

Scanned from a carbon copy of letter from Dick Atlee to his family composed after a week and a half of "Freedom Vote" work in Mississippi in the Fall of 1964

8 November 1964
[Chicago, Ill.]

Dear Mom and Dad and Tom,

All I can say is, the trip was the easy part. Things were kind of clear cut while we were down there, but now that we're back, things are confusing. I guess I may be sorry at some future time for saying this, but it's kind of hard to readjust. The worries I had about not being able to fit back in with people (get this, after only 10 days) were unfounded, but getting back to responsibilities is kind of a shock (only 10). Things seem sort of unreal and I felt, up until Biology class yesterday, that the things I'm learning in class just don't have any meaning for anything. Bio snapped me out of it (that class is by now my favorite by far, having been told on an English paper that I completely missed the point, and getting below average on a Chem test -- before I left -- and having a good degree of certainty of having failed Friday's math test -- for reasons which should present no problems during the rest of the course). And to top it all off, SNCC [*Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*] is sponsoring a party (eh wot?) to honor the returnees from that strange land from whose bourne etc etc. The really good thing about the party is that it's the first one I've had any solid reason for going to in the last five years, and it might help defer some of the transportation expenses. Oh, enough of this drivel. I would like very much to tell you about this trip, and in case you wonder about the difference in tone of the single spaced [here, indented] section, it is copied off the brief journal I kept of the first few days down there. Put on the silver-lined telepathy helmets and here....

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You all (three) get together and take a taxi to the train station, and manage to get the ticket and get out on the platform after underpaying the poor taxi driver who doesn't complain. The train trip is not anything special, and you all sit trying to really understand what you have got into (that state down there always seems like a dark place of anger -- this a completely accurate description of the feeling). You meet some people from the University of Illinois who have been on the train about twenty minutes. They are asking each other if they are all feeling the same sick feeling. They are going, too. You wonder why you feel so blank and uncomprehending and they don't. Twenty minutes passes. During the whole time you look out in the darkness, and the main cross streets approach and are a long road of lights going to nowhere and perspective and are then gone. The houses are not daytime gray blocks. They have lights, and for the first time you begin to get the idea that there are people in those, among the lamps and curtains and tables, and for the first time you realize -- a feeling that you really can grasp -- how damn many people there are in the world. Really grasping it. But if you aren't used to observations such as these, you sort of wonder why you think them, and then you wonder if you'll ever see the paths and patches of light again. It seems kind of stupid to remember feeling that, the somehow almost certainty that you won't. But now you're going south and what you haven't been able to feel is there in the seat in back of the seat which is in front of you. About twenty minutes from leaving the station. (That coincidence still sticks hard, even after the doubt is gone). And the feeling stays through the

night and through the morning, even with the apparent innocence and real beauty of the northern part of the other country you have arrived in. Lasts for some reason up until the time you see a farmer walking down the road with a shotgun under his arm. (... "all people in Mississippi have guns...."). Oddly it fades off after that until you hit Jackson.

In Jackson you wander around nervously with the other six, going off with another guy (Phil Russell from International House) to try to get a street map. Finally the call gets through to COFO [*Council of Federated Organizations*] headquarters and they come to pick us up. You are the one to stand outside and watch for them. For ten minutes nothing happens. You watch a cop go over to a police telephone and call a number and then hang up. He meanders around until the phone rings, then goes back and starts talking. About that time a Volkswagen pulls around the corner, and the cop starts gesticulating forcefully at it. When it pulls over to the curb just past him, you notice that the pair of guys inside it is integrated. Wandering over to the opposite curb, you lean on a railing and watch the cop talking angrily to the driver. He pulls out the ticket book and another police car pulls up. They both get out and tell the driver to pull up the block. You go to tell the others, and just then the Negro guy comes running around the corner asking for a driver. The other one from Chicago leaves with him, and a bunch of people appear and take you to COFO headquarters, where you wander around for a while and then go over to Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) headquarters for Orientation. We find out quite a bit about the state in general and where one can and need not expect trouble. The specific information about specific areas is left up to the Project Director of the Project to which you choose to go...

