

1965, Feb. 7

Fact Sheet on School boycott and school integration
-1964

March 2: The students of Rogers Junior-Senior High School staged a boycott of the school for the following reasons: Books in poor repair and not enough of them, not enough chemicals and equipment for the chemistry laboratory, typewriters in poor condition and not enough of them, home economics laboratory poorly equipped, no physical education for high school students, no foreign languages taught, insufficient first aid equipment, insufficient library, inadequate shop facilities, overcrowded and broken busses, overcrowded classes, building in poor repair, and no lockers for students. The attendance figures for Monday were given by Superintendent Allen (for Canton Negro Schools) as: 2,625 absent and 915 present. At Rogers itself the figures were: 1,396 absent and 316 present. During the day, about 115 students participated in a Freedom School at Pleasant Green.

March 3: The students who were absent the day before were given letters to take home to their parents. The letter, published in the paper, stated that those who were unable to give excuses for their absence would receive zeros in their work. Allen said, "Who actually got hurt by this day's absence from school? The answer is 'Nobody, absolutely nobody except your boys and girls, who should be trying to get an education, and the teachers of your schools.'" He mentioned later that about 3/4 of a million dollars had been spent on buildings and equipment in the last few years, and added that "Great improvements have been made in every area of school activity and will continue to be made with your support." Finally, Allen mentioned the school policy of not permitting students to leave the building once they have registered for the day: "To fail to abide by this school board policy will bring immediate suspension." At the bottom of the letter to the individual parents there was a form for the parents to fill out: "My child was absent from school because_____."

March 4: At least several hundred students were turned away from Rogers because their parents had not filled out the absence form.

March 24: The parents of Rogers High students wrote a letter to James Jones, Jr. (Principal), Dean Allen (Superintendent), L.S. Matthews (mayor), Jack Cauthen (sheriff) and Dan C. Thompson (Chief of police). It protested the "presence and harrassment of the police on and around the campus during school hours." The letter stated that there had been no disturbance or violence to merit such attention and that the only unlawful act that had been committed by anyone connected with the school was the turning away of the students on March 4; it added that the presence of the officials "contributed to the delinquency of all the boys and girls who were sent away. A large number of these students lived nine, ten, and eleven miles out of town and had to get home the best way they could, or wander around town until the school bus left in the late afternoon." The letter, finally, suggested that the police would contribute better to the welfare of the school and students if they provided patrolmen at street crossings, instead of "questioning

them /our daughters/, using abusive language..." The letter was signed by 28 parents: Mrs. Ruth Eva Smith, Mrs. Alice Tucker, Lorian Brown, Verililia Alfred, Henry Alfred, Arsenia McGee, Fremar Jersey (?), Moses Greenwood, Mrs. Tennie L. Anderson, Miss Percy Lee Jackson, Miss Gladys Jackson, Mrs. Lillie Thompson, Minnie Lou Chinn, Mrs. Annie Devine, Mr. Clark Esco, Mr. James Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Powell, Mrs. Charlestine Harden, Mrs. Bernice McElroy, Mrs. Ida Jackson, Mrs. Mary Louise Adams, Mrs. Sarah L. Singleton, Doris Francis, Emma Trotter, Rev. S.M. Johnson, Arneida Beals, Ida Lee Wade, Annie Louis Goodlow, Mrs. Cora Davis.

Aug. 31: Susan Mae Williams was approached by a man who claimed to be from the FBI in Jackson and who asked her if she intended to send her children to the white school to attempt to integrate it. In the conversation, the man said, "That would be good if you don't send them, you won't have any protection and anything might happen to them." Mrs. Williams's opinion is that this man was not from the FBI.

Sept. 1: Seven children went over to Canton High to try to register for the year: Eddie Williams, Richard Weatherford, Sammie Owens, James McCullough, Addie Goines, Henrietta Anderson, and Walter Griffin. The parents were not allowed out of the cars, and Superintendent Allen met the children to take them inside. He said registration for transfer students was two days away and questioned them. Billy Noble and several police cars were in front of the Freedom House all day.

Sept. 3: 19 children went to the school to try to transfer: James Anderson (7th grade, age 13), John Anderson (7th grade, age 13), Juanita Bennett (8th grade, age 14), Mary Lee Bennett (7th grade, age 13), Mary Chambers (8th grade, age 14), Gladys Binkins (10th grade, age 14), Floyd Esco (7th grade, age 15), Dewitt Grant (10th grade, age 16), Jimmy Grant (9th grade, age 15), Lena Harrison (9th grade, age 15), James McCullough (8th grade, age 13), Chester Thomas (9th grade, age 16), Sammie Owens (7th grade, age 12), Hattie Mae Oliver (8th grade, age 16), Georgia Mae Reid (9th grade, age 13), Betty Jean Silas (8th grade, age 13), Richard Weatherford (8th grade, age 13), and Eddie Williams (7th grade, age 12). *also, Hattie Mae Oliver
The parents who went with them were: Mrs. Rosa Lee Weatherford, Mr. McCullough, Mrs. Lockett and Mrs. J. Bennett.
Cars were staked out at Liberty Supermarket (next door to the school), and people were staked out at vantage points throughout the school and downtown area. Three cars on their way to the school were held up by the sheriff until our lawyers could get to the office with verbal permission to drive the cars. There were police and sheriff cars all over the school area, and in front of the school there were several cars with hoods in them; these cars circled the block. City trucks were out tarring the streets in the area, seemingly with the purpose of impeding the cars taking the Negro children to the school. There was good press coverage- Life, NBC, ABC, etc.

Sept. 3: The children were given a letter from Allen to take home to their parents: "Your application for transfer from Rogers Junior-Senior High School has been received, and until you are notified of the School Board's action relative to assignment of students to attendance centers, you will remain in the school in which you are presently enrolled. Present enrollment status is based on regular last Spring and promotions with the Canton School system."

A press release was sent out the same day, written by Mrs. Devine and Mrs. Lockett. It made reference to the Civil Rights Bill, Title IV, Sec. 401 (B) and 401 (C); it claimed that "In Canton, Mississippi, a county with a population of 71.2 percent Negroes, the Civil Rights Bill has been ignored. There have been no moves on the part of the School Board to initiate any plans for desegregation of the public schools...We will use every legal means available to us at this time in order to exercise the right to an equal education for our children."

Sept. 11: A petition was written up to Roy E. Cox, Superintendent of Education, and the School Board of Madison County, Mississippi. It asked for a "hearing...whereby the matters and requests stated below may be discussed and peacefully resolved." It stated that "By Tuesday, September 8, 1964, the date on which regular school sessions were to commence for the academic year 1964-1965, you had failed to advise the said applicants of your decision regarding the said application for transfer filed with you on September 3, 1964..." Finally, it requested that all of the public schools in Madison County be promptly desegregated.

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