

SCLC Chapter 4

FRANK BATES

Interview
Frdak Bates
Negro; Male in Crawfordsville, Georgia
Local. SCLC

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Q: First of all you could tell me something about your background. You're a high school student here in Crawfordsville?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you'll be a senior?

A: I'm a senior, that's right.

Q: Could you tell me how you first got involved with the movement?

A: Well, really. We usually had a mass meeting before we started the movement, to vote legally(?) And we'd meet out at Springfield, and our town asked all the kids in school to come out and also their parents. That's one of the big things that started the movement. And one thing that happened last April, we celebrate in Crawfordsville we celebrate the ninth day of April the Emancipation Proclamation. And William, our superintendent, says no one goes down to the church, to Friendship Church, except the people in the choir. Someone told us that we could go, it was Robert Stevenson I believe it was, he was a speaker here. And T_____ said you get all the students in the school from 8 through 12 to sign a petition that you want to go. So I was the one he appointed and Ed Andrew another guy, he was the one who was jailed. And we got all the people there were about a hundred of us I guess, people signed a petition that they want to go down to the mass meeting. So he called William and told her that we had about a hundred who wanted to go, so she called back and said okay, you can go. And that was on the 9th. of April.

Q: Was that before any SCLC people were around?

A: Yeah. All through the time we've had _____ from SCLC staff say you come down, to the mass meeting before we started this movement, you come down, you'll probably be of value, we want to start a movement, start in the right way and everything.

Q: Who were the people who wanted to start the mass movement?

A: Well, Turner (?) he's the one who's really the head of the movement. He didn't like, well, ever since he's been here in Crawfordsville he didn't like the way things are going on with the Negro that wasn't on the board, or the way everything

was run by the whites, the white people always say so and everything. And no Negro has anything to say about any kind of decisions being made. When the movement started, teachers really kicked the movement off; it was already about to explode, you know. And they find that teachers helped kick it off, and they asked teachers as they refused for their contract to be renewed. We had a regular then out in Springfield.

Q: That was after they found out he couldn't come back to work?

A: Yeah.

Q: You said that you thought that the people were ready you know, and it was the teachers that kicked the thing off. Do you think that it would have started, do you think the students might have started it or someone else might have started it if the teachers hadn't?

A: Well, yeah. I believe it would. It was at a point where it was about to explode; if the teachers hadn't, you know, kicked it off, probably with some effort it probably would have kicked off. I wouldn't be in a position to say if the teachers hadn't started it what would happen, I don't know. But I believe that it would have started whether the teachers had started it or not, you know.

Q: Then you were appointed originally to get names to sign the petition...

A: Yeah, to go out...on the 9th day of April to go down, for all the kids to go down to...

Q: So you went down to have that meeting, is that right?

A: Yeah, we went down and listened to this guest speaker there. He was speaking on the poverty of the Negro, and well, really it was celebrating a day that the Negro was supposed to have been freed, that was the 9th day of April. Generally it's celebrated on January 1st, I believe it is. But here I guess the Negroes here in Crawfordville didn't hear about it till April the 9th. Well, really, in _____ County it's January 1st. I believe Crawfordville County is the only county that wait until April the 9th.

Q: Maybe they were April the 9th the year before.

A: Oh, no, I guess not. And we started the movement that Wednesday. _____ said all the students meet to the project at I believe it was 8:00 Wednesday morning. So we had about 60 of our teenagers. There were two ladies there, Mrs. Wiggins and Mr. Wiggins, they were there. Turner, and Mr. Harris

and our leader was still in school after we got out was still in school checking our files and sending them to the superintendent. Boulton, he was here then. Boulton came in Tuesday night I believe. Boulton and _____ and Al Lupton (?) and Jan Gibson.

Q: These are all SCLC staff?

A: Yes. Those were three white guys who were along with Boulton. So we organized in three groups, and Bo he sent 9 to the cafe, and 6 to the laundromat (?) The other people went to the park, a large number of people went to the park, I don't know exactly the number that went. I was in the group that went to the cafe. I thought I was getting out of something by not going to the park, I figured there would be violence at the park, and there wasn't. I was the group that did have violence, at the cafe.

Q: What kind of violence was there there?

