

Mississippi Letters -- Overview

26 August 2013

Since I can imagine the list of letters might be overwhelming, here is a brief outline of the contents of each, in case you are looking for something in particular

November 11, 1964 -- Chicago (about the Gulf Coast)

- Trip down
- Jackson
- Truck ride to the Coast, end in Biloxi
- Biloxi: street canvassing, curse blazing white house paint
- Beginning of Freedom Vote work
- Ocean Springs: vote canvassing
- Is simplistic jingoism better than nothing?
- Considering Vanleave, Poplarville, Wiggins, Picayune
- Votes not as important as letting communities know we are there and can help
- Value of going on workday (white men at work)
- Danger of (Uncle) Tom Negroes
- Vanleave -- spread out, few votes, escape from white clearing, white Goldwater voter
- Comedy (!) of missing persons and cars
- Gulfport to Wiggins, canvass, run into the missing persons (complicated story)
- Heading for Picayune -- fear, hubcap hiding places, "She's Not There"
- Canvassing ended when White Citizens Council shows up
- The Dr. Mason contradiction --
 - Tough, not non-violent, pro-traditional Democrat, but need his support
 - COFO knuckles, agrees to support segregationist Sen. Stennis
 - Bitter arguments until accept inevitability, and leave
- Thoughts on movement leadership, commodity food

June 25, 1965 -- Washington

- Beginning of orientation, staying 40 blocks from activity
- Kinoy speech on challenge to seating of traditional Democrats
- Finding a place by doing KP duty
- Inverted prejudice

June 30, 1965 -- Washington

- Police hassles
- Possibly going to go to Greenwood
- Lobbying Congress
- Will be working for MFDP

July 2, 1965 -- Washington

- Now definite I'll be going
- MFDP's Jackson address
- More lobbying -- great experience!

July 3, 1965 -- from home

ID's sent, want typewriter?

Legal advice --

Pittsburgh COFO bail fund

What to do if arrested

Pittsburgh contacts

Call them rather than local COFO lawyers, who may be too busy

July 7, 1965 -- Hattiesburg, MS

Orientation (started July 5)

The racial problem of northern (clueless) whites vs (experienced) Negro grassroots

Jackson (July 3-4) stay-over was nightmare -- locals breaking up office

Assignments expected tomorrow, will be going to Greenwood

July 11, 1965 -- from home

Mother philosophizing on politics, disturbance/equilibrium re: Coleman judicial appointment

Thoughts on importance of having racial antagonism in the open

July 11, 1965 -- Laurel, MS

Basic orientation plan

3-day Hattiesburg orientation

County MFDP heads would choose volunteers

Plan messed up:

Volunteers coming out of jail in Jackson grabbed by project directors

Only half left for orientation

Resentment on part of those following the rules

No attempt to adjust planned numbers, some ended up with many vols, others none

My situation

Invited in DC to go to Greenwood

Hattiesburg: invited to Columbia/Marion County by Jake & Curt (from Biloxi 64)

No FDP org there, so will be doing more COFO-style work

Greenwood people left w/out me

To wait in Laurel for Curt to set up in Columbia

Firebombing of Greenwood car

To Laurel July 9, COFO office firebombed while we were in DC

Helping w/canvassing -- sometimes intense

July 17, 1965 -- Laurel, MS

Expect to leave for Columbia on morrow

5th Congressional District projects wracked by racial strife except for ours

Volunteers came close to leaving out of concern for damaging the effort

Tension with local whites, defensive measures taken

List of personal supplies wanted

July 21 & 27, 1965 -- from home

Need a map to follow your reporting; don't assume we know what you're talking about

How to deal with medical problems: Medical Committee on Human Rights

August 9, 1965 -- Columbia, MS (actually written in several sittings, sent in instalments)

- Background on Marion County
- Rehash of events leading us to be here
- Apparently arrived July 18
- Town governance, demographics and layout
- The House -- description, people (Sara, Ann, Sam) photos
- The phone calls
- Casing the library
- NOT Freedom Riders (no car :-))
- Sam in the Courthouse -- photos of Courthouse
- Conditions -- of house, ants, rats
- Standing watch
- Bombing/shooting & aftermath (police questioning, what was left)
- Repairing
- Philosophizing about organizing and responsibility
- Desegregation
 - The library (insignificant)
 - The difference between integration and desegregation
 - The need for confrontation, an incident
 - Plan movie desegregation for Sunday 8/15 (independent of community consultation)
 - Unfair trial catalyzes immediate desegregation at two cafès on Friday
 - To warn or not warn the mayor
 - Sunday glitches
- The supermarket -- hitting where it hurts -- Sat, Aug 21
 - Details of trial
 - Planning meetings, outside source of morale
 - Vignettes from picketing
 - Violent attack on girl
- Who will get organized first (song verses)
- The really risky effort:
 - Same day, Saturday night at cafè
 - Plans vs. events
 - The event
 - The chase (w/map)
- Telephone song

August 12, 1965 -- Columbia, MS (during the composition of 8/9 letter)

- Thinking about plans for returning north
- Most of the others going to DC for direct action
- Want to stay on alone -- one last chance to accomplish something, assuage guilt for leaving

August 15, 1965 -- from home

- 8/9 letter is a cliff-hanger
- Fundraising for COFO
- Strong advice not to stay on alone

August 24, 1965 -- Columbia, MS

Slowing down

CORE head from Duritta, LA upbraids the church congregation

Canvassing for DC trip and getting people to register

Have to hang the door

Sam leaves

[**August 28, 1965**] -- written in June 2013

Supermarket picketing pictures

Jailing and beating

Lewis, organizer from Bogalusa

Reasons for thinking all this occurred on 8/28

August 28, 1965 -- from home (notes taken by my father, not a letter)

COFO Bail fund

Notes on how to bail me out

[**August 30-September 1**] -- notes taken at home, and recollection

Trial results

Departure -- luggage chicanery

September 2, 1965 -- Rev. Bill McAtee

Introduction and context

School desegregation controversy

Formation of "The six" (2 white, 4->3 black ministers)

Rev. McAtee's July 20-Aug 13 absence

Letter to key businessmen & arrival of civil rights ("CR") workers

August 2 formation of bi-racial steering committee

CR desegregation activities, Columbia non-stereotypical until shoplifting problem

Leaders' Statements of Belief and editorial in newspaper

August 21 commencement of grocery store picketing

Ground-rule setting between mayor, ministers, CR workers

August 24 school desegregation settled

August 26 grocery store door-blocking

August 27 start to set up meeting of 150 white leaders to meet 9/3, blacks 9/3

August 28

confrontation and arrests at grocery store

reference to "outsider" leader (Louis Ashley)

Ashley's request for parade permit for next day

August 29

rumors of Klan rally and Deacons for Defense counter force

highway patrol pulled in from Natchez

only a few marchers showed up (ministers had spoken against it)

pulling together list of black leaders for 9/4 meeting

August 30 trial of CR arrestees

September 1

"the six" coalesce, whites understand the blacks' inner strength

awareness of the changing county power structure

December 21, 1965 -- from home

Christmas card from me to Mayor McLean

Epilogue -- ongoing

University of Chicago stark choice -- return to MS in fall, lose scholarship

Finding Ira Grupper, Rev. Bill McAtee and Chris Watts (historical society)

Bill McAtee's book

Finding Sara Shumer

Naomi Stauber's rabbi father's similar experience to Bill McAtee's in South Carolina

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