Sometimes you wonder just what your attitude toward adversity under such circumstances is. Physical discomfort and sometimes even harsh appearing surroundings are a snap to overcome, even to enjoy as part of the whole experience. But the uncertainty is deadly. You get here, with a pleasant welcome, even. Late in the afternoon you choose to go to Carthage, a dangerous part of the state, maybe to test yourself. Later it begins to seem you would be a disadvantage in your inexperience and that you might serve better on the coast, an "easy place." You feel disappointed (why? heroics?) but resign yourself to the inevitable decision which comes late at night transferring you to the coast. Next morning this is specifically Moss Point. Finally we arrange a ride with a guy going down in a truck within the hour. We go out for a pop, come back in, and he's gone, so we help around the office and attend a staff meeting which bares many of the organizational difficulties, personality clashes, and other problems affecting the movement. But the disorganization you expected. The location and transportation setbacks you didn't, and they weren't finished yet. Early in the afternoon the truck driver Bob Williams reappears and you jump in the truck. He comes up, abducting one of the female staff on the way and we're off. After the front rocker-arm came loose twice, Bob had it welded and except for a violent right-left swerving, the truck worked and we continued on. We got to Moss Point only to find that we hadn't signed out and for seven hours we were considered missing and Jackson office was frantically worried. (((This trip occurred late in the afternoon and quite a bit in the darkness. Watching the white lines flashing under the middle of the hood -- staying in the middle of the road so the almost uncontrollable swerving didn't throw the truck off the road -- and the dark trees close on both sides of the road, you can't shake the feeling that something was definitely missing. Later it occurs to you that the something is a low, dangerous sounding music with a strange beat.

So strong is the tradition for beginnings to TV mysteries and documentary films. Each time you think of that music the tingles begin.))) Meanwhile we found we had been replaced and would have to go to Gulfport. At 11:30 we finally had dinner, faced with the prospect of another night on a hard floor God knows where, and no one expecting us anywhere.

Nevertheless, the travelling party of Party (FDP [Freedom Democratic Party]) heads finds you a place with a family and you sleep on the floor after all, but voluntarily so the bigwigs can have the beds. The lady of the house gives you a blanket to lie on and you spend a very comfortable night in an externally ugly house with a very pleasant inside in a neighborhood with more open space than yours has. You get up early, wake the bigwigs, but they dawdle around and fall asleep and you can leisurely eat breakfast and then argue and discuss aspects of politics and the movement. For all their power, the Party heads seem outwardly silly. It's only when it becomes necessary for them to be serious that you see how earnest they are. So you gaily head off for Gulfport, stop in Biloxi, and end up staying there.

((To indicate how easy the town is -- having much commerce from outside and a U.S. Air Base to boot -- almost as soon as you arrive you and Phil and another guy, Curt, a Negro guy who persuaded you to stay in Biloxi) all go down to ask the Chief of Police if the Project can use a mobile public address system to publicize the Freedom Vote. He is sugar-friendly and says sure, sure, just don't use it at night or in the business district and it's OK with him.)))

There are a lot of nice guys there and a very earnest and hardworking girl. You change your name (to Duck) to avoid being confused with the project director (Dickie Flowers) and start sanding floor tiles for the community center. Shortly you go off passing out info on the FDP and the Freedom Vote, in the process getting bit by a dog. You end up staying out alone way past dark and in a way hope that they will be worried (but it a safer place than up North). All that you get is the cold remnants of dinner: rice and butter-beans-beef mixture. So you start working on a Biloxi map which after about 2-1/2 hours you find cannot be transferred to a stencil. The dinner sets up a discouragement which lasts in spite of a second delicious dinner and the antics of a little girl who drives you nuts. And you begin to feel tired. (This will serve as an indication of the everyday stuff which went on the whole time.)

