

June 22, 1964

Dear Family,

Am safely arrived in Oxford. We had heard last night that just about all of last week's group had gotten into Miss. without mishap (no pun intended). Then came the blow: the summer project's first casualties. Three men (all white, two staff people and one volunteer like myself) [note that Pat mistakenly believes all three were white – James Chaney was black] had just arrived in Meridian (the "safe", relatively speaking, area of Miss) and had immediately set out to investigate the ruin of a Negro church which was burned last week in the staff's absence. The last definite word of them came from Atlanta, where they had stopped on the way down. Trying to track them down, the SNCC office has been given various stories by the local officials there, the main one of which says that the three were picked up for "speeding" near the burned church yesterday in Neshoba County and released (after being beaten) at 10 p.m. last night. As I said, they haven't been heard from – all the jails and hospitals in the area deny having seen them. For all intents and purposes, they have "disappeared", evidently, this is a common happening – people "disappear" for months at a time – meanwhile being held in solitary in some jail (I was of the impression that this only happened in Spain, Russia, China, etc.). At any rate, the FBI and Justice Dept. officials on the spot have refused to investigate the case (though, as I said before, it is not only their right but their duty to do so). This lack of cooperation on the part of federal officials may unfortunately set a precedent for the summer – i.e., the local officials seem to feel (we're handing them justification on a silver platter) that they can get away with murder (literally, at the moment there is evidently nothing at all in the way of protection between us and the ruthlessness and whimsy of Miss. officials.

SNCC doesn't expect any of us to be safe this summer. President Johnson's refusal to hear out the Movement leaders last week because he was too busy with the war in South East Asia seems indicative of the general tenor of the federal government in confrontation with the realities of our U.S. mess. They look the other way. So I'm asking you please to at least write to our Pres. Johnson, Senators, Atty Gen. Kennedy, and ask some friends to do the same. We are not safe. I'm not the sadist type or masochist type in the least, but like everyone else involved I realize that (all melodramatics aside) I could be killed this summer. I've known this all along and it was one of the primary considerations before I decided that this is a cause that I'm willing to die for. I'm not asking or expecting you to do the same. All I need is half an hour of your time – to write some letters demanding federal attention. Please don't let me down.

More later. Hope all is well chez vous.

Love,
Pat