A: It wasn't really violence, you know. Action. There was more action than at the other places. We went down we went to the cafe, Jan Gibson and _____, they were the two spokesmen for the group; we went to the cafe, and by the time we walked to the door, she hung a sign up, CLOSED. So about three or four people went around to the back to see if they could come in the back and come around to the front. The back door was locked too. So they came back and sat down on the step, and Jan said if she's closed well she might as well prepare to stay closed; there were a couple of white guys here too, local whites here you know, wanted to bust the door you know, he hated the one that started it. He came out and he said you know, why don't you get up and let some of these people get outa here? What are you all doing here anyway? And _____ told him that we wanted to be served. Well, you ain't gonna be served. Then Mrs. B-_____ the manager came out and she tried to brainwash us, she said I been good to you boys and girls and I don't...I been good to your mother and father, I don't see why you all want to come here. So she said if you all don't move I'm going to go and get a warrant for every one of you. So she went across to the courthouse; she had _____ standing looking out of the window, we could see him looking out of the window. She got a warrant, she went over to the law office, over by the service station; there were a lot of white boys standing looking to see what was going on down there. So she got done, and they came, at least she got one of them came over with a iron pipe and he went and looked in the cafe and saw it was closed so he went back. She came across the street with the warrant and went over to L_____. By this time there were four brothers, the H_____ brothers, you've probably heard of them before, they're really the Klansmen here you might say. The fourth is kind of a young guy, he came and said what's going on here? We

got a bunch of damn niggers want to eat here. So one of the Hubbard brothers, his nickname is Shy, he say, "I think we need to go home and come back again." And the other brother, Rock, his nickname's Rock, he say, "We don't need no going. Why don't they just turn them over to me? I get them up til their teeth come out once." They kept talking and cursing, telling how disgrace it was for them white guys to be seen here with these Negroes, and D_____ he said, asked James, "You don't have no work to do here, boy? All you's fit for is set around and led a bunch of damn niggers." By that time B_____ she came back with the warrant. Sheriff Moore with her to serve the warrant. She came and arrest James and Al. And we went along with them as Sheriff Moore helped them up, and another four white guys helped - went along with Sheriff Moore. We went in the Courthouse behind them, and Sheriff Moore told one of the Hubbard brothers to get the keys. His name is - well really I don't know his name, they call him Lovey. He went and got the keys, so Sheriff Moore locked two white guys up, and they gave him a bad time - they pushed and kicked him, and he gave them a shove with his foot. We told him, we want to be locked up too. But he said, "You ain't going to be locked up." James - one of the Hubbard brothers came out of the jail and said, "You all niggers, get on that corner curb like a dog." So they went back across the street, and we went to the project. James told me to tell B_____ that had em locked up, that's what went on. So we went back to the park - to the ah - yeah, to the project - and waited for B_____ and the other group. The group that went to the laundromat didn't have any trouble at all. They went, they washed their clothes, but they couldn't dry them. They - the man had cut the water off, to claim they was working on the water - the water system - they couldn't get any water to dry their clothes with. So they had to bring their clothes back wet. And the incident that happened at the group that went - that to ah.....to take pictures of everything that happened and report back to SCLC. He was expecting that both of them would get locked up, and the other guy, but apparently Bolten didn't get locked up and Tony did.

Q: What was he locked up for?

A: He was in the car, at least the Hubbard brothers said there's a another one over to the park, we'll go and get him too. But Tony wasn't over to - he wasn't with that group that went to the park. But when they turned and go to come to the park, they met Tony in the car with Grenda Taylor and Robert Stevens, two Negroes, and Tony - he was in the car with em, trying to get some pictures. And they stopped, blocked the road, blocked Mr. Grenda Taylor's car, and asked Tony out, told Mr. Grenda Taylor to let him out, and Grenda Taylor told em that he weren't gong to get him out.....So they stood around and argued some few times, then Bolten came up and told - Bolten told Tony to get out of the car. By that time the Hubbard brothers arrest him, you might say. They give him a bad time,

broke his glasses, and had him down, put him in the back of his pickup truck. They hauled him off to jail.

Q: What was the charge?

A: I don't know what the charge was. Bolten came back and used the phone, and called....from Hossanha, I believe it was, I'm not so sure. But he came and called some more - called SCLC office in Atlanta. And that Tuesday - that Thursday they sent some more SCLC workers in. I'm quite sure it was Thursday, they sent em. Yeah it was Thursday. And that was all the arrests was made that day.

Q: Well I understand that _____ was in jail for some ten days. Was she arrested that day?

A: No, she was arrested that Sunday for going to church. It was a group that went to church, to _____ Baptist Church...

Q: That's a white church?

A: Yeah. And the Methodist church.

Q: What was she doing? What was she arrested for?

A: Deborah - for going to church. I don't know what the charge was. I think the charge was - I don't know really what the charge was, you know. Arrested for going to church, I don't know. One church they went, the pastor there - the pastor at the church, he told em to come in, but the local white people, they closed the door, said that they couldn't come in. That were the group at the Methodist church...

Q: So is everything integrated in Crawfordsville, as much as can be done? Or what has happened since that time?

A: Oh there's ah - the laudromat is still white - it's still got white and colored signs up. And no one is going in the colored side, just the whites going in the white side. We have discussed whether we will go back to the laundromat or not. But the reason why we haven't been back to the laundromat is it's not in the civil rights act, I don't believe. And the library here, the public library - I have tried to attempt to go in a couple of times - she says she must wait til the board meeting and until the board meeting she must keep on doing like she has been doing all the while.

