

Junior
~~September~~ gr.
I have a car! Friday 13
September
1963

Dear Scott,

Well, I'm here. Things are just about like they always are — slow at first, but it's bound to pick up. I had hell getting a room. Lightfoot did make it but is rooming with Monzo this year, so that lets me out. I got a room with Jim Gundry and we will have to wait and see how that turns out. I think I got some great pictures on my way down here. I am getting them developed right now and if they turn out, you ought to have some good subjects for paintings. I took a bunch of pictures of that old whitewashed General store just outside of Shreveport. I even got a couple of niggers in it though one of them was quite adamant about having his picture took. I sneaked a few off though. I know they will be blurred because I keep forgetting to focus the damned thing because of my excitement. You didn't notice the front of that old store because we went by it so fast, but there are quite a few mail boxes stuck on front. I tried to get the composition as good as possible but I just know that I screwed. I took a whole lot of pictures of that subject at different exposer times and lense openings in my photograpers's notebook. I'm going to be real scientific about it. Well, I took about seven pictures of that subject then went on. I got about five miles down the road and BINGO there were two niggers sittin in front of their cabin and around the cabin, piled on burlap squares laid in the yard was fresh picked cotton. I had to go about two miles before I could turn around but I came back and literally got down in my knees to them to let me snap their pictures. They were good old guys and I got some neat pictures. But I ran out of film. Goddamn it, wouldn't you know that I would run into a whole crew of men women and children off by the side of the road with their freshly picked cotton spread out in the sun in burlap squares. Men were laying in the shade under huge cotton wagons. Some of the older men wore all white (sold a light red from days of working in the same clothes.) they (the men) had white handkerchiefs wrapped around their heads. Men and women were bending over their loads in poses that would make Vegas jealous. And you know what? I didn't have any film. Not one bit and no where to get any. They had a chuck wagon truck there with women working in the back among colorful fruits and pans. Scott, you would have gone apeshit. I ain't kiddin.

There's always next year though. I reckon I'll get some good pictures then. The pictures that I do have are good though and should provide good material for you. They are taken in color and that is why I'm scared about the exposé times. I followed the directions carefully on the package, so let's cross our fingers and hope for the best, I will send them to you as soon as I get them. Already I have seen a million subjects to picture. The main trouble is the difficulty in getting a good candid shot. You just can't get close enough. Also, the minute that you tell them you want to take their pictures then they pose for you. You just about tell a posed picture every time. I saw an old negro woman (a member of a cotton picking crew) just a minute after some whites loaded her and some others into the truck to take them home. The look on her face. It was like looking at all the pain of work and injustice done to the negro all rolled into one. I would have given ten bucks to have taken that picture. But I knew that if I stopped I would never have gotten that picture on paper. That's where the artist comes in I guess. I can see that look as clearly as though I had seen every day for my entire life. I couldn't picture it though, but maybe you could — if not now, then in a few years. That's what you are working for. I also saw an old white woman and her husband sitting sideways on opposite sides of her cabin which was one of those split room things with a large central breezeway type thing running down the length of it. It would have made a daring composition and particularly effective one. I have got all these things written down in case it might help you some day. Some of these are good ideas and are worth doing. Well, Scott, have got to run. I will write again come next week.

Now Wednesday 18,

Scott, I wanted to wait to send you the pictures that I took. I was very happy with the way that they turned out. I am sorry that I took so many but I was not sure of my ability as a photographer. I think you will have at least three good subjects to draw from. How do you like the old man sitting on the front porch. Beginner's luck mixed with a little audacity to have taken the picture in the first place. I couldn't believe that everyone of them turned out. I have got a lot of better ideas for future pictures. Jim and I are going on a trip up river road this weekend and I might really get some good pictures. The ~~xxxxx~~ weather has not really been conducive to taking good pictures.

I haven't seen the sun for five days. As soon as I can get the sun shine that I think will be necessary, I will go to the grave yard and take some pictures there. I am going to take a black umbrella with me and I am just going to come right out and ask somebody, an old negro if possible, just to pose for me. I don't think I will be fortunate to run into any nuns, but I am working on that situation too. Also there a lot of wild looking nigger bars down on Claiborne street that will make great pictures if I don't get my head shot off. I will probably take those pictures from the car. I might be safer that way.

I was very surprized to see the picture of the nigger sitting on the store bench come out. He was just getting up to leave when I picked up the camera, tripod and all, and snaped his picture. I just couldn't believe it was so good. Scott, tell me some of the exposer times that you commonly use when you are taking color photographs. I would like to know since now I am beginning to understand about these things. Don't you think that the book store does a good job of printing these pictures. The whole batch came to about four dollars and thirty cents. I won't be so wasteful with my pictures next time. Still, if I run into a shot that I do not want to take and do not wat to loode I not going to take any chances. Just think the price of the photo ain't but a fraction of the worth of a good Gentling original.

Will send you some more pictures soon.

Stuart