

The Alabama Struggle

Today Alabama is in turmoil, tensions are focused on Selma, Alabama, a small town, where Negroes want to vote, a small town where people have looked to and where all Negro citizens of Alabama have decided that Negroes have the right to Vote. All over the state of Alabama the move is on, College students, High School Students and adults alike have decided, no matter what, the Negro is going to get the Vote.

Selma Alabama:

For two weeks, starting January 25, 1965, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) has put much effort in organizing citizens of Selma, Alabama to go to the Courthouse and Register to vote. Endless effort was made by Selma's citizens to register and vote, only to find out that Jim Clark and other Dallas County officials would not allow Negroes the opportunity to become registered voters. Many tactics of intimidations were used against Negroes in Selma, some people lost jobs, some were arrested, some were told that the time had not come for Negroes to become registered voters and others were told after applying for registration that they had flunked the test. These methods of intimidations, as far back as tow years had been quite passive up to 14 days ago.

Upon the arrival of John Lewis (SNCC Chairman and Dr. Martin Luther King (SCLC President) Selma's Negroes had realized that Selma was due for a radical change and that this change would bring about a new Negro and a new Alabama and a new political system of the South; a political system that would be guide-lines for Southern segregated states. SNCC and SCLC began to organize organizers for the big move, a big move that meant every Negro adult would have to go to the Courthouse and attempt to register to vote, that every Negro adult within himself would have to make up his mind that he would become a registered voter no matter what the sacrifice was.

So now was the "Big Alabama Struggle":

January 18 - 24

Monday morning approximately 500 Negroes marched to the Courthouse with Dr. King and Mr. John Lewis, leading the line. Upon arrival at the Courthouse, Jim Clark (sheriff) and Mr. Baker (Chief of Police) met them and ordered them to go to the rear of the building to be processed for the right to vote, It was there that Negroes were kept in the cold on the outside of the Courthouse in the rear like cattle and only then, less than 10 Negroes ~~were~~ processed the whole day. For eight hours Negroes stood in line waiting in vain for his legal, moral, and appointed right as an American citizen.

That evening of Monday, Negroes of Selma met in Browns Chappel Methodist Chnunch for a mass meeting with John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King as guest speakers. The mass meeting was full of the Freedom Spirit. Negroes at the mass meeting gave great concern to the issue that black American citizens should not go to the back of the building anymore. It was then that Selma's citizens decided that to jail they will go, if they have to go to the back of the Courthouse.

During the next four days, some two thousand Negroes were arrested for "unlawful assembly", many of whom were arrested two to three times in that week and each time were released by hand on personal recognizance. For the four day period Negroes peacefully went to the Courthouse and to the front door to become registered to vote, only to find out that they would be arrested and denied the right to become registered.

COLLEGE STUDENTS MOVE

It was then necessary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to call to the attention of the Alabama Negro college students the problems of Selma, Ala., and the problems of Negroes in that state, and the role of college students in relation to the plight of the Negro in the state of Alabama.

On the evening of Jan. ~~29~~³⁰, 1965 some twenty Negro students of Alabama, representing the colleges Tuskegee Institute, Stillman College, Selma University and Lutheran College met to discuss what they could do the next day while Selma was in the midst of a great voter registration revolution. Students from the colleges represented felt that more students of Alabama should come into the project areas of Alabama and that a method and new approach should be used to bring Negro college students out of their apathetic attitudes with regard to the inequalities Negroes suffer in Alabama.

Students asked the following additional, related questions: "What is voting?" "Should we set stipulations on voting?" "Should the Negro be denied the right to vote if he can't read?" Basically the questions were not answered, but it was resolved that before these questions could definitely be answered they would first have to work with and help Negroes to register, and from there answer the questions in their own minds.

The following day students went out into the community and canvassed for ward meetings to be held that evening. Many of these students had interesting conversations with local people.

That evening students met in a workshop among themselves. Previous questions were raised and some answers suggested; in addition, students questioned the whole idea of what education is, and what it's responsibility is, not only to Negro students but to the Negro community as a whole. Students felt that the Black man has a purpose, and not one of inequality but one of equality. They thought that the system of the South is geared to keeping Negroes from voting, but the very fact that Negroes are standing in line to register(which is his right), means that they must get this right to vote, and that the system should be changed in such a way that illiterate Negroes will

be allowed to vote. Many whites in the South, they pointed out are illiterate, and yet they are allowed to vote.

TUSKEGEE STUDENTS GO TO JAIL

On the afternoon of ^{Feb. 15} ~~Jan. 21~~, 1965 six Tuskegee male students were arrested for "contempt of court," and they served from 3 to 6 days in jail. Before they were arrested some 400 Negro people had been assisted by them in going to the courthouse to register. The students arrested were:

Eldridge Burns
George Davis
Charles Scott

Irvin LeBlanch
~~Reginald Braddock~~
James Paul

After the students had been arrested, Alphonso Atkins ^{& Fred} (know as K.C.) went back to Tuskegee, Ala. to organize students to march in behalf of the Negroes right to register and vote. That ~~weekend~~ ^{weekend} some 300 Tuskegee students paraded downtown in agreement with the Negroes in Selma and their efforts to become registered voters.

SNCC finds a great need for Negro students to participate in helping Negroes of the South become free from the political and social oppression of the white man. It has been proven that true change in the South can come about through the efforts of young Negroes and Negro college students. SNCC plans are to go into other counties in Alabama and throughout the Black Belt and set up voter registration projects. But this can only be successful if Negro college students of the South participate in the struggle and bring about changes that will condition him, not to the southern political system but to democracy.