Wednesday is more canvassing, street by street, (except for a district meeting for the 5th Congressional District, at which the most important decision for you is that Biloxi accepts responsibility for the northern communities of Wiggins, Poplarville, Picayune, and Vancleave -- more on these later). Canvassing is funny. You don't get disinterested, like in door-to-door selling, but in a way it hurts more when you get turned down ("No, ahm too old to vote," "Ah think ahd better wait for my husband," and even "No! (slam!)"). Wednesday afternoon is canvassing in the rain, Thursday in the hot sun (over 80 degrees) as you silently curse the inventor of white house paint (in fact, even vocal cursing becomes easier, and you even learn the authentic pronunciation of "mo'fuckin'" which was always somewhat an enigma before, but which is heard there more frequently than "damn" is here). Friday is the first day of the election.

En route from Jackson the ballots disappeared. You don't get them until 12 noon, and then only after finding out they have been in Moss Point since 6 AM (the Project Director was drunk). All the ballot boxes are set up, but the turnout is poor (which can be written off as being on a workday, and a payday at that). This is kind of disappointing, like the 4 hours spent walking all over the city Thursday night trying to get cars to use in the northern communities. But hope still springs. Saturday a bunch of you pile into the cars the Project has had assigned to it and go over to Ocean Springs for door-to-door balloting (Ocean Springs is tighter than Biloxi -- the people there are really economically afraid, and Dickie Flowers was arrested there Thursday for speeding and reckless driving in a school zone (he was going 17 mph after school hours) and fined \$29 (\$25 fine, \$4 for "traffic education" ?!), which is the second arrest Biloxi Project has had all year (another indication of the easiness of the area).

It is in Ocean Springs that you get your first guilty feelings about the election. A lot of people who finally vote (after spiels and explanations lasting up to 20 minutes) refuse to sign, and mark only an X in the signature book. (Out of the 16 votes I got in 1-1/2 hours, 14 signed X). ((This made me all the more determined in my explanations of the Freedom Vote. And then in the middle of one of these, some of which became almost harangues, I stepped outside of myself and thought "My God, I have become a fountain of jingoism." Which was exactly what I was.)) You find it necessary to describe Senator Stennis and Representative Colmer as "segregationists" and Dr. Henry and Mrs. Gray as "Negro integrationists." This is one thing in a campaign, but in an actual election, can it be considered right to do this? You hit (i.e. run into) a lady who is very old and who doesn't seem to grasp what you are saying, even in the most blatantly jingoistic terms, and when you finally convince her to vote, you have to guide her hand it is so shaky. Afterward you wonder if all you were doing was steadying her hand, as you later say to many people that it is imperative that they mark their own ballot (even their husbands can't mark it for them). At first you ask them to fold their ballot so you won't see it, but this seems so meaningless that you even forget that and even go so far as to say, if you notice they voted only for Johnson, "Are you sure you wouldn't want to vote for Dr. Henry and Mrs. Gray (or: "these two integrationists")?" And in spite of all this you get only 16 votes. One of the Negro guys gets 36. Later that night, in Biloxi, he gets 35 to your 8, and in Vancleave on Sunday 26 when the sum of the efforts of the other six people amounted to 7. It turns out that his trick was to say, "Do you want to vote?" If the answer is no, then "I have the ballots right here." If still no, then "It's free" (this apparently netted quite a few). If again, no, "You aren't supporting Goldwater, are you?" You begin to wonder if your method is so bad, after all, considering the circumstances. You find out Phil plays on the threat of Goldwater being elected and the social security and relief support being taken away. Saturday night, under a street lamp in Biloxi, you haul out a ballot (more appropriate and easier to come by than the back of used envelope) and write:

Rationale: In a way it's better than the normal election. There are fewer candidates, and thus fewer unknown candidates. And at the risk of jingoism the voters are getting a (admittedly biased) much better explanation of the candidates than they would otherwise.

This is the turning point in the major battle of the trip over conflict of conviction. Once you see the election in a constructive light, as something more than an opinion poll, more than just to see if people are interested, rather as something to make people interested or at least start them along

a path toward political awareness, than the jingoistic, perhaps even hypocritical and a bit dishonest means can be seen to in the end be justified by the end.

Saturday night you spend on a night-spot circuit with three of the Negro guys from the Project. They are looking for drinks and women. You feel kind of bad when no drinks turn up, but somewhat relieved than no women turn up.

