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George B. Leon to Professor Silver, 4 December 1962

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MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

December 4, 1962

Dr. James W. Silver
Department of History
University of Mississippi
University, Mississippi

Dear Professor Silver:

Although I had in mind to write to you prior to this time, unfortunately existing circumstances precluded the realization of my intentions. It seems that I always begin my belated letters with the same introductory apologetic statements, explaining and/or justifying my apparent procrastination. I am certain, however, that such overtures have virtually lost their meaning, for me at least, as a result of their repetitious nature; therefore I have presently decided to dispense with them.

It seems that we left Mississippi just in time to miss the second Civil War between the United States and the Sovereign State of Mississippi! I must say that I view the situation at Ole Miss with mixed feelings, for even though the happenings were very regrettable, I am delighted that events unfolded as they did. For justice must be enforced even with resort to force if all other peaceful means seem to be of no avail. Unfortunately, the great struggle against the unprincipled, corrupt, ignorant, and parasitical demagogues of our society remains ahead of us. And I am even more disturbed by the almost insurmountable task of educating the masses to the degree that will enable them to understand not only the legal but the more important abstract sense of justice, without which no national organism can hope to survive the colossal test of our times. How shall we be able to overcome the prejudice, ignorance, falsehood, injustice, and hatred that have permeated our society? This burning question always preoccupies my thoughts. Especially this dull, rigid, almost inarticulate hatred that has permeated our national organism. The word "segregationism" does not suffice to describe it, for the term reveals neither the nature nor the source, neither the depth nor the aim, of that hatred. It contains elements of superstition and voluntary delusion, of fanatical terror, of priestly callousness, of the rancor of the wronged, of ignorance, of falsehood, of lack of conscience, of justifiable self-defense, and of religious bigotry.

Men are not born with hatred in their blood. The infection is usually acquired by contact; it may be injected deliberately or even unconsciously, by parents, or by teachers. Adults, unless protected by the vigor of their intelligence, or by a rare quality of goodness, seldom escape contagion. Indeed, it almost makes one despair of honesty and humanity by observing how rare and difficult they are. But it is not to the interest of the self-appointed guardians of our society to educate the masses in the principles of justice, humanity and honesty. If most priests and ministers spoke honestly, I should still feel that Christianity is intellectually, and today emotionally, too, a failure; but I should not feel, as I do now, that it is such a dismal moral failure.



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But perhaps your illustrious colleague, the Reverent James A. Cabaniss, will bring justice, truth, humility, and honesty to the State of Mississippi when he is elected Governor! I am sure you know that he is planning to run for the Governorship in 1967. What a hypocrit! What a treacherous snake! The description "Giaour Janus" fits him perfectly! (In case that you cannot recall the meaning of my imaginative(!) description, I am sure Dick Stewart will be able to explain it).

The situation here at Memphis State is quite discouraging. Half of the members of our Department are at best mediocre graduate students, and the better ones will remain here very long if they can help it. Unfortunately, nothing is being done to improve the situation. In case that you hear of any vacancy in a suitable place, please let me know. Please do not disclose these remarks to Mitchell.

Please convey my regards to Richard Stewart.

With my best regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. B. Leon".

George B. Leon