

12 August 1965
[Columbia, Mississippi]

Dear Mom and Dad,

This is really frustrating. I'm trying to write the long report in snatches between construction and going downtown on errands and dealing with local people and canvassing, and I'm afraid some of its continuity may not be exceptional. Also, I had answered less of your questions than I thought, so it may be a long time in completion.

... The suggestion of coming home early at all I hadn't considered, but doing so would relieve the lot of the guilty feelings I have about not studying my German, an impossible activity at this point. Also, now that [snip] has pointed one thing out, I can recognize it in all of us -- the malnutrition we have been generally undergoing is lowering our mental capabilities and separating me (at least) more and more from the attitude necessary for school work, though I (as in the past at the beginning of the year) feel quite enthusiastic about the idea of school... maybe this year --.

At any rate, [snip] proposed September 7 as a meeting date. If this were okay, I would leave here, somewhere around the anniversary of our march. However the confusing part is that the majority of the Mississippi workers are planning to go to Washington to lobby for the challenge, which apparently (against all our expectation) is going to come to a vote after all, and again is forecast to lose. They are leaving on or about the 23rd. Now, after my experience with our dear Mr. Corbett on this issue, I have no desire whatsoever to see him again nor any confidence that would make the least bit of difference to him. I find myself very cynical about Congress as a whole; there are plenty of people going up from down here, including probably our whole project.

I came down here to work as long as possible; apparently my commitment is not total since I am strongly tempted to leave at least a week or two early for personal reasons, but since I would probably leave anyway for school, I wanted to get as much done as possible to get this project on its feet (it is the only live one in this district, I am afraid) before we leave. So I would rather stay down here. If I was alone I could still do a lot as far as canvassing and meeting with whites and possibly desegregation, and I would probably be able to get housing outside of this house for the five days necessary, and leave when the rest returned. Considering the attitudes of the mayor and police, I seriously doubt there would be any increase in danger whatsoever.

I am trying to convince the people here to stay put, but they are interested in the direct action possibilities and a couple in the political science aspect of it, as well as meeting Mississippi people there. I suppose I want to stay for a perhaps insignificant five days so that I can ease the guilt at leaving here. At any rate, what would you think of all this?

It's about time to go downtown, and so I'll leave this here temporarily. I understand the feelings about writing -- I'm in the same boat. There's so many other things to feel guilty about: I think we can write that one off. Thanks again, ever so much for calling, and good luck to us all...

[For the complete set of my Mississippi 1964-65 letters, see
<http://dickatlee.com/issues/mississippi>]