But the important part about Saturday night is the Gulfport-Biloxi-Moss Point meeting on trips to Picayune, Poplarville, Wiggins, and, Vancleave. Vancleave isn't too bad, and Biloxi volunteers to take it. It is decided to choose Picayune over Poplarville (mainly because it has a more concentrated Negro community, and because Biloxi has a contact in Picayune who drew up a map and met with you Thursday night) and to go to Wiggins if Picayune comes off OK. Now how about Picayune and Wiggins? The group that went into Picayune last year was arrested, put in jail, freed late at night and taken to the edge of town, where they found their gas tanks filled with water. They spent the night walking the 20 miles to Poplarville (little better than Picayune) from where they called for help. A Negro group went to Wiggins last year and was driven out, with the warning that if any whitefaces came with them the next time, they would all be shot. The meeting lasts almost 4 hours. In the course of it, the original plan for Sunday is dropped, and early Monday morning is substituted. Since almost the whole Biloxi project is going, arrests Sunday would paralyze the Biloxi election, while Monday would see many of the whites going to work, which might stall any trouble if you hit the town around 6:30 and got votes until everyone was at work (and maybe get votes from housewives later). This certainly does not give promise of a large number of votes, and an equivalent number of votes could be obtained on the coast in time, but the main purpose which arises from the meeting is to make it known to the Negro communities in Picayune and Wiggins that you are still interested. The fact of your being there carries a lot of weight and will get around. Thus the idea is to spark a movement there if there is any potential for one. Also it is decided to go in integrated groups. The danger is not much greater, since once you hit Picayune, segregated or otherwise, and start canvassing, you will be known to the white community, since apparently a large number of Negroes (Toms, after Uncle Tom) are deputized by the County Sheriff's Office and are on the watch for such things. (The contact in Picayune narrowly missed being found out when two of his most trusted friends turned out to be Toms.) And they reputedly have less compunction about shooting you directly than the regular leos (law enforcement officers) do.

Sunday night rolls around. You get to bed early. Around midnight a bunch of the guys from the Project come barging into the Freedom House (where you sleep, as opposed to the Community Center, where you eat and out of which you work) with the news that the 3 guys from Moss Point have decided not to go. Then they go out for a last binge before going over to pick up Moss Point's car (a 1963 Oldsmobile, rented, like Biloxi's 1964 Chevrolet Impala, for power in case a fast getaway becomes necessary). You lie in bed and wonder what the morrow may bring, wishing more and more that you had been writing the "Biography of a Decision (on the trip into the northern communities)" that you have been thinking about for several days. But you must wonder...

Sunday you went to Vancleave. The houses are out in the wilderness, about a quarter mile apart in Vancleave, surrounded by coniferous forest. A place of dreams if you had been just passing

through, but Vancleave for a COFO worker is no place to relax. You all piled out of the Impala and start walking down the various roads to talk to people, while the car went down the main road slowly. You and Jake spend about 20 minutes talking to one lively family and the next five houses you visit have already been hit. Then you meet the car and drive through a long stretch of no houses and run into Phil (and Bobby, the guy with the phenomenal luck at getting votes, but Bobby has ridden off with a lady down the road further). You turn off the road and end up in a dump on dirt road banked at about 15 degrees and eroded in big gashes. Dickie conks the car out 9 times trying to get out. Next you see a sign for a tavern and you drive up the dirt road. No tavern, but through the trees another ramshackle house. You ask Dickie if he thinks it's Negro (there are quite a few white Creoles with white ideas in that area) and he says sure and drives down a path with no more than 8" clearance between the car sides and the trees. You drive into the clearing and a lady's face appears. White. The word flashes through your mind and your stomach knots up and then you realize the car is in reverse. Dickie conked out 5 times getting out of that clearing. Meanwhile for some reason all of you in the car are almost collapsing with suppressed laughter, while no one has the nerve to look back and see if there is a shotgun. Luckily there isn't. You greet the husband on the way out and neither car has a chance to collect itself. Still no Bobby, however, and it is getting dark. You drive back through town and visit another part of the Negro community, still spread all over creation. Very few votes anywhere. On the way back through town you meet Bobby. He has 26 votes. He walked into one house and found a whole clan, all of whom wanted to vote. He came out of the house and ran into a car loaded with Coldwater stickers. The white guy inside said "What're you doing." Bobby says, "Getting votes. Wanna vote?" The other guy answered, "Sure," cast his ballot for Goldwater, and drove away. Vancleave is strange. The most dangerous instances are the funniest there. But it is getting dark and you must get to bed early...

