Dear Mrs. Meredith:

I am writing to offer my sympathy and encouragement to you. It is very hard to tell how best to do this, when I am so far away, and do not know you. I hope that if my remarks seem to be patronising or sentimental, you will blame the tricks of language, for I assure you that I greatly admire your determination and courage.

The worst part about being a student in Oxford, Mississippi, is the dreadful sense of frustration that comes from having to read about these things in a newspaper and feeling that there is nothing I can do to help. I’m sure I should be just as powerless if I were on the spot, but that doesn’t lessen my wish to involve myself in some useful way. I suppose this letter is the best I can do.

I have been at an English university where there were many coloured students, and they were unquestioningly accepted by everyone — indeed one of my best friends was a West Indian. You can imagine, therefore, how utterly amazed and sick at heart it has made me to read of all the things that have happened at Little Rock and at Oxford. Of course I realize that there are only highlights that have reached the headlines in the English press, and that I know nothing of the attitudes and exchanges that make up daily life in your part of the world.

It is true that coloured people in this country are not generally accepted on equal terms — in large cities insidious people take advantage of their difficult position and force them to live in shanty conditions at high rents, and much misunderstanding arises through fear, ignorance and selfishness on the part of the less educated English. Also, “race riots” occasionally occur, but these are always the work of bored young men who have nothing better to do than look for trouble, and who gang up on some unfortunate coloured person. But this is a different matter, and is not really a racial problem.