

P. O. Box 197
Waverly, Va.
July 3, 1965

Dear Dr. Lillibridge:

As you know I have joined SCOPE, a special project of Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. At present I am working as a member of a SCOPE team in Sussex County, Va. We have been here for approximately one week. Virginia is considered a relatively progressive state but this is only partly true. That is, the northern part of the state is pretty much the same as any northern state. However the southern part or Southside Virginia is not this way. Sussex County is a Black Belt rural county. The Negroes outnumber the whites almost two to one yet at the polls the situation is reversed, with the whites over the Negroes two to one. Most of the Negroes in Sussex County are poor, with about one-third earning less than three thousand dollars a year. Yet the white power structure differs from the white power structure in Mississippi or Alabama. Here there is almost total integration, very few places refuse Negroes. The discrimination is much more subtle. They use economic slavery and it is just as effective. Dr. King spoke last night and said, "What is the use of having the privilege of going to an integrated lunch counter if you don't have the price of a hamburger and soda." This is the problem we are faced with down here.

It seems as if the President's War on Poverty would help to relieve the situation here but it doesn't. All the programs that are presented by the government must be sponsored in the community by a bi-racial commission. This is impossible. These programs can also be sponsored by the local government. This is where the vote comes in and is so important to the Negro. This is where our job begins. We must try and convince these people that the vote is important enough to sacrifice their jobs, homes, and present security. This is not a easy thing to do. These people have been "asleep" for a hundred years. They have had it beaten in them for several hundred years that they are inferior and can never hope to be anything else. They are afraid of us, of the Movement, of the white man, and of themselves.

Sussex County is the worst county in Virginia. This is not an idle boast. It is controlled by one very corrupt and ruthless politician. Once, about 10 years ago, a union was formed at this politician's lumber mill (the only industry in the county) and he closed the mill down for six months. Since that time little has been done by the Negroes in the county.

This politician has been unopposed in office for the last twenty-two years. He owns the only local bank and much of the property in the county.

The Negroes have enough here to worry about with just this one politician but there is more. The most powerful of the Negroes in the county have sold out to this politician. They have gotten loans and the police have orders to overlook many illegal things that they do in exchange for these Negro leaders keeping their people quiet. If a local man tries to do anything he is told to shut up or get out by his own leaders. There is a tremendous fear that we must overcome here. Part of this fear is based on ignorance. Most of the people have not gotten a high school education. They think that this politician has the right to fire them if they register to vote.

There are many more problems that we are faced with. If we can convince someone that they should vote and to do this they must register we run into all sorts of problems. The registrar's office is open for one day a month and sometimes for a half a day. When they go to register they must pay the poll tax for the last three years. They can only pay the poll tax between the months of November and May in certain years. And the requirements go on and on. It looks like we won't have the voting rights bill to work with until August so we have a lot of work to do and problems to overcome. SCOPE is also interested in setting up community organization. This is the only county in the whole South that had absolutely no organization when SCOPE (us) came in. This is also the only county in the South that SCOPE went into that hadn't asked for SCOPE. I could go on forever about the problems that these people are faced with. But the main reason I wrote to you was to ask something of you. I was planning on staying in the South for only a few weeks and then going home and working. I have already written my boss explaining why I won't be in. However, I don't have enough money to go to school next year unless I get a part-time job. I won't be back in Chico until the first part of September which is late to try and get a job. If you could ask around or something. I can't return to school unless I have a job. About the only experience I have is typing and filing. I have worked in kitchens before, washing dishes and serving. Any help you could give me would really be appreciated.

Sincerely,

P.S. After re-reading this letter I feel that I must ask you to keep it as private as possible. I don't care who reads it but if anything were printed in the papers I could be in a lot of trouble.