

## SCOPE Chapter 13

CALVIN TURNER

0272-7  
Side 2  
Calvin Turner  
Negro male  
Crawfordsville, Ga.  
SCOPE project leader

Q: Could you begin by telling me something about how the movement actually did get started here, giving your early experience?

A: I think that there has been a lot of tension between the white and Negroes for maybe five or six years, and that the white has been rather deceiving in that political action, and the Negroes began to become restless. The movement actually was started by the fire of five teachers and one principal. The student body resented this very much, and they wanted really to do something about it, because it's my thinking that they felt that they fired the--what they considered the best teachers, the teachers that they fired was really teaching them citizenship, and really teaching them that there is no difference in people as far as races is concerned--and when the teachers were fired, they threatened not to march and not to have a graduation; but this, with the teachers prevailing with them, they went on and they had the graduation exercise. So they informed me to get in touch with SCLC and see if SCLC could help them.

Q: Was this the student leadership?

A: Yes; the student leadership. And SCLC agreed that they would do what they could to help them to restore their teachers. And the way in which this was planned to be done is by protesting, by marching, by picketing the stores; and what really disturbed the community is that there was no reason given for the dismissal of the teachers, and no Negro citizen could talk with the Board of Education nor the superintendent. They made several attempts, and the superintendent refused to tell the Negro community anything other than, "See, the Board has taken the action, and that was final."

Q: Do you know the reasons why the ...

A: No one has been told; not even the teachers have been told the reason for their dismissal.

Q: So SCLC sent some people in?

A: Yeah; they sent their staff members in, and they first, well, this involved as the results of the protests for the teachers, the Negro community decided that they would like to integrate the public facilities that were in the county. Their first target was the Liberty Cafe, which is

now the Bruner's Private Club, and the state park. The state park has been integrated; the Liberty Cafe has changed into a private club, and this is supposed to be private, and this is one of the ways in which the owner thinks that they are getting out of integrating the cafe. I do think that even if the teachers had not been fired, this was coming later, because the Negro community had just gotten enough of being in semi-slave...or a semi-slave. And they were going to do something about it anyway.

Q: What would you say was the extent of community involvement in the movement?

A: We have about 80, 85 percent of the Negro community involved--it's either marching, picketing, giving them money, or making some type of contribution. There's maybe five percent of the community really just doesn't care... well, five percent of 'em is more or less Uncle Toms; they think that this is a sin. The other ten percent just doesn't care one way or the other, whether the conditions is better, or whether they are worse.

Q: Would you say that there's some connection between registering and...would you say that the people who are registering are the ones who are participating?

A: I think first of all, I would like to say this, that we have been told, and I think we have been brainwashed to the point that they are many Negroes registered in the county as white, which is not true. The voters' list hasn't been kept accurate; and this, it shows it, on paper; but in reality, it's not true, because we have 1700 people registered in the county, but on no election can we vote over 700 or 800 white and Negroes. But we can also find on the voters' list that there are people who've been dead and moved away six and seven and eight years, and these people are still on the rolls as eligible voters. I think that this one thing the white community fear: they can cut down on registration, or if they can keep more Negroes from becoming registered, we'll more or less be able to have the condition as they wish. And this is where SCOPE came in. It was such a hard job to get Negroes on the registration lists, it was too big a job for the local people to do it alone. Well, this is why we asked for SCOPE, to help in political education and registration.

Q: Was there any dissent on this? Any feeling that you could do it as well without the SCOPE?

A: No; the community could do it, I think, but they're financially limited--their resources, and they just couldn't afford, because this is really one of the poverty stricken areas. Whereas it isn't uncommon to find a man with two jobs making fifty, fifty-five dollars a week. All the other people having to go out of the county to make a living. In the summer months, we don't have anything for our children to do; there is no jobs. The ladies that are working in the county only makes from ten to fifteen dollars a week. And from that you can see that it takes every penny that they can get to survive. And still they can't. So it's a matter of having the money to launch such a campaign of this nature. And financially, we were just not able.

Q: Then how has it worked out, having the SCOPE people here?

A: It is working fine. I think that maybe we are accomplishing a great deal of our goal or our purpose.

Q: I know that they've been here about three weeks, and you have about 20 registered, and 12 yesterday. Do you think there's any chance that they would be able to get a Negro majority by the end of the summer? It seems like their work is getting harder, as if perhaps there aren't that many people in the county who are ready to register. Whom they can still get to register.

A: This is true; this is the problem of illiteracy. We're hoping, we had set our goals, for three hundred. And we're still hoping that we will be able to register three hundred. If we don't we're hoping that we can get at least 150 on the books through adult education, at least to, we can get them to the point that they can register. And this can be done, if it can, we can have enough power in the election to kind of persuade a candidate to think about and consider the Negro when he's elected.

Q: You've been working with the Voter's League for a number of years now, isn't that right?

A: Yes.

Q: How many years?