Q: Which is?

A: Keeping all Negroes out.

Q: Of the library?

A: Of the library.

Q: Is that the only library in town?

A: The only library in town.

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Q: And how long - has that been since during May?

A: It was in June - the first of June, I believe it was. Around the first of June.

Q: Did you ever think of doing these things before the SCLC people came to town?

A: Yeah we had discussed before we start the movement that why couldn't we go to the public library to use books - to check out books and go to the park. Well, there was one guy that go to the park and the superintendent asked him out. They put this phoney jive in the paper when we started the movement, that the park - the Negro had accessed to the park for - ever since the civil rights bill was signed. But apparently it wasn't you know.

Q: I wondered how much the fact that the SCLC staff was here and gave you all the ideas of things to do - how much that was responsible for getting the movement started?

A: Well SCLC gave us a lot of ideas and how to go about it in the right way. And how to conduct yourself in a non-violent coordination. Booten has, you know, helped us in that way quite a bit. And I would just say they gave us a lot of advice in this movement.

Q: Have very many people participated in this movement outside of the students?

A: What?

Q: Has the participation in the movement been mostly students?

A: Yeah. Mostly students. We have some older people that participate a little - mostly old people that participate live out in Springfield community - out where the center is located.

Q: Why is that? Do you know?

A: Well more of the people out in that community are not Uncle Toms, you know. Everybody out there is ready and going, ready to fight for freedom. But one of the main areas we having trouble at is _____, Georgia.....

Q: What seems to be the big problem there?

A: Well I guess because the white people there have brainwashed the Negroes so long that they hate to come onto the white people. And they haven't been taught anything about standing up for their rights or any other type of thing..

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door, "Closed for vacation." ... (inaudible) if they han't gotten no (inaudible) association closed anyway.

Q: Do you think...well, do you think you'll stay in Crawfordsville after you graduate from high school, or what will you be doing?

A: Well, I hadn't planned to stay in Crawfordsville. after I graduate from high school. I had planned to go to Cincinnati and go to trade school or to goto Jacksonville.

Q: And go to?

A: Trade school.

Q: In what kind of field?

A: Radio and Television technician.

Q: Do you still plan to do that?

A: Yeah. Well, this all depends. Well, Father Conant (?) asked me "why do I join SCLC. What was on the staff of SCLC." Well, I guess now this all depends on what will happen after I finish school; you know. What would happen of the Movement is still goin' on? I guess...I don't know whether I'll join SCLC then of not. This all depends. What my intentions are not is to...if things go on well, to go to trade school in Cincinnati or Jacksonville.

Q: Did you ever thing about going to college?

A: No. I never thought of goin' to college.

Q: Why was that?

A: Well, I guess for...I tired of school, I guess. I dm't know. I'm 'patient with school at four years. Well, one the main reasons was the loan. The fimancial loan you know. Was the money problem. The loan has been arranged that if you want to go to college, you can get a loan but I just didnt' want to go to college noways.

Q: What did your parents think about your involvement in Civil Rights.

A: Well, my father, he's dead. He got killed sometime... about February...a year ago. In a car accident. He was takin' a transmission out of a car, and the jack fell, so the car fell on him. It crushed him. My mother, she's... well, she...she go along with me, but she's scared for me, you know. Bein' that I'm, well, the leader of the

pickett line, and in the middle of what is goin' on here in Crawfordsville. But my brother kind of gets to her. For instance, when they were arrested for asking a customer not to patronize a store, the shoe shop, that when I arrested. That last Saturday. Well, he kind of just... Well, he my father now, since he the oldest one. That... I said my father dead...died. He's been to keepin' charge of everything here. So he get to my mother and tell her that what he doin' is right, and don't worry about a thing, because nothin' will happen, and the white people won't do anything to him, and a lot of things like that to just keep tryin' to boost her spirit up, encouragin' her for me to go on. She never told me Frank ~~started~~ doin this, although she...well, she's with the movement, but she's scared for me.

Q: Have you got any threats?

A: Yeah. Yesterday I got...I was walkin' by the Superette. George McCluen (?) the owner of the Superette, said, "BOY, I'll cut your damned neck off." Well, it happened to me a lot of times before then, that..."I'm goin' git you," and "I'll whip your ass, and kill you and cut your neck off," and a lot of threats like that, but I don't pay 'em any 'ttention, because I figure the type of thing that happen in any movement when you start to fight for your freedom.

Q: Have you ever been beaten by white people?

A: No.

Q: Even before the Movement?

A: No.

Q: Have there been very many incidents of violence here in...

A: Since we started the movement?

Q: Yeah.

A: No.

Q: What about before that?

A: With white people, you mean?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, there wasn't any violence at all. None that I can think of right now...but I'm quite sure there wasn't any

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violence. Because some of the white people here...

END OF TAPE