

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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SPECIAL REPORT

Selma is located on the bluffs of the Alabama River. It is the county seat of Dallas County, the seventh largest in population of Alabama's 62 counties.

During the Civil War, Selma was an important military depot in the lower Confederate states. Today it is the birthplace and stronghold of the White Citizens Council in Alabama.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) first went into Selma in the fall of 1962. Present SNCC activities in Selma - now spreading to other Black Belt Counties - began in February, 1963.

FACT SHEET

"Selma is now a little country town that is typical of most small country towns."

....from a history of Alabama

Selma is more than "a little country town." It is the center of a struggle taking place in 19 Alabama Counties described as "Black Belt" because of their heavy Negro population.

The majority of the residents of Dallas County are Negroes (57%) the minority white. But only 0.9% of the eligible Negroes are registered to vote, according to the Civil Rights Commission Report on Voting, 1961. Registration of eligible whites is 64%.

Adjoining Wilcox County has never had a Negro voter, although 78% of the county's population is Negro. Lowndes County, also bordering Dallas County, has never had a Negro voter.

The U. S. Civil Rights Commission says:

Testimony at the Commission's Alabama hearings covered economic pressures and registrar's discriminatory practices which prevented Negroes from voting in this county (Dallas).

In Greene County, Negroes are 82% of the county's population; in Macon County, 84%; in Lowndes County, 81%; in Sumpter County, 76%; in Bullock County, 74%; in Hale County, 71%; in Perry County, another base for SNCC operations, 66% and in Marengo County, 62%. Like Dallas County, Russell, Barbour, Monroe, Clarke and Choctaw Counties have Negro populations of 50% or more.

Alabama's Black Belt counties stretch across the center and south center of the state. Almost exclusively rural, their most important products are peanuts, cotton and livestock. Impoverished and lacking opportunity, this section lost a tenth of its population from 1950 to 1960. The whole state during this period saw a population increase of 7%, and two Black Belt counties with small cities grew. But 17 others

- rural counties - all lost population, some as much as 20%.

The poverty of these counties places them among the poorest in the country. 21% of all the families in the United States in 1960 earned less than \$3000 - the minimum necessary for a decent life. But of the Negro families in these counties, 85% made less than \$3000.

Of Negroes over 25 years old in these counties, 67% have less than a sixth grade education. 82% of the white population over 25 has better.

Those counties which are the poorest are usually the most rural. These Negroes in Macon County are the richest in the Black Belt, but only 36% of the county's Negro families earn more than \$3000, and 21% of the employed Negroes work on farms. In Henry County, where 92% of the Negroes families make less than \$3000 a year, 32% of all the Negroes who do work work on farms. In the 19 counties, 65% of the Negroes working hold farm or completely unskilled jobs.

With few exceptions, those counties with the highest percentage of Negroes (and thus the highest percentage of Negroes of voting age) also have the smallest number of Negroes on the poll lists. 5.7% of the eligible Negroes in all 19 counties are registered to vote. One county, Pickens, with a 45% Negro population, has the highest number registered - 13%.

Those counties with the highest percentage of Negroes are generally the poorest, with Negroes holding the lowest paying jobs. Negroes in Black Belt Alabama are held in poverty by job discrimination and lack of education. Selma adequately demonstrates how Negroes are denied the means to change.

- figures from the United States Census of Alabama, 1960 and the United States Commission on Civil Rights report on Voting, 1961.

"ONE MAN - ONE VOTE"

On October 8, 1963, SNCC launched a Southwide "One Man - One Vote" at a Selma Freedom Day. Both the "One Man - One Vote" concept - open registration with residence and age the only requirement - and the "Freedom Day" technique - mass attempts to register to vote - have spread from Selma to other states and other parts of the civil rights movement.

From February, 1963 to the present, SNCC workers and local Negroes - and the one white person in the community who openly supported the vote drive - have faced almost daily harrassment from law officers and private citizens.

The former Mayor of Selma is now head of the local White Citizens Councils. SNCC Field Secretary Reginald Robinson, who did preliminary survey work in Dallas County in the fall of 1962, reported "businessmen who do not support the Council cannot make loans at the local bank. I was told that members of the Council are in key positions in the city and county governments."

An expected avenue of restraint - Craig Air Force Base on Sel-

ma's outskirts - has failed to honor three requests from SNCC workers and Selma Negroes to place segregated establishments in the town "off limits" to airmen, even though Negro airmen complained in a federal court hearing they were discriminated against in Selma eating places and movie theatres. Only intervention with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara by SNCC Chairman John Lewis resulted in cancelling a February 2 appearance by Alabama Governor George Wallace at Craig's Officer's Club.

