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Nancy R. Smith to Mr. Silver, 9 October 1956

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LIFE

TIME & LIFE BUILDING
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
NEW YORK 20

October 9, 1956

Dear Mr. Silver:

Thank you for your comments in connection with LIFE's publication of Noel Sickles' painting of Fort Pillow which appeared in Part II of our series, "The Background of Segregation."

The motive for our publication of this painting--and the other illustrations in this essay--is that it was pertinent to our presentation of the anti-Negro feeling, with its often tragic results, which occurred during and after the Civil War in both the North and South. The editors called on photographers and artists, as well as other contributors to the series to treat the subject of race relations and integration with frankness in the hope that a realistic approach--even though some of the brutality is not pleasant to contemplate--would make the greatest contribution to an understanding of the problem of segregation today. It is a problem of deep interest and concern to millions of Americans in all parts of our country and, as the introduction to our series pointed out, the manner of settlement of this complex issue can shape the nation's life for generations to come.

LIFE's staff members consulted historical reference sources as well as the Congressional Report about Fort Pillow. No matter what one's personal feelings may be, the fact remains that there was a massacre. However, we regret that space limitations prevented us from going into detail about the motivations which led up to it--the looting on the part of the Pillow garrison, the fact that its members included Negroes and renegade Tennessee whites, the report that there had been a good deal of drinking done by the Negroes and that they insulted the Confederates from behind the barricade. Thus, a smoldering situation was set up for these and other understandable reasons.