Monday morning. You get up at 3:00. You are to meet the Gulfport crew of four at Gulfport at 5:00. You go to the Community Center. No one is there except Ruth, who is fixing breakfast. Barry Clemson arrives (the white assistant project director who in reality runs the project and is a really swell guy to boot). Then Phil and Bobby. But Dickie and Curt and Jake and Bennie (a real livewire who refused to go to Picayune) and George (whose brother died while we were there) don't show. You call up Moss Point. Someone half asleep says yeah, they got the car. What kind? A green Chevy. You rush out in the street. There is a green Chevy. You rush over to it. Someone is asleep in it. It looks like Curt. You open the door and shake him awake. He is a total stranger. He falls asleep as you say oops and slam the door. By 6:30 you have checked all the jails they could be in and they're neither here nor there. Barry writes off Picayune and Wiggins (since the disappearers had the Impala and were going to get the Oldsmobile we had neither of the powerful cars) and decides to go to Saucier (pron. Soe-sha), which is almost all Negro and relatively safe. About then, a bunch from Moss Point comes by on their way to Jackson to drop off the Oldsmobile. No one had come by for it, they say, and so the mystery deepens. Barry gets the Oldsmobile and we leave for Gulfport. Feeling somewhat, no -- very -- cheated out of some long awaited excitement, you try to argue him into going at least to Wiggins, but he says he doesn't have Dickie's authorization (funny, since he does more running of the Project than Dickie does). In Gulfport, the Project Director says that since Saucier is within the coast sphere of influence, no gesture is necessary on their account, and he can get more votes in Gulfport for the time spent. So Barry decides to go to Wiggins and three from Gulfport pile in with us. The

nervousness increases as you find you are unable to get a lock-gas cap (the Impala had one, and had a locked hood as well).

In Wiggins you are very careful. Barry stays with the car, slowly driving along beside the six of you as you go from door to door. It seems so absurd. It is a pleasant little community, the sort you would enjoy driving through on your way somewhere. Then a Volkswagen drove by. And came back. And went by a third time. And disappeared. You go on canvassing. And suddenly...!!!...you run into Dickie and Benny and George and Curt and Jake and the Impala. It turns out they went to Moss Point and asked the Project Director for the car. He said OK, wait a second, and went back to sleep. This happened about three times, and it wasn't until 6:30 that they found out the car had left for Biloxi. They got back to Biloxi to find that Gulfport had called with the news that you had left for Wiggins. They picked up Dickie, who had been sleeping in a car right next to the Freedom House all the time, and headed for Wiggins. Once the forces regroup, you decide to hit Picayune.

You stop at a store to call up and let Biloxi know plans. Barry is trying to speed things up as the deputy sheriff drives up. He gets out and proceeds, amid laughter from the local people, to get your names and license plates. He asks Dickie where you are from. Dickie says Harrison County. He goes back and notices the license plate on the car is from Rinds County. He goes into a huff, and insists that Dickie is lying, even when you explain to him the cars were rented in Jackson. It is delightful to see the disbelief on his face as he asks addresses and gets more and more "709 Main St. Biloxi's" from white and Negro alike. But he has apparently left his equalizer and shells at home so he is not very aggressive. He arrests no one, and when he checks Barry's drivers' license, Dickie offers his and is told that if he really wants to show it he can go down to the sheriff's office. So we left Stone County, followed all the way out. And after making a few wrong turns we went through Hancock and hit Pearl River County.