Selma's Negroes are politically impotent without the vote. They cannot appeal to city or county law enforcement officials. Although the federal government has attacked intimidation and discrimination in Dallas County in two voting suits, the progress of these has been painfully slow. The government has been equally impotent while police beat and jailed Negroes, even making arrests on federal property.

The United States Department of Justice of filed two suits charging intimidation and discrimination against the county registrar (April, 1961) and Sheriff Clark and other county officials (June, 1963) The latter suit charges Sheriff Clark with illegally arresting two SNCC workers in June, 1963.

On January 15, 1965, the Justice Department filed suit against the State of Alabama and the Secretary of State, charging the state's new voter registration test (in use since September, 1964) was too difficult and discriminated against would-be Negro voters. The new test has 100 alternating variations, consisting of four questions about government, four about the U. S. Constitution, and a dictation test. Alabama Attorney General Richmond Flowers has admitted the test is "rugged". "Had every voter in Alabama passed this test," Flowers said, "we would have the most intelligent electorate in the nation."

In nearby Perry County, where SNCC worker George Bess has been organizing a voter drive since January, 1965, the Justice Department has been successful in obtaining a federal voting referee. Between November 3 and December 18, 1964 however, the referee registered only 2 of 61 Perry County Negroes who tried to register. The Justice Department has challenged his rulings.

But while the Department's lawyers slowly attack Alabama's restrictive voting laws and oppressive police activities through the courts, the Department has been almost paralyzed in moving against brutality witnessed by Department officials or FBI agents.

On October 8, 1963, FBI agents took notes while Sheriff Clark's men beat and arrested two SNCC workers taking food and drink to Negroes waiting in line to register to vote.

From January 18, 1965 to the present, the Selma representatives of the federal government have been able to observe from their second story office across the street from the Dallas County Courthouse nearly every arrest (over 2500 in three weeks), every instance of brutality and every attempt Selma's Negroes have made to register to vote. The federal government has chosen to stand - in Dallas County - on suits' filed in 1961 and 1963, actions which are still in the courts. Federal law declares that abridging the right to vote or intimidating those who seek it is a crime, and provides that immediate arrests may be made when a violation occurs in the presence of a federal officer. To date, no such arrests have been made.

The events of the summer and fall of 1963 illustrate the harassment and intimidation that early SNCC workers and local Negroes met in Dallas and Wilcox County.

- two shotgun blasts were fired into the home of voter registration worker Lonnie Brown on April 17
- SNCC worker Bernard Lafayette was beaten by two white men when he answered their plea for help with a stalled car on June 12
- SNCC worker Bossie Reese of Selma was arrested after being "literally thrown" from the sheriff's office on June 17
- SNCC worker Alexander Brown was arrested July 23, two days before he was to testify at a Justice Department hearing. He was charged with "false identity."
- SNCC worker Worth Long reported he was beaten in the county jail September 17.
- Commander Richard Ault refused to honor a request from SNCC workers and local citizens to place segregated Selma businesses off limits on September 21.
- On September 24, police arrested SNCC workers Worth Long and Benny Tucker in the middle of a prayer led by Tucker at the First Baptist Church.
- On September 25, SNCC Chairman John Lewis was arrested with 27 local people while he picketed the county courthouse wearing a sign reading "One Man - One Vote!"
- On October 8, SNCC workers Carver Neblett and Alvery Williams were arrested and beaten by sheriff's officers after they tried to take food and water to a group of 500 Negroes waiting in line to register to vote.
- Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark, County Solicitor Blanchard McLeod and four policemen raided the SNCC office - striking a SNCC worker, confiscating the office files and ripping a telephone from the wall - and the SNCC "Freedom House" on December 22 and arrested nine people.

In March, 1964, Mrs. Amelia P. Boynton of Selma qualified to oppose Alabama Representative Kenneth Roberts. Mrs. Boynton's candidacy helped spur registration attempts throughout the old Fourth District.

In May, 1964, Sheriff Clark refused to leave an organization meeting of the Dallas County Voters League when League officials asked him to. SNCC Chairman John Lewis was arrested with three other SNCC workers and fifty Selma residents on July 6 when they refused to leave the front door of the courthouse. The day before, July 5, policemen beat and clubbed Negroes leaving a weekly mass meeting. Among those injured were a white free-lance writer and a white photographer. A policeman later explained that the two men said they had been beaten by Negroes, which they both denied. One July 7 and 8, 25 more Negroes were arrested, and police impounded two SNCC cars.

On July 4, 1964, sheriff's officers had beat and arrested Negroes trying to test the then two-day old Civil Rights Law.

The events of January and February, 1965 in Selma and Marion illustrate the need for added federal presence in the Alabama Black Belt.

