

[1965, March]

A group of University of Kansas students and Lawrence residents, sponsored by Lawrence CORE, will be spending their spring vacation in Jonesboro and Bogolusa, Louisiana, and other parts of the state to help in the civil rights efforts there. The following is a report from CORE field secretary Mike Lesser on the situation in Jonesboro at the present time.

Under tremendous pressure from local and state authorities, and white vigilante groups, the Negro community of Jonesboro, Louisiana, a rural mill town in North Louisiana, is conducting a 100% effective boycott of the local segregated high school.

Aided by Charles Fenton, a CORE task force worker, students at the all-Negro Jackson parish high school began their boycott last Monday, March 8, to protest intolerable conditions at the Negro school and to demand integration of the parish school system. On the first day of the boycott about 50% of the Negro school students refused to attend classes, and a picket line of students and their parents, 200 strong, was set up around the school.

This action brought out the local police, sheriff's department, and white segregationists from the area who harrassed the picketters and arrested many of the participants in the protest. Tuesday, as the picketting continued and the boycott became almost 100% effective, with classes in the all-Negro school almost completely empty, the local whites took more drastic action. The police and sheriff's men, with the aid of a local segregationist vigilante group called the "Citizen's

---

*Memorandum*  
Highway Patrol" set up roadblocks in a six block area around the school, which encompasses most of the Negro community, and also blockaded all the main roads leading into Jonesboro. No Negroes, civil rights workers, newsmen or other observers were allowed to pass the blockades, either to enter or leave the area, and a report from Ed Hollander, CORE Field Secretary in New Orleans, Louisiana, stated that all telephone communications with the Jonesboro Negro community and CORE headquarters in the town had been cut off.

This action by local white authorities and their supporters had the effect of completely isolating the Jonesboro Negroes--from help and the outside world. The blockade was so complete that they even refused to allow a representative from the United States Department of Justice to enter the area to observe for the Federal Government.

Under cover of this isolation the local whites began reprisals against the Negro protesters: many protesters were arrested and several beaten, including two local men prominent in civil rights activities, Ernest Thomas and Olin Satcher. Satcher, as he emerged from his house after lunch, was beaten in the head by a member of the Jackson parish school board with a billy club, and then taken to jail. Ernest Thomas was beaten and arrested. He is still in jail under \$2,000.00 dollars bond.

Also arrested, on Wednesday, was CORE worker Fenton. Other names of those arrested are not available because of the news blackout, and the charges against them are not known.

By Wednesday the boycott of the school had become 100% effective, with more and more Negro students and parents joining the picket line.

Finally school board authorities announced that the school would be closed

Thursday and Friday, but would be reopened Monday, with all students "invited" to return to classes. Student and parent leaders announced, however, that the boycott would continue until their demands were met.

The demands being made by the students and their parents are: that the school gymnasium, which was burnt to the ground in a mysterious fire last October, be replaced; that an auditorium be added--the school has none now; that their woefully inadequate library be expanded and that such noisy activities as music and industrial arts classes be moved away from the library where they are now located. The boycotters are also demanding curriculum changes to add courses in mechanical and office skills, and in Negro history. Other demands are that the parish school system be integrated and that Negro students be given fair treatment by their principal and the parish school superintendant.

The town of Jonesboro, Louisiana, has been a civil rights battleground since late in 1963, when two CORE workers, Ronnie Moore and Mike Lesser, were the first civil rights workers to enter the town to start a voter registration campaign. This campaign got under way in the summer of last year as a part of CORE's project, "Louisiana, Summer, 1964," which was a statewide voter registration campaign. This campaign spearheaded the registration of many new Negro voters in the area and the desegregation of facilities such as the public library and several public accommodations.

The success of these efforts by Jonesboro Negroes, aided by CORE workers, brought swift, violent and continual retaliation by the white community, with arrests, beatings, and continual harrassment, climaxed by the burning to the ground of two Negro churches last January 17. Both churches had been headquarters for civil rights activities.

Last month, the ground around both churches was cleared for rebuilding