

Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
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PRESS SURVEY - May 17-August 17, 1966

(based on the national news magazines, the New York
dailies and several syndicated columns)

A survey of the press in this period is very revealing. It shows how the press cultivated a rising hysteria among whites -- how the distortions were irresponsibly repeated and thus mushroomed. It also reveals a pattern of attacks on SNCC combined with national developments which suggest a certain manipulation by the powers-that-be. It also reveals who SNCC's press friends are, and who is poison.

This is the general chronology (dates are those of publication):

- May 17 NY TIMES breaks story on SNCC staff meeting changes. Jim and especially John projected as "not non-militant but did keep a working relationship with the established coalition of Negro leaders" and the administration.
- May 24 SNCC will not attend White House Conference.
- May 28 Dr. King attacks Carmichael as "separatist."
- June 9 "Black Power" is heard as slogan of the Mississippi March. Charges of racism reach peak. SNCC refuses to make March a demonstration for the 1966 Civil Rights Act, and says that bill is unnecessary--there's enough legislation.
- July 1 John Lewis resigns.
- July 5-8 At NAACP convention, with Humphrey leading the way, Roy Wilkins says black power is black death. Also, charges SNCC with mishandling of funds, etc. But final resolution is modified.

CORE convention asserts black power.
- July 9 King calls for summit conference to repair rift in movement; Randolph also calls for meeting.
- July 14-22 Press full of stories about declining funds as whites withdraw support (NY TIMES, NY POST, WALL STREET JOURNAL)
- July 24 Stories on links with nationalists; Carmichael calls for unity talks with Muslims.

- July 24 to present Violence in Northern cities is at a peak; SNCC and CORE calls for "Black Power" blamed, but also a tendency to call it "the politics of frustration."
- July 29 John Lewis interview by Jack Nelson
- Aug. 5 NY TIMES publishes SNCC paper said to be key in evolution of black power; plus Carmichael "I don't trust any whites" profile.
- Aug. 9 House of Representatives approves amendment to 1956 Civil Rights Act which would make it a crime for persons to use inter-state commerce to foment riots.
- Aug. 12 Dynamite "found" in Philadelphia SNCC place.
- Aug. 16 HUAC begins hearings in D.C. of subpoenaed anti-Vietnam war workers on Pool Act (aiding and abetting the enemy).

SPECIFICS

- A. The press stories up to the Mississippi March contained 3 major areas of error and distortion:
- 1) Misinterpretation of the changes in officers. Gene Roberts in the NY TIMES saw not only Lewis' replacement by Carmichael but also Forman's replacement by Robinson as evidence of take-over by super-militants. This was picked up by the other media, which apparently never bothered to check. As late as July 1, the TIMES was still saying "it has never been completely clear whether he (Forman) left against his will." There are other minor errors about the staff meeting, such as that it was "secret" (TIME magazine).
 - 2) Statements that whites are going to be or are being "purged" (TIME); later reappeared in WASHINGTON POST and NY TIMES. In the POST, a column by William Raspberry (Negro journalist) was headlined "Why SNCC Demoted Its Top Whites" -- but the column itself never touched on this subject:
 - 3) SNCC's "new direction" was seen as complete break with past. NY TIMES of May 22 says:
 "...The new philosophy is a major development in the civil rights

movement because it stands in such sharp contrast to the philosophy of the committee when it was organized in 1960 by Southern students -- both Negro and white. Then the committee dreamed of integration as an end in itself..."

- 4) Carmichael statement "integration is irrelevant" was quoted everywhere-- out of context, according to him ("integration is irrelevant, when initiated by blacks").

The early stories emphasized SNCC's "black panther" program, it's "boycott" of Alabama elections and especially it's distrust of the Democratic Party. The second most widely quoted Carmichael remark was "Asking Negroes to become Democrats is like asking Jews to join the Nazi Party." This remark, along with "integration is irrelevant," climaxed by SNCC's position on the White House Conference, set the scene for the next stage of press attacks; charges of racism and the whipping up of white back-lash. King's criticism of SNCC as separatist played right into this, as did John Lewis' statements.

E. During the March, wide publicity given to Carmichael calling for black power; Willie Ricks "calling for white blood" (apparently, he actually said that if black blood was going to be spilt, white blood would be spilt -- the doctrine of self-defense, not unilateral aggression. The press portrayed SNCC as having suddenly dropped non-violence, again picturing us as having broken with the past. (NY TIMES, July 8: Roy Wilkins quoted as saying "he also denounced the SNCC and CORE modification of the doctrine of non-violence..." Such charges were published without correction: another example of how press published secondhand comment and thus mushroomed distortions.

Most of the press not too critical on self-defense and black power, in view of Meredith shooting and violence at Philadelphia and Canton. But the NEW YORK POST carried a series of articles by Pete Hamill (see attached clips) which reached a new high in malice and irresponsible reporting. Hamill's charges of racism, unsubstantiated by any direct quotes, were repeated by former SNCC friend Ted Poston in another

article; he took Hamill's word for it without checking. This was typical of press in general.

The press labels black power "anti-white," "racism-in-reverse," "black supremacy," "black nationalism," "separatism," or condemns it as an impractical go-it-alone policy which denies necessity for coalitions. The NEW REPUBLIC and NEW YORK POST claim SNCC is not interested in coalitions with poor whites; actually, Carmichael has said that is the only possible coalition and SNCC wants to help organize poor whites.

Most of the press (occasional exceptions in the NY TIMES and NEWSWEEK) ignores SNCC explanations of black power. Or else they say "If what SNCC means by black power is getting political and economic power, then that's all right. But that isn't what it sounds like they're saying." Thus, white fears are constantly attached to the slogan; white press is incapable of examining it in context.

C. Notable examples of inaccuracy and distortion since the March

- 1) The NY TIMES story on SNCC paper said to be key in evolution of "black power"; profile of Carmichael; editorial headed "The Politics of Frustration." (See my letter to TIMES for details on inaccuracies.)
- 2) Stories on finding of dynamite in Philadelphia SNCC meeting place (see memo from Atlanta)
- 3) Pete Hamill story in NY POST of August 16 in which he says that SNCC is held in particular contempt in Watts, and he quotes a nationalist as saying "Just after the revolt last year, SNCC threw a Watts memorial benefit, something like that. They raised \$50,000 from their fancy friends. Watts never saw a penny..." This was, of course, the discotheque at the Daisy which had been planned months before the uprising and happened to fall a few days after it; the amount raised was more like \$35,000. But Hamill didn't bother to check the quote.

Special case: Jack Nelson interview of John Lewis, in LOS ANGELES
TIMES and WASHINGTON POST.

D. Exceptions to above -- the "good" white press

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