

John Howard Griffin

3816 West Biddison  
Fort Worth, Texas 76109  
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Dearest Nell,

What a lovely letter and how wise you are to remain alone in your beautiful nature. I have had two glorious weeks of nearly complete solitude (with my family, of course, but they never intrude on the naturalness of life) and tomorrow I have to go to Michigan to address the big meeting of the Education Association (19,000 teachers and my whole being loathes the prospect. I do it only out of obedience. I am going to talk about something dear to your heart - about the devastation wrought when we forget the concept of respect for privacy of conscience; urging them to renew this teaching, which was once so intrinsic, so clear to something peculiarly American. This whole matter has preoccupied me more and more in recent weeks, as I see organizations that were inspired by the highest ideals degenerate, falsify themselves and end up little totalitarianisms, hating anyone whose views differ in any way from their own; the hooliganism of the peace march, where the pacifists were exceedingly unpacific; the hippies, who seem so strangely mature and advanced in many of their moral concepts with their slogans of love, love, love and their blanket hatred of anyone not really "with them." Those who preach tolerance and are so incredibly intolerant. In all of this, the lost key, it seems to me, aside from the inherent corruption of strength through organization, is the loss of that vision of respect for privacy of conscience.

All of this fulminates out of me each time I publish a book. The terrible personal questions that come in perhaps 8 or ten a day from students doing reports on my books, as though the fact that I published books makes the doorway to my private self open for every sappy invasion of curiosity.

I will probably be in your area in January or February. They want me to come for the launching of my new book on Jan. 22, but that would be the surest thing to keep me away, and so if I come at that time, it will be to hear the premier of Nicolas Nabokov's new symphony with the Philharmonic, and will keep it a secret. I can no longer bear this refined hawking that always takes place when you make the rounds of TV appearances in connection with a new book. I told my publishers that I will never again face the idiot questions of an Arlene Francis, though she is a nice lady off the microphone.

All for the moment. Forgive me if this sounds somber. The prospect of facing 19,000 people is unnerving - rather like doing a trapeze act at the world's largest circus...

Best love to you from all of us here,