Everyone feels a bit confident, or at least does not show it [any fear]. The little green sign (Leaving Hancock Co./Entering Pearl River Co.) approaches. Jake is following Barry, around 65 mph. We pass the sign. Suddenly there is a bloodcurdling scream (if ever blood curdled, it did then). Jake jumps involuntarily and the car almost goes off the road (two wheels on the shoulder). It is Benny. (I don't know if he was fooling around or whether he just realized he was headed for Picayune.) And you know now just how much confidence and how much fear there is. The whole car jumped. And your heart begins to go faster. A few minutes later you realize you are lost. Barry, driving ahead in the Oldsmobile, stops to ask a white lady the way, and all of you in the Impala almost scream. But she shows no surprise at the integrated cars and both cars continue. Barry passes a crossroad, stops, backs up, looks confused, and finally goes right. Now no one in the Impala knows where the group is, and in the uncertainty fear begins, and you feel your heart really accelerate. (Going down that innocent country road in open country, with fear in the air everywhere, the radio (at full blast) started playing a song by the Zombies called "She's Not There." Again, it seems silly to think of this, but it is a minor-key song, and somehow seems just outside of complete understandability. In that context it was enough to make you want to turn and get the hell out of there. Every time I hear that song now, I feel a much muted version of that fear. But then it was like a wild singing of gospel hymns might be to a revivalist on the brink of conversion. Where earlier there had been an exhilaration and pride in the danger, there is now fear.

Many precautions have been taken. In Hancock County we got out, ripped out all the signature pages in the notebooks and put them into the hubcaps. We had left the map of Picayune behind, not planning to come, but I had memorized it while waiting on line to get Barry's new license plates, and I drew another one up and gave it to Barry in Hancock Co.

Then suddenly, with really no warning, you are in Picayune. So suddenly that Barry gets into the wrong lane and has to do some illegal jockeying. With the map in mind you try to figure out where you are, but can't, and Jake follows Barry. The group ends up in one of the three Negro sections of town. After about 3/4 hour some of the guys get nervous and you leave for another section. The two cars take different streets. You are at a door almost getting a vote after 10 minutes of persuasion when the Impala drives up and honks and you have to get the hell out of there. They are becoming extremely nervous, since a Council (White Citizens' Council) car has been driving around the neighborhood for about 20 minutes (you can tell them by the CB radio antenna). You go around the corner, and after 5 minutes (hours) of confusion you pick up and leave. Now the Impala is in the lead, and the only map is in your head. You try to remember all the escape routes, and the only good one is right smack through the middle of town. At the light (red, naturally) you sit trying to look as small as possible. And then leave the town at 35 mph (like walking slowly along, with a snarling dog running around your legs, trying not to show fear). But it was 75-80 mph the rest of the way. Mission accomplished? It will probably be quite a while before anyone finds out. Your car has gotten 10 votes. The other has got 54. And it's all over.

After that, just about anything would be an anticlimax. Most of the noon and evening is spent counting votes and classifying them. Your job is to gather the scattered pages of the signature books and match them up with affidavits signed by the poll watchers. (You give up after about 6 hours of this, when there turn out to be too many affidavits. It turns out when you get to Jackson the next day that there is another book of signatures inside the back car seat where it had been hidden on the way to Picayune.)

The local NAACP holds an election-eve meeting at 7:30. The Biloxi NAACP is run by a Dr. Mason, one of the most powerful men in the city. In the Negro community he is apparently God, and his word is Right. He is wealthy, and owns a black Cadillac and yellow Mustang, and sports both. When the Biloxi beaches were integrated a few years ago, he ran the show. When things seemed to be running well, he got into his car and started away when he noticed a few local whites beating up a Negro on the beach. He got out, ran over to them, and sent both of the whites to the hospital with his fists. It seems that everything he is, COFO isn't. And yet without his support, COFO apparently is almost a dead duck in Biloxi. Unfortunately, the main showdown came as a result of the election. Dr. Mason is a Democrat, a Party Democrat. He supports who runs on his party ticket. Senator Stennis is a Democrat. Senator Stennis is a segregationist in every sense of the word. Dr. Mason is a Negro. He heads a civil rights organization. Dr. Mason supports Senator Stennis. In fact, at that meeting he insists that if a person does not vote for a straight party ticket, his ballot will be invalidated. According to the COFO people, this is an outright lie (they even checked with the State Election Commissioner). Barry and Ruth and a couple of others go to the NAACP meeting on behalf of the FDP. After they make their position known (simply that you can vote for the electors of President Johnson without having to vote for

