

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30314

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA



"ATLANTA HAS TIME --- BUT NOT MUCH"

"....Atlanta, despite its national image as a leader in Southern race relations, actually lags behind several other Southern cities in desegregation of hotels, restaurants and schools, and in employment of Negroes in non-menial positions.

"Atlanta still has time to head off demonstrations, to live up to its image - and simply do what is just. But time is running out."

The statement beneath the photograph on the front page did not come from a Negro leader or Civil Rights group. It is taken from the lead editorial of the Atlanta Constitution on November 19, 1963.

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Time did run out. On December 21, 1964, demonstrations in Atlanta were again initiated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In a short period of time students were able to desegregate all the Dobbs House restaurants and in the wake of that action came partial desegregation of 16 hotels. In the past few weeks participation in demonstrations has grown. This increased attempt to secure equal rights has not been met with any serious effort to end segregation but rather, by a pernicious attempt to divide the Negro community, to discredit those who had dared to trouble the waters, and ultimately, to stifle at their very beginnings the legitimate protests of Atlanta Negroes. This was not done with billy sticks or fire hoses, for segregationists and officials here are not so crude. It was done with slanderous accusations from the Mayor, city officials and newspapers. It was done by evoking the "menace of Communism in Atlanta." And it had a single aim in mind - to split the Negro community, to stop demonstrations forever, to secure the status quo in Atlanta and to leave the Negro where he is. These distortions and attacks were in response to a singular fact: the demonstrations were successful. They came because we are on the brink of achieving new freedom in Atlanta. The accusations are but the last barks of defeated segregationists.

Let us set the record straight.

The first mass arrests came at Krystal's Restaurant at Marietta and Broad Streets on the night of January 18. The arrests were not planned, but resulted from contradictory police orders and confusion among the police. Inside the Krystal's sat uniformed members of the Klu Klux Klan. In order to protest the white-only policy of Krystal's and the presence of the Klan, Negro students picketed and then sang freedom songs before the restaurant. Police Sergeant Mahler did not question the legality of the protest but roped off the area for "their own protection." The presence of the Klansmen covering in the segregated restaurant encouraged Negroes to join the line. Captain Hamby arrived. He took down the rope and entered the restaurant. After conferring with the Klan, Hamby came out and yelled, "clear the area." 17-year-old Taylor Washington was near Hamby chanting "Freedom, Freedom." Hamby turned toward Taylor and called out, "Arrest that one." Mahler, who had previously made it clear that the students were permitted to stand and sing, obeyed Hamby and grabbed Taylor. The arrest of Taylor

Front cover photograph: James Forman, Executive Secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is loaded into a police paddy wagon Sunday, January 26, 1964. 84 demonstrators were arrested that day - the same day that the United Nations Subcommittee on the prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities ended its visit to Atlanta. Photo by Danny Lyon.

Washington was the first arrest in about a week. It was illegal and unjustified. He had been permitted by one officer to do one thing and arrested for doing it by another. By the end of the night over 75 students were in jail.

This arrest was typical of what happened at the many legal and orderly demonstrations that later occurred. Of the many students who followed Taylor Washington to jail that night, many went to protest his arrest. But many went because they were arbitrarily grabbed by the police in their great confusion. Those students that protested the illegal arrests of a fellow demonstrator did so by sitting in front of the paddy wagon or lying under its wheels. They did not fight the police or cause any violence. They acted out of deep personal conviction that Taylor's arrest was symbolic of the unjust treatment received by the Negro in Atlanta's system of segregation. They did not resist arrest; they were in fact volunteering to go to jail. These students were putting their very bodies down before the system. They were saying in the best way they could, "If you wish, put me in jail with my innocent brother, but if you must, run your police car over me so that it will be known that I will suffer injury or die for freedom."

