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## Jo Drake Arrington to Dr. Silver, 22 February 1962

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Please return this

JO DRAKE ARRINGTON  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
410-412 HEWES BUILDING  
GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI

TELEPHONE UNIVERSITY 4-1982

February 22, 1962

Dear Dr. Silver:

For some time I have been trying to get a letter off to you since receiving yours of many, too many, weeks ago. This is not the letter I promised myself to write, by any means.

The Annual meeting of the Historical Society occurs next week at Corinth, and I did want to at least write you a note before you left for that meeting. Mrs. Arrington and I plan to go and trust we have the pleasure of seeing you and Mrs. Silver, and that we have at least the chance to drink a cup of coffee with you, if nothing better. I do trust you are well by now, as you must be if you took care of yourself following your hernia operation. You and I are both over 35 years old now and we do not bounce back like we used to. I trust, too, that the tension that seemed to be bothering you has disappeared. You may be a nervous person like myself, who requires an abundance of rest. If I get less than eight hours sleep at night I may ignore the difference the following day, but I cannot kid myself because I realize I am different.

I am vain enough to be gratified to know that you saw fit to read my letter to several of your classes, and I am all the more gratified since I dashed it off spontaneously, as I have to do most of my writing. I could have done better than that. The tyranny of time and the press of business does not give me much time to deliberate or reflect. I feel like I am on the wing all the time. I still want to know how you made out with your talk at Gettysburg College, and was hoping that you would mention that.

It seems to me that you should not have much difficulty satisfying your own mind as to the aberrations of Mississippi. You know its history fairly well already, but if you will just drive out along the countryside or make a few contacts in the little villages dispersed over the state and see how the vast majority really live and make their living, you can easily see why we behave as we do. You mention that Mississippi is at the bottom in all respects to progress, but with that data you really have no right to be surprised at our aberrations, and I fear there are even worse to come. It seems that Mississippi along with other states in the Deep South, resented the census of 1860. The Twentieth Century is utterly obnoxious to us and we cannot be dragged into it - and I just hope we are not blown into it. Taking our history and the way we are living at the present time, it all adds up. When I was younger, I used to bruise my wings against the bars which hold us down as if we were in a vice. Time may not have taught me very much, but has pinioned me more closely to the earth than I ever wanted to travel. For years I have been a member of the

American Civil Liberties Union. I have tried to explain to some of my friends in it that these people down here don't give a Tinker's Damn about either civil liberties or civil rights and there is not too much anybody can do about it. Their frame of reference is entirely too narrow to tolerate the concept.

I have already said more than I intended to. I have more on my hands than I can attend to. In fact, for weeks I have been overwhelmed. After the Christmas holidays things broke loose here with a bang. I have been trying to take it easy the past year or so after nearly passing out of the picture in 1960, but I am finding that in this rats race one can hardly take it easy. Of course, if it actually comes to brass tacks, I do not give a damn, but as long as I am practicing law I do have enough pride and respect to attend to my business properly and to keep a bowing acquaintance with the law. I intend to keep turning business down now for a while until I can loaf and invite my soul at pleasure. Many days when I leave my office I feel like I have been hit by a truck but I come back the next day and let the same truck hit me again.

I am determined to go to the annual meeting of the Historical Society at Corinth unless the weather is intolerable. I need to get away from it all, and so does my wife, so I shall plug the dike to hold for a few days and shake off some of these burdens I am bearing now.

I certainly do hope you and Mrs. Silvers show up at Corinth and please allow me to express the hope that you will not allow anything that happens to hurt you. Please bear in mind that here in Mississippi we are doing exceedingly well to have a Historical Society at all. You and I do not have to contend or lock horns with the patriotic biddies and the Bill you mentioned. He cannot help being that way, and like many others, has probably been a young man in a hurry for a long time. I discovered long ago, in most societies we join and function in, we must be peaceful and bear injustice not just for an hour but perhaps for a decade or even longer. We live in a sick society if not in a lunatic asylum and without conceding anything, we should relax and watch them all cut their fantastic capers. The Old South was outnumbered 4 or 5 to one <sup>when</sup> you and I are outnumbered thousands to one. It would sound well to say that we should appeal from Phillip Drunk to Phillip Sober, but to me it is very apparent that Phillip is going to be drunk a long, long time. Conditions may change and people may change in consequence, but logic and common sense and intellectual decency, in my opinion, have not a chance.