Stennis or Colmer) Mason is forced to crudely shut them up. But according to Barry it hurts him politically, and Barry, after Mason spends an over-lengthy amount of time talking about raising funds for COFO, is apparently almost politically forced into saying: in the interests of unity etc. etc. COFO will not oppose Senator Stennis. When you hear this, after having spent a whole week telling people to vote against Senator Stennis as a bad white segregationist, what else can you feel but disillusioned. You feel you can't really help in such an election, and decide to leave Tuesday morning. You talk to Phil and he agrees. After a bitter argument with Barry, during which the political inevitability of the move really shows up, you go to bed and Phil goes out with Dickie and gets drunk on two cans of beer and proposes to one of the Moss Point Project girls, who says she'll marry him if she ever happens to end up in Chicago. Then Phil comes home and you both think audibly about the week for a while.

The next morning you get out of bed early to avoid running into people, and with normal luck run into Ruth at the Community Center, which precipitates another bitter argument. This calms down, and Barry arrives with Curt and it flares up, and only really subsides when you accept the inevitability of the decision. The parting is on good terms, and you head for Jackson with Dickie and Phil. And so it is over.

The thought of the similarity between this and a revolution stays on. You think of Orwell and the Spanish Revolution, and the disillusionment with the inevitable politicking to consolidate power which follows the revolution and sometimes kills it. And on the other hand you have a situation similar to the one following the Soviet Revolution. People like Dickie Flowers and Thimon, project leaders of Biloxi and Moss Point. They are the sort of people who can lay their lives on the line when it counts, but they don't adjust well to the need for organizational work which needs done after the fighting is over. The situation is the same in a large number of projects all over the state. The project leaders are those who led the attack which cracked the towns, and with this credit became project leaders. Dickie Flowers is a man-about-town leading a fast life. Most of the time when people need him he is off drinking or just riding around. Biloxi is lucky in having a guy like Barry who can run things most of the time.

And the food. Aha: an expoundable subject to end all others. You walk into a little hole in Jackson and get a huge dinner for \$.73. You visit a family and get a royal dinner (which, even in some of the poorer areas you have no reason to suspect is abnormal). But when you eat in the Community Center as a COFO worker. Hmmm. COFO seems never to have any money for food (or supplies, for that matter: I bought supplies for the office with the money I never sent COFO as contributions). You sit down to breakfast. There is a 100% chance you will find commodity powdered eggs and commodity yellow grits (or a splurge of regular white grits) and a glass of water. And a 0% chance that there will be anything else (though on Black Monday we celebrated and had real eggs). Now, to dispel misconception, commodity is not a brand. It is the fit-for-human-consumption food dispensed in the public relief program, and after having lived for most of a week on commodity grits, commodity eggs (powdered), commodity cornmeal, commodity milk (powdered), and occasionally (once) commodity hamburger (I almost said powdered, but there was too much gristle for that), you can easily completely disbelieve anyone who says people enjoy living on relief and not doing any work. Even though I became moderately used to it, every time I think of it I can enjoy whatever I happen to be eating (tonight the meat was tough, and thought of that food suddenly made it delicious) And here I stop.

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There are loads of things to say about that trip which keep flooding, but I have already said too much about it. Part of the enjoyment people other than the participants get from such expeditions is the feeling rather than the detailed knowledge of the trip. Maybe too much has been said, maybe not. And I suspect that many of the kids who went down this summer somehow couldn't really connect the personal publicity with themselves, and latched onto it only because they realized how much the movement needed it. The trip is one of those things that sticks in your mind for years, out of all proportion to the amount of time actually spent on it. But, seeing this, the mind goes on, not living in it, but seeing other things afoot.

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