Two days later, on January 21, 1964, the Atlanta Constitution made a historic turnabout in its editorial policy. Having fought the public accommodations section of the Civil Rights Bill for 11 months, it now urged that the section be passed as quickly as possible. It admitted that Atlanta could not handle the issue of civil and human rights without new laws. The one reason that the Constitution took this step forward was because students had been courageous enough to raise the issue of Atlanta's sugar-coated racism. Instead of thanking the students for opening their eyes, the same editorial that urged passage of the public accommodations act attacked the students with the headlines - "SNCC Lawlessness." The author of the editorial did not witness the arrests at Krystal's. We did.

The students arrested the night of January 18 were treated cruelly by the police. Affidavits and photographs bear testimony to numerous instances of people being dragged with unnecessary roughness, and being twisted, limp bodies being mashed into police wagons in a clear attempt to harm them. We feel no hate of the police for they are the unfortunate product of the same system of hate that we are trying to remove. The newspapers have either ignored or minimized the brutality of the police. Instead they play up an alleged incident which projects the kind of picture they want. John Lewis, Chairman of SNCC, who is also a Baptist minister and a conscientious objector, was mashed into the side of a paddy wagon by five policemen. He was held around the arms and the chest; one policeman clasped his hand over Lewis' mouth. Lewis is committed to nonviolence as a way of life. During the Freedom Rides he almost lost his life when he walked without resistance into a mob in Montgomery, Alabama. At Krystal's he dramatized his arrest by non-cooperation. An allegation that he kicked on of his five captors was what emerged in the press. The action of the police was not noted.

The Krystal's arrests were repeated in substance at Leb's and the police station the following day. Students singing before the police headquarters were arrested en masse; they were given no chance to leave. On January 27 at Leb's, long lines of orderly pickets circled the block. They moved in single file in accordance with an agreement signed the night before by James Forman, Executive Secretary of SNCC, and Police Chief Herbert Jenkins. Over 80 demonstrators previously arrested were released on their own recognizance and SNCC leaders agreed that every demonstration in the future would "picket single file, not less than thirty six inches apart and keep moving at all times." This is what the pickets were doing when a hoarse police captain proclaimed, "Next time they come around arrest them all." Some voluntarily went to jail by standing on Leb's property. White crowds gathered across the street. The pickets obeyed the law and most of them were unaware of the new police orders. Again police confusion led to mass arrests. Pickets were arbitrarily thrown into paddy wagons. An entire white family, a father, mother and two daughters were snatched from the sidewalk and pushed into the wagon. The same incidents of police treatment and non-cooperation with the illegal arrests was repeated. Inside the jail Negro trustees were used to brutalize the new prisoners. Although affidavits support these facts, the Mayor's office and newspapers chose to ignore the issue. Segregation, discrimination, employment and police action were not discussed. Freedom was not mentioned. Instead the demonstrators were accused of being aliens that do not love their city. Instead of a proposal being made to end discrimination in hotels and restaurants, the Mayor demanded a thirty day halt to protests.

The courts could have rectified the illegal arrests. Instead, they perpetuated Atlanta's racism. While fresh judges circulated on the bench, the demonstrators and their lawyers were kept involved in the trials from 10:00 AM until as late as 1:30 AM. Those who might have expected justice from the courts should have remembered the six month jail sentence, thousand dollar fine and \$20,000 bail meted out to Rev. Ashton Bryan Jones, a white minister arrested at the First Baptist Church of Atlanta on June 30, 1963, when he attempted to worship there with Negroes. Rather than justice making itself heard at trials of the demonstrators, the court reverberated with "objection overruled." The press, which so solidly condemned demonstrations, did not appear with any regularity.

The Negro community has remained amazingly united. Rarely do large groups of people agree on an issue. This is no less true of the Negro community. But in Atlanta the demonstrations are being carried on by SNCC at the request of the Summit Leadership Conference - a coalition of 200 leaders representing 82 community groups including the NAACP, Urban League, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Virtually all of the groups have voted confidence in SNCC and have refused to honor Mayor Allen's request for a "cooling off period."

Demonstrations are nothing new to Atlanta. They are caused by segregation and will continue until Atlanta is an open and free city for all its citizens. We are glad for progress that has been made, but it has been too little and almost too late. Our concern is how far we must go. Time is indeed running out.