly, if bluntly, questioned him about the inadequacies of Negro schools and about his using some influence to get businesses to comply with the 1964 Rights Act. From the point of view of what was accomplished, little concrete came from the meeting. But the kids told the mayor that they were going to do some desegregating. His position was that he couldn't tell anyone how to run his business. As to lousy school conditions -- he didn't have any power over the schools. But in a less concrete way it was a great success. For the kids were able to confront the mayor and tell him candidly what they thought of the system and what they were going to do about it. And it was a great propaganda victory. So at the next MSU meeting they decided to test public accommodations the following Saturday. ~~So~~ We got together the day before to do some "role playing." One of the kids played the waiter and others would try to get served, with the eventual results that "policemen" came in and carted them off to jail. On the Saturday there were 18 kids and two COFO workers who participated. We marched up town, and the police caught on very quickly, their cars circled around, ~~keeping~~ waiting to see where we would go. I don't ~~mean~~ <sup>mean</sup> ~~make~~ to make it seem as if this was a picnic, for I was quite scared, especially as we passed through town, across the street from the (unintegrated) poolroom. In front of it were about 10 ~~men~~ slack-jawed with pool sticks in their ~~hands~~ <sup>hands</sup>, telling us their feelings about Negroes in general, and us in particular. We had 9 places that we attempted to go, so we divided into 4 groups. Our group ~~went~~ <sup>went</sup> to the Marshall Motel, owned by the mayor, first. We were followed by two cars of police. We walked in, and the spokesman asked for a single room. The lady, after a momentary start, gave him the form and he filled it out. The sheriff walked in, remarked upon the good weather, and watched. Our first success, so we went into the room and watched a bit of television. Then we went to the Mize Restaurant. A lady, the cashier, met us at the door and said we could not come in. We asked for the manager, she said he wasn't in, and wouldn't be back until 3. We waited by the door, while people passed in and out. Five minutes later she returned and said we could come in. We sat down, were asked to move, did so, were brought water and menus by a very polite waitress. Then the owner came up and asked us if we had come to eat or just to see if we could eat. We replied to eat. He walked away, then returned, very angry. He asked me where I came from and I told him. He



told me to get out and I started to oblige him. Then I told him I had a right to be served there. He said, "I'll serve them," pointing to the three Negroes in the group, "but I won't serve you", pointing to me, "or her", pointing to the Negro girl in the group. So our spokesman said that if he didn't serve some of us, then we'd all leave, which we did.

Then we went to the Southern Inn. There we were informed that it was a private club. We asked why some people from the Justice Dept. had been able to stay there, and he said they must have been guests, or, finally, that they must have "slipped in". None of us had wit enough to ask if we could join the club.

Next we went to McCollum's Drug Store, which we understood had served an integrated group that day. We were <sup>by the manager</sup> told that the soda fountain was closed, even though there were several people eating there, and several unoccupied seats. He didn't know when it had closed, or when it would open. So we left.

While we were doing this, other groups were testing the Coffee Shop, Rose Cafe, Henry Clay Hotel, and Ritz Theater. They were served at the first two. Also refused at the A and W Cafe.

So when we got home we wrote up affidavits about the places that had not served us, and sent them off to the Justice Department, where we hope some action will be taken. The experience was still another example of how confrontation can help to raise the spirits of local Negroes; the word got around very quickly what we had done, and that a Negro had stayed the night in the <sup>Mayor's</sup> ~~Mayor's~~ Motel. It also intensified white resistance, for that night the police arrested <sup>white</sup> men near Mrs. Adams house, where we stay. We don't know what for, but cars had been coming by all day. And some people are receiving threatening phone calls...

This letter is awfully long, and I really haven't got to giving you all the background about precinct organization, <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ is the foundation of the work in Clay County, also about murder in Okaloosa. I'll start quite soon on a new letter filling this in and also telling about our plans this summer.

We shall overcome,

Man: Please don't  
mimes this up. You can show it to anyone  
you want, though. If you can copy it

Jeef