

Adams Co. Jail
(approx. June '65)

Dear John and Bonny,

The stationery is a bit unorthodox-corny to say the least, but theres nothing else to write on here. The jailer will occasionally give me a sheet of paper, but he then confiscates it to see what I've written. Besides, a letter written on toilet paper and smuggled from the jail is a lot more thrilling and civil rightsy. I've been in this lousy hole just a couple hours short of a week, and I think I'm beginning to understand the expression "stir-crazy". Sometimes a feeling of desperation wells up in me and I have to force myself to remain calm, to settle my nerves. Before I ever went to jail I longed for the experience out of curiosity and to put the official stamp on my involvement in the Movement. Now that I've been locked up 4 times in the last 7 weeks, my original enthusiasm is beginning to pale. I hope to God I get out soon and never see another jail! However, that is pure wishful thinking, for the cops are bound to drag me off at least a couple more times this summer.

I don't know if I told you, but upon return to Jackson, I left immediately for Selma where I spent 2 weeks working with the March on Montgomery. From there I returned to Jackson for a week and then came to Natchez, where I've been working for the last 2 months. When I arrived with Mike (24) senior at Berkely and was on the executive committee of the PSM) there wasn't much going on. The two of us were new blood for the project (that's not an opinionated judgement, but what the project director said we were to be), and I guess we succeeded fairly well. We've started to get the community excited and conscious of their position and potentials. We worked primarily with the H.S. students on the theory that youth is less conservative than the adults, and we started demonstrating at the segregated YMCA. We picketed the place twice, marching from our office with placards and singing to the "Y" and then

back again after a couple hours of picketting. At the sight of their kids risking their lives and safety to protest the Southern Way of Life, many adults became interested. The demonstrations really served to spark the Negro community. For instance, we had 600 people at our last mass meeting, an unheard of amount for Natchez. Our last demonstration was a march on a segregated public park (sound like a contradiction in terms? - it is, but that doesn't bother white Mississippians) and we had 100 people in the march--twice as many as ever before - a really exciting occurrence. 3/4ths of the way to the park, the cops stopped us and told us to disperse or be arrested--one of the detectives poked me and asked whether I would comply. Attempting to have leadership stem from the local people here I had been silent, but I replied when asked that for my part I wasn't going to move. They grabbed me, I went limp, the detective twisted my arm and used an electric shock device all over my arms and back, finally stuffed me into the back of the police car. About ten others refused to leave and were also arrested--the cops picked up 20 more demonstrators on their way home. They set bond at \$500 apiece, an outrageously exorbitant amount for our "crime"-unlawful assembly. It's obvious that they figured they had the core of our movement, and they wanted to keep us out of action as long as possible. They sure have succeeded with me. Being a staff member, I feel sort of morally bound to stay in til everyone else gets out, and so it has been. Boy, I sure hope I get sprung tomorrow!

I wouldn't mind it so much if there was somebody in here with me, but the jail, as all Miss. jails, is segregated and so I am on the bottom floor with whites. Mike left for California two days after the 1st demonstration, about a month. (????????????)

That renders me rather conspicuous. It also leads the whites to think that I am the troublemaker, the instigator, the leader, which forbids ill for Pet M. Even when Mike was here, I somehow earned a disproportionate share of hatred of the cops, the civilians, etc. It's starting to catch

up with me--meaning that the potential danger is becoming more real, more actual to me. One incident served effectively to change my passive knowledge of the situation to a realization, complete with a taut feeling in my stomach and a quickening of my pulse, of what the ~~the~~ white attitude of the town could engender. It's like this. If we had marched 1/4 of a mile further last Saturday, I would probably be dead now. There were 150 white men, armed with clubs, bats, chains, knives, etc. waiting for us at the park. And they were for real. They came from 30 miles around in flatbed trucks to be there. Natchez, I might add, is one of the most violent, hardcore racist places in the South. It is headquarters for the Klan for Miss. and Louisiana. Negroes here have suffered under a gruesome reign of terror. And this isn't just the opinion of the Negroes here. Two of the whites in jail with me are pretty friendly--thank God for that--and they affirm that Natchez is worse than that. I mean, it's really a tough scene, this town. So you begin to imagine what nearly took place. So in a way I'm glad we were stopped--altho if the police weren't in the Klan themselves, they might have dispersed the whites which they ~~the~~ should have done. Something like that makes you think. Also, one of the whites who was jailed here yesterday and who has been quite affable and friendly said that there are guys outside planning to get thrown in here on purpose so that they can work me over. This guy was originally put in the city jail before he was transferred here to the county jail. When he was about to be brought over here, several of the local white hoods begged him to beat me up when he got here. One of the cops said that he wouldn't get into trouble with the law if he did beat me. So its understandable that I want to get the hell out of here. And besides the danger from the outside, the guy here keeps harping on how I'm a fool to be here, how I'll be killed if I stick around. This one guy says he knows a dozen guys offhand who would think nothing of shooting me, etc.

This is probably partially an attempt to scare me, but (?) of what they say is true. There are innumerable other stories, threats, etc. I could elaborate on, but I don't want to dwell on it all. I wouldn't be writing this except that I guess it's a type of therapy. Writing relieves some of the agonizing boredom here. Please don't mention any of this to my father or mother for it might scare them. Dad was here for a couple of days (he spoke at a mass meeting and took part in the last demonstration) and he left worried enough. He didn't know anything about the white mob reception committee prepared for us.

I'll be seeing him again at the end of this month under less oppressive circumstances. He'll be in Michigan at relatives on June 28 for a week. I guess I'll head up that way on June 28 for so and spend a week in all away from Natchez. I'm really looking forward to that, not only to see Dad and the clan, but just to get away from here for a short spell.

Well, reading this all over --it looks as though my nerves are a bit on edge--just what the crackers and rednecks want. If I could just get out of here, this rotten jail! It's a lot more comforting to be with friends--people you can trust. But I should make it tomorrow--I believe they'll finally have bail for me then. Plans for the future are still hazy, but I'll probably return to Dartmouth in the Fall, as Dad wants me to do so badly. I promised him that I would, before I came to Miss., and he's holding me to it. Also, there's a limit as to how effective I am here and so it probably will be time to return to college then. I was thinking of taking off for a year or two to go around the world after working here, but that appalled Dad. He suggested instead that I finish my sophomore year and then take my junior year abroad, probably in Africa at Ghana or Kenya. There's some such program in the Presbyterian church which he's confident he can get me into. That sounds pretty good, and I'll guess I'll do that. Well, take it easy, Wish you were here.

Freedom Now, Peter