

Special

STUDENT NONVIOLENT
COORDINATING COMMITTEE
208 AUBURN AVENUE, N. E.
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Jackson 5-1763

STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
TO THE PLATFORM COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION
THURSDAY MORNING, JULY 7, 1960, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

MR. CHAIRMAN and Members of the 1960 Democratic Platform Committee:

I am Marion S. Barry, Jr. of Nashville, Tennessee and with me are Mr. Bernard Lee of Montgomery, Alabama, and Mr. John Mack of Darlington, South Carolina. We appear before you as elected representatives of the STUDENT NON-VIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE, which is composed of students from eleven (11) Southern states, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

We also represent the thinking of thousand of Negro and white Americans who have participated in, and supported student efforts that have been characterized, generally, as Sit-Ins, but which in truth were peaceful petitions to the conscience of our fellow citizens for redress of the old grievances that stem from racial segregation and discrimination. In a larger sense, we represent hundreds of thousands of freedom loving people, for whom our limited efforts have revitalized the great American dream of "liberty and justice for all."

WHAT THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IS

On February 1, 1960, four freshmen left the campus of A & T College in Greensboro, North Carolina, went to the heart of that city, and took their seats in forbidden territory - the lunch counter of Woolworth, Inc. In a sense, this was the beginning of the student protest movement. But the threads of the quest for freedom and human dignity reach much farther - back into the days of 1955 when thousands of Negroes walked and the buses of Montgomery, Alabama were under boycott.

The threads of freedom form the basic pattern in man's struggle to know himself and to live in the assurance that other men will recognize this self. The ache of every man to touch his potential is the throb that beats out the truth of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. America was founded because men were seeking room to become.

We again are seeking that room. We want room to recognize our potential. We want to walk into the sun and through the front door. For three hundred and fifty years, the American Negro has been sent to the back door in education, housing, employment, and the rights of citizenship at the polls. We grew weary. Our impatience with the token efforts of responsible adult leaders was manifest in the spontaneous protest demonstrations which, after February 1, spread rapidly across the entire South and into the North as sympathetic students sought to display their own dissatisfaction with race relations in the United States.

The movement is a protest and it is an affirmation. We protest and take direct action against conditions of discrimination. We affirm equality and brotherhood of all men, the tenets of American democracy as set forth in the Constitution, and the traditions of social justice which permeate our Judaic-Christian heritage.

WHAT THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IS NOT

The student movement, despite the accusations of some public figures, is neither Communist-controlled or inspired. Such charges are unfounded and merely serve to heighten the tensions which must come in any social change. To label our goals, methods, and presuppositions "communistic" is to credit Communism with an attempt to remove tyranny and to create an atmosphere where genuine communication can occur. Communism seeks power, ignores people, and thrives on social conflict. We seek a community in which man can realize the full meaning of the self which demands open relationship with others. What we, the participants in the movement, have in common are our beliefs in the dignity of the individual, our hope in the democratic form of government, and our devotion to our homeland.

WHY WE ARE HERE

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee, but we are conscious that we cannot adequately bespeak the hearts and minds of those whom we represent in the allotted ten (10) minutes.

We must ~~also~~ state frankly that we are interested in something more than a strong civil rights plank in the platform to be adopted by this convention. Many of us are old enough to remember, and others have observed through studying the records, that all too often, such planks seem devised mainly to woo election votes, and then, for all practical purposes, are forgotten.

We are here today to urge the leaders and candidates of the Democratic Party to stop playing political football with the civil rights of eighteen million Negro Americans and to take forthright and definitive action to make American citizenship a vital and living reality to all, regardless of race or creed.

We are here to ask leaders of our nation to face up to the reality that racial discrimination is America's number one social issue, and that, our

national government must assume responsibility to guarantee the fundamental rights of all citizens without discrimination.

We have come to urge that this convention not only speak to these issues but pledge itself to see that the full weight of the Federal government is used to eradicate our national shame, Jim Crow, and second-class citizenship.

WHAT DO NEGRO STUDENTS WANT?

The question has been asked, "What do Negro students want?" Our answer is firm and clear: we want all the rights, opportunities, and responsibilities enjoyed by any other American, no more, no less; and we want these things now! Because of this, thousands of young Negroes have faced abuse and mob action; more than 1600 have been arrested; some have spent as much as sixty days in jail, and all have faced charges from disorderly conduct to conspiracy to restraint of trade.

As citizens we are interested in the total civil rights issue; but as students, we have special interest in four (4) considerations. They are:

- I. Education / that the legislative and executive branches of government act firmly and immediately to implement the 1954 Supreme Court decision against segregated public schools.
- II. Employment / that the Federal government set the pace for equal job opportunities by using the existing statutes and executive orders to see that Negroes are hired without discrimination on federal jobs, and jobs where federal contracts are held.
- III. Voting / the unhampered exercise of the franchise for all citizens.
- IV. Legal Protection / against violation of the constitutional rights of freedom of assembly and freedom to petition peaceably for redress of grievances.

I. Education

In 1956, the Democratic Platform on Civil Rights said very little in the way of direct endorsement of the May 17, 1954 Supreme Court ruling against segregation in the public schools. Instead, the platform stated that the court ruling "brought consequences of vast importance" and that such court decisions were "a part of the law of the land."

