

9

TO: MR. WILEY BRANTON
DIRECTOR, VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

FROM: PENNY PATCH
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
ALBANY, GEORGIA

December 8, 1962

Dear Mr. Branton,

It is now five o'clock in the morning and the cocks are crowing. You know, Southwest Georgia is very, very beautiful. It just needs a little bit of fixing.

We moved into Southwest Georgia as an integrated group in June 1962. I do not think that all of us were aware of the magnitude of this move or its full implications. But then how could we be. This awareness comes only after long exposure to the area and then never completely. To be fair perhaps I should only speak for myself. Sometimes I feel extremely ignorant of how deeply embedded the system of segregation is in both the black and white man. So we have to try and understand what it is we are dealing with and this comes slowly, slowly, very slowly. We have lived, breathed, agonized the frustration, the gear and all that is bound up with being a Negro in the deep South or for that matter anywhere. Yet, I, Not being Negro can never really know. This is, to me, a great source of frustration. I like to know. Recognition realization come in flashes and from small incidents. Impressions that remain a part of me and still cannot be fully understood or absorbed.

And then the white community. We have little communication with it as yet. Only again; flashes of frustration, rage and hate. White faces become blanks and people to walk past without noticing - giving me some measure of understanding of how black and white see each other. I have walked through the white downtown area to visit somebody in jail, etc., and have seen good friends of mine on similar errands walk by me without recognizing me. Yet in our familiar Harlem setting.....

One day this summer while canvassing in Smithville (Lee County) we met a woman of about 45, a medical doctor. She lives in a large farmhouse, part of what used to be a farm. A farm bought by her family right after the Civil War. The history of the house and of the family hits you as soon as you walk in the door. Listening to Dr. Griffith speak I think all of us were taken back to the days of her ancestors, the former slaves who first settled there.

The pictures of her ancestors were hung on the walls - one Negro, some American Indian, some white. She, Dr. Griffith, said: "We must come to flow freely among ourselves." That is it, I think.

The immediate goals can be stated as those of equal opportunities for all, economic, political and legal; the recognition that no one should be excluded because of race, creed and color. Legal barriers have to be removed, and registration of Negroes as a means to a political voice in the power structure of this country is essential. The political voice being the means to these immediate goals. Then, however, there are the more intangible implications of our aims and our work. I see it as the opening of doors to people who have always seen closed doors; seen them so much and for so long that they don't see the doors any longer. Human dignity is a key phrase, one key phrase that means something to me. I feel that every human person has this dignity and regardless to how much of it has been stamped down and it cannot be stamped out. ~~all~~ What we are doing is perhaps in some measure helping to bring it back and out into the open. I'm speaking about the white man as well as the Negro. These are idealistic concepts and I am idealistic. And the final goal is the eventual realization that the questions, "What is race? What is black? What is white?", are valid ones.

We are an integrated group now working in Southwest Georgia and the significance of it creeps up on me more and more every day. Here, for the first time, all Southerners are able to see Negroes and whites working side by side as equals and as friends. This latter part has more significance in regard to the Negroes as they have a chance to get to know us personally and can really see that such a thing is possible. We are confronting the community with what should be and what will be. We are showing here and now, rather than talking about black and white together, that a dream can be reality, and that words can mean something. There are few things that in my mind are designated as totally, absolutely and completely right. Integration is one of these things. I think that the group down here feels and sees beyond the immediate goals of equality and that all of us are, in our own individual ways, fighting for the for a new community. And this is why the integrated group is an essential part of our entire philosophy and mode of action.

The role of the white student ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ in the "hard-core" South has come under serious question. People say: "White students increase the

fear of the Negroes, the rage of the whites, the amount of harassment." All of this is true, to some extent. Fear in the Negro is there anyway and they deal with it every day of their lives. A whole life-time is spent in ever present awareness of the white. (I cannot generalize and say that this is true without exception, but I think that almost everyone has some of it in him. It involves always being careful and not missing a step.) As far as voter registration in the counties is concerned, those who work with it can never forget that their lives, homes, families, churches are in jeopardy. Most are share-croppers and as such can be thrown off the land. And this is too all part and parcel of the life-time of conscious or sub-conscious worry that is a part of most southern Negroes. It is difficult to speak with authority though. I can learn from observation and from friends, but I, myself, again only experience, as I have all my life, momentary flashes of fear. This fear must be broken through and that is an enormous part of our job. Each individual must come to realize that he is a person ^{just} as good as any other, a person with the same chance ~~in~~ life. There has got to be hope that something can be done and that it is up to you as an individual to do it. Yet, this can't turn into black against white and with the lack of white southerners to help (for the moment) the white northern student has a valuable role. Non-violence means love to me. But love for other human beings can only come, however, when you have the opportunity to realize that the person you are to love might be a human being and not a blank wall, with no faces ~~xxxxxx~~ Learning to regard ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxx~~ another as individuals rather than blanks.

We've got to deal with the enragement of the whites though. We have to make an effort to their feelings and somehow to comprehend the centuries of indoctrination that lie behind them. Someone once said to me: "When they see Negro and white together it is as though way deep down inside of them two broken ribs are grating together." A great many of the harassments that we experienced this summer dealt with this. Threatening phone calls almost always referred to "that white girl" or "white boys." It seems to be a feeling of betrayal. Encounters with police or local whites have the same "tone". On the other hand, harassments ~~xxxx~~, beatings, shootings, occur with non-integrated groups. Witness Mississippi, witness Southwest Georgia before last summer.

I am expounding - sometimes with absolutes, sometimes with the uncertainties that flood my mind. And as the pace quickens, then slows, as more people register,

then fever again, as homes and churches get burned and people are shot, as discouragement sets in as it occasionally does, I hold onto the thought of each individual that we reach even a little bit is progress.

I come up on a porch and an ancient lady, full of dignity in her world, says, "es man" and offers me her chair. An enraged white face shouts curses out of the car window. Jack Chaffield walks up to a house and the lady of the porch shakes visibly. The voter registration team is greeted with fear at the door. "I didn't know that Colored people could vote."

And people ask why we are down here....

