

7 July 1965
[Hattiesburg, Mississippi]

Dear Mom,

We are in the midst of orientation in Hattiesburg now -- it having quieted down since the first session on Monday, when I asked a question which precipitated a discussion baring a good portion of the racial antagonisms between staff and volunteers. It even came out that a good portion of the SNCC [*Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*] staff hadn't wanted us in the first place -- this year or last -- for many valid reasons: mainly that whites tended to gravitate toward positions of control in the movement, and the whole idea has been to keep things on a grassroots level. When the volunteers left last summer, many hadn't built a continuable structure and many programs collapsed. And the people being canvassed tended to do things because a white person told them to. This year, however, we are working for the FDP [*Freedom Democratic Party*] (which turns out to be a complete and legitimate party organized on all levels), not SNCC, and so many of these things will not happen. As long as we keep in mind the fact that no matter how slow it goes, the movement here must come from the people and any initiative on our part must be very carefully applied. We are for the most part tools...

Jackson was a nightmare. We got there Saturday night, and all the local hoods who hang on the movement were drunk and breaking up the office. Also, the kids who were in jail for weeks came out and found most of their money and belongings stolen by the same local people (I've lost an alarm clock and seven dollars under similar circumstances -- thank God for the suitcase key). We spent the night at the house of a slightly off lady -- she was convinced we were all her "chirren," and was drinking down her bottle of gin at 2 A.M. Hattiesburg is comparatively heaven, though there is much evidence of stopped mail.

At any rate assignments to counties should be made tomorrow. There is a possibility (I'm beginning to wonder how good) I will be assigned to Greenwood, which is well organized with an apparently very good project director.

Among miscellaneous items, I bought an excellent Jews harp in Birmingham, and I'm really learning how to play the thing. And just yesterday I ran into a girl here who can hambo and bakmes (Swedish and Finnish folk dances [*snip*] taught me). It's really great to be able to do them, even if the music is vocal.

Have you tried Country Dancers? And how is everything going generally? If you'll number letters when and if you get time in the rush to jot a note off, I can check on male holdups.

Good luck.

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