In six years since the Supreme Court ruling, states have executed programs whereby the law could be circumvented through token and nominal integration. Today, 94% of the Negro children of school age have not been integrated into public schools. The 6% who have fought their way through courts have been subjected to public humiliation, mob violence, and Klan action. America cannot continue to let such illegality go unchecked.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

*We urge that the members of this Committee endorse a plan to with-hold Federal funds from any school system which has not and will not begin integration now.

*By the same principle, we urge that the Federal government offer full technical assistance and financial aid to those areas in which honest efforts are being made to end segregation in education.

*Further, we urge you to insist that the Federal government require areas where discrimination in education continues to submit concrete plans to end this discrimination.

We cannot continue to accept second-class schools and inferior material. It is extremely important to us as future leaders and heads of families that we receive the best possible education in the public schools of America.

In all justice, we urge the adoption and implementation of a plan of action which will give meaning to the words "with all deliberate speed." Integration of 6% of the school children in six years is a denial of these words and a mockery of the Supreme Court. Aside from the fact that it is law, school

integration is the beginning of encounter between persons; consequently, the beginning of communication which is essential to the practice of social justice.

II. Employment

Equal chance for individual economic advancement is one of America's proud boasts. Negro youth, like other youth, dream of jobs and "making a living"; but for them the dream is too often fraught with disillusionment and despair. Discrimination in employment is not limited to the South; but there it is accentuated and defended by local custom. Trained and skilled Negroes have almost no hope for professional employment, except the limited number of jobs in segregated facilities. Thus, many college trained Negroes are offered the "mop and broom" when seeking employment in private industry.

State and municipal governments offer not too much more. Even in Federal facilities, jobs are limited by local administration. Yet, there are statutes and executive processes through which the Federal government could start immediately to guarantee:

Equal opportunities on Federal jobs

Non-discriminatory employment by firms holding government contracts

CUT Making a good living is basic to making a good life. Negro youth cannot make its fullest possible contribution to the future welfare and security of America if job discrimination continues. At a time when despotism and nuclear power threaten both the existence of a free world and that of any world at all, it is essential that America utilize her full human potential.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

We, therefore, call upon this convention to accept responsibility for decisive action towards a Federal fair employment law, with adequate enforcement machinery.

III. Voting

The right to vote is basic to a democratic government. ". . . Governments are instituted among men", the Declaration of Independence stated, "deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed". Yet today, ninety (90) years after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, many Americans are denied the franchise because of race. This is being accomplished largely through the arbitrary interpretation and application of complex voter-qualification laws, literacy and education tests, that frequently have been enacted for the express purpose of thwarting the Negro voter.

But even more shameful than the legal blockade are the extra-legal harassments to which potential Negro voters have been and still are subjected. Economic reprisals, threats, physical violence, even death are part of the pattern. Presently, in Haywood and Fayette Counties, Tennessee, persons are denied the right to buy gasoline, farm supplies, and even medical aid because they are Negroes and are trying to register for voting. To such conditions there is but one answer - the right to vote must be assured and protected by the Federal government.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

*Hence, we call upon all political candidates to pledge themselves to work to strengthen and implement the 1957 and 1960 voting legislation and to work toward a Constitutional amendment that will encourage rather than discourage every qualified citizen to register and vote.

*Further, we urge immediate action to provide self-government to the voteless residents of our nation's capital, the District of Columbia.

IV. Legal Protection

It has been amply demonstrated that the white South is not averse to subjecting the Negro to law; it only objects to including him under a common law.

Nothing is more frustrating to a young Negro than to be barred from

spending his money in public places. But it adds insult to injury to be invited, even urged, to shop at a store, buy at all counters. . . EXCEPT the lunch counter, because of the color of your skin.

We have been falsely told that the law forbids white and Negro eating together, or that the law forbids giving service to Negroes in "white" eating establishments and department store lunch counters. Often, it is not the law, but it is "local custom" which is being used to prevent the Negro from receiving his rights. cut

In the peaceful attempt to demonstrate our dissatisfaction with special laws for Negroes, we have been arrested, convicted and jailed. Then new laws have suddenly been enacted, denying the right to assemble, and petition for redress of grievances, the right to be secure in our homes, and the right to be free of excessive bail and excessive fines.

We have been met with the "protection" of the police. . . fire hoses, clubs and tear gas. In many places, local officials have sanctioned the policies of rabid white supremacists and have actually deputized members of such groups. cut

Of the so-called Reconstruction Amendments, only the Thirteenth (XIII) has been carried out. Enforcement of state laws of segregation and disfranchisement have negated the others. Time is far overdue for making real the citizenship rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth (XIV) Amendment.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

We, therefore, urge the leaders and candidates of this convention to pledge that the basic provisions of the Part III of the 1957 Civil Rights Act will be enacted into a law that makes clear that Negroes are citizens of the UNITED States and that "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States."

Surely, the American government is not powerless to make good this promise of more than ninety years ago.

CONCLUSION

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress, adopting the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, created a new potential for life and liberty. On July 16, 1945, the explosion of the first atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico created the possibility of death and enslavement. We stand today between these great turning points in human history, saying that America cannot fail in its responsibility to the free world. We must be strong. Civil defense and economic power alone will not assure the continuation of democracy. This democracy itself demands the great intangible strength of a people able to unite in a common endeavor because they are granted a common dignity. This challenge cannot be met unless and until all Americans, Negro and white, enjoy the full promise of our democratic heritage - first class citizenship. Dedicated to this end, we, the students of America, must continue our movement.