General Walker and the other rightists will continue to have a field day so long as the cold war lasts. The General is, of course, a dud; but such fools and fanatics are breeding like mosquitoes and swatting one makes no perceptible difference. The swamps that breed them will have to be drained and dried. We are living in a

very irrational society and in my opinion there is little we can do about it as individuals. It would take a mass uprising to really change things, but the kind of mass uprising I would like to see is not in sight.

To be frank with you, if you will permit me to be, the economic arrangements of this capitalistic country are just as absurd and out of date as slavery was in the Old South, and in my opinion are far more dangerous and deadly. You are bound to know even better than I do that education from the kindergarden to Harvard is a big joke, while technologically we are far out in front. The economic and social bases are antiquated and will soon be anachronistic. One seldom meets a University graduate that has the slightest interest in, much less the knowledge of the mainsprings of our society. The whole setup is very preposterous and very hateful to me personally. It is as hateful to me as, - say slavery was to Wendell Phillips or Garrison, but I do not blame any individual or individuals for the situation. To quote Lincoln, "It is too vast for malice." I do not intend to let it make a raving idiot out of me, and at the same time I do not intend to be imposed on or intimidated by it. I have conceived it my duty to do the best I can and to make as much out of this short life as one of my meagre talents and temperament can possibly do. After all, you and I are very lucky to be living and we should enjoy it to the utmost, and enjoy it in the only sense decent people can enjoy anything.

I must end this! I can sympathize with your despondency about the people of this state, but please remember that people are mostly fools everywhere. I am a citizen of the World insofar as I can qualify to be. I try to view the World and life objectively but as a human being I live it subjectively, which of course is the only way one can live at all.


In expressing myself as being at odds with the present economic, social and political arrangements in this country, I do not mean to imply that there is any other system extant which suits me in the least. I have no blueprint for the future and it is not necessary to have. Old nature, historical nature and social nature, the social, economic and political forces now seething are preparing the future, if indeed there is to be a future. To me, profound cataclysms in societies or social revolutions seem to occur like a phenomenon of nature and are just as inevitable. Hindsight may teach survivors how this one or that one might have been avoided but then we are so unwilling to learn from History we shall go on reliving it to the last syllable of recorded time; so let them go on saying that geese are swans, or swans are geese, as Matthew Arnold sang. Perhaps the forts of folly will one day fall. Meanwhile, let us be of good cheer and face the difficult days with a heart for any fate.



Take care of yourself and do try to be at the meeting in Corinth and bring your good wife with you. I should like to know her better. You probably do not drink but you would not object to seeing me take one if I enjoy it, would you?

Write me when you can. I shall always be glad to hear from you.

Sincerely yours,

  
Jo Drake Arrington

JDA:eg

P.S. I intended to congratulate you on your election to the Vice-presidency of the Southern Historical Association at its meeting in Chattanooga. I had learned about it before you wrote, however. I am glad you attended the meeting. I subscribed to the Journal, which of course is far superior to ours.

I intended to tell you that Mrs. Arrington and I have reservations at the Corona Plaza Motel in or near Corinth. It was recommended to us. We shall arrive Thursday evening in time for the Directors' Meeting.

Speaking of education - some time ago I was very astonished while listening to the radio to hear your old pupil, George Thatcher, reciting the prayer service of the Episcopal Church in the absence of the Minister or Rector, who got drunk and had the misfortune to break his arm or leg. Our friend George was substituting for the Minister and I tell you as I told our mutual friend, Owen Palmer, that I could not have been more surprised if he had sang a hymn to Apollo. Perhaps he is right and I am wrong but it was ridiculous to me, never the less.

  
JDA