On January 17, SNCC Chairman John Lewis kicked off the voter registration drive at a mass meeting. Lewis repeated his earlier appeal for "One Man - One Vote." Dr. Martin Luther King and his staff arrived on January 18. A summary of the events that followed appears below:

JAN 18 - 500 march on the county courthouse led by Dr. King and SNCC Chairman John Lewis. They are made to stand all day in an alley, and none are able to take the voters' test. Later in the day, Dr. King is punched and kicked by a white racist in a newly integrated Selma hotel.

JAN 19 - 62 people - including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, SNCC workers Lafayette Surney and Frank Soracco and SNCC Alabama Project Director John Love - are arrested when they refuse to enter the courthouse by the alley entrance. Mrs. Amelia Boynton is pushed and shoved by Sheriff Clark. All are released on their own recognizance.

JAN 20 - 156 arrested including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, SNCC workers Terry Shaw, Frank Soracco, Gladys Freeman, Tom Brown - while marching to the courthouse. Sheriff Clark tells SNCC's Lewis: "You are an agitator and that's the lowest form of humanity."

JAN 21 - All those arrested 1/20 are released on their own recognizance. V. B. Atkins, Chairman of the Board of Registrars, rejects an appeal from the all-Negro Selma Teachers Association to open registration on January 22. Five Negroes and one white are arrested at a drug-store lunch counter for "trespassing" by city police when they refuse to leave.

JAN 22 - 125 Negro school teachers from every city school march on the courthouse to protest the closing of the registration office. Three times they try to enter the front door and three times they are clubbed back by Sheriff Clark and his men. Roger Daley, a white volunteer, is attacked by a white man on the street.

JAN 25 - Mrs. Annie Lee Cooper of Selma and SNCC worker Willie McRae are arrested at the courthouse. After a scuffle with Sheriff Clark, four lawmen pounce on Mrs. Cooper and beat her with billy clubs. Sheriff Clark says later: "She's a nigger woman and hasn't got a Miss or Mrs. in front of her name!"

JAN 26 - 34 arrested including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, SNCC workers Willie Emma Scott, Eugene Rouse, Willie McRae, Stanley Wise and Stokeley Carmichael. Mrs. Cooper released on \$2000 bond.

JAN 27 - 24 arrested including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, SNCC workers Larry Fox, Joyce Brown, Frank Soracco and Dartmouth College volunteers Roger Daley and John Liutkis. The Selma Times Journal reports: "In the nine days since the campaign began here, only 40 Negroes have taken the lengthy literacy test."

JAN. 28 - Colonel Al Lingo of the Alabama State Patrol compliments local law officers. In Mobile, civil rights lawyers ask for an injunction against Sheriff Clark, Solicitors Blanchard McLeod and Herry Reese, and County Judges Hugh Mallory and Bernard Reynolds, barring them from interfering with the voter registration drive.

JAN. 29 - Cases are removed to Federal Court. Local people are allowed to sign their own \$100 bonds.

JAN. 31 - United States District Judge Daniel Thomas accepts jurisdiction of 54 additional cases and orders them released. He amended his earlier injunction to say that while only 100 applicants per day would be given numbers, more than 100 could wait in line. Sheriff Clark had interpreted the injunction to mean that all applicants over 100 could be arrested.

FEB. 1 - 264 arrested - including Dr. King, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, SNCC workers Frank Soracco and William Hall, arrested for "parading without a permit" as they march to the courthouse. 450 high school students are arrested that same day on the same charge as they march to protest the difficulties their parents have in registering to vote.

- From Marion, SNCC worker George Bess reports over 500 Negroes stand in line all day for that city's first Freedom Day. Negroes are tested 7 at a time, and 115 take the test. Two drug stores and a movie theatre integrated by testing groups, but other businesses refused service to Negroes.

FEB. 2 - SNCC Alabama Project Director John Love and SNCC workers Terry Shaw and Larry Fox are arrested in Selma for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" who participated in demonstrations of Feb. 1. 75 adults are arrested at the courthouse, as well as 60 more students. That night, Selma's Negro businessmen stage a march on the courthouse.

- In Marion, SNCC worker George Bess and 15 others were arrested at a cafe which refused to serve them. They are charged with "trespassing".

FEB. 3 - 850 arrested at the Perry County courthouse for "unlawful assembly" when students and adults marched to protest: the earlier arrests of Feb. 2, the fact that courthouse is only open on first and third Mondays of month, firing from jobs of people who attempt to register and protesting the lack of compliance with public accommodations section of Civil Rights Law.

FEB. 4 - Injunction issued banning demonstrations "in and around courthouse" in Selma.