A: I have been working with the NAACP chapter for nine years; well, really about five, and then I was made chairman of the Tufalo County Voter's League about four years ago; so I have been involved in either NAACP, Voter's League, for nine years in the struggle for registration and political

education and community education.

Q: How many people were registered nine years ago?

A: This we don't know. We can say, because we have never known, really, how many people we have had registered, but nine years ago, up until now, I think maybe we have put a hundred, maybe a hundred and twenty-five, on the books. This is a good number, in that we are so small, and illiteracy is so high. Where we get those from, is from the school. As soon as the children become of age from the school to register, we see that they register.

Q: In your work then, with the Negro community, and trying to get people to register, you must have a pretty good idea of the reasons why people don't register. Do you think that the SCOPE workers understand why people don't register?

A: I think, to a great deal, they do understand. But I don't think that they understand as clearly as I do, being a part of the community. And they have mentioned that it's fear, and it is fear, but not having to live in a community where you have always worked to be--well, it was intimidation, it was threats of jobs, it was threats of life, it was something that would keep a Negro from speaking up and living up as a man really should--and because of this, this is what really created that fear. They do understand that it is fear; they do understand that it is a matter of surviving; but, and I think that they are working with this, very good, but if they were a part of the community, I believe that they could understand even better. I think they're doing wonderful in understanding the problem; they're acquainting themselves with them more and more every day. I should say this, that it has been a big change in their attitude since they were first here until this point. Their attitude, I think, the way I evaluate it, is that "I'm going to work with some people who just need to be told, 'You go down and register,' and I just load them up and carry them down." I don't think that they really realize the problem that involves even going to individuals, staying with them, and just talking with them, and going back, and back, and going back, and trying to convince them that this type of thing they need to do.

Q: All in all, would you say it would be better to have local people doing the voter registration work, if that were possible?

A: NO; I think that it is a good combination, to have the northern whites and some southern whites, and the

local Negroes involved; by doing this, I think the Negroes will get a chance to know that all white people are not like the ones that they generally know. That there are some white people who are really concerned about the welfare of all citizens, be he white or colored. That all men should have opportunity to have his ability and to more or less live where he wants to, and to have the freedom of voice, you know.

Q: Well, I know with the SCLC staff and with a lot of other civil rights staffs, there's a tendency to feel that it's not really worth the effort to have white students down here because they do have to learn so much, and it takes so long for them to get used to the situation down here, that they would rather do without the white students, if possible. Do you think that that, as a goal, would become more and more important as the Negroes see more and more chance of getting good jobs, and getting a share of the political power, that it would be less important to have the white student down here and that even the white student can damage the movement?

A: I wouldn't agree. With most of the Southern communities, because as we said before, well, I just agree that it will help the white to understand the deprived Negro's way of life; this they have never known. And I will agree that it will take them some time to understand, but while they are understanding, they can also do a great deal of help; this is to help remove that fear, from the Negroes, that whites are always untruthful, that you can't depend on them, that they are always out to...well, to take whatever they can from the Negro; and I can prove that, from the SCOPE workers that we have in our community. I don't think that we could get a better team and a better group of people who just really intelligently get right into the community among Negroes, and they somewhat, I think, feel comfortable in that they understand the Negroes' problem, and I think this is why they know that they accept what they see. And really try to do what they can to correct it. And I think that this is very good for the South. Because they have been things that I have always wondered about whites, that have more or less been cleared up in my mind.

Q: What kinds of things are you thinking of?

A: Well, some of what I have just said, that you have no confidence in white people; and when I say that, I'm speaking generally of the Southern whites; they're just deceiving. And it's just good to know someone that you can rest assured that they're not going to take advantage of you once they learn to know you, and learn to know something about you, your affairs, and your problems.

Q: What do you think will happen to the future here in the movement in Tolofa County, and what...can you imagine, in the next couple years?

A: Well, I think this movement is really going to change the whole attitude, it's going to change the whole community; it's going to give it a new look--in that we have so many children involved, and they, I think, is getting the right attitude now, as to the only way the Negro is ever going to achieve anything, which is that he's going to have to stand up, that he's going to have to let the world know that he's a man, and that he's going to stand up for what he think is right. I think that--well, I must admit that it's going to be a slow process until some of the older heads, and that's Negroes and white, but I do think that one thing that will contribute much to the future is that the plans for integrating the schools. This is really going to help both Negroes and white, and it's going to more or less bring them together and give them the opportunity to really learn and to really care for one another from the standpoint of individual dignity.

Q: Do you think there's any chance that these students will be staying in the county after they graduate? Will they continue to move on out?

A: Some will stay; because I think the community is getting the idea they are going to have to move forward, they're going to have to get industrial in here, interests in here, they're going to have to provide jobs. And once this happens, I think the younger people will stay here as much as anywhere. And this seems to be the concern, especially of the Negro community, and I think the whites are realizing that this must be done if we are to continue to exist.

Q: Back to the SCOPE project. Is there any way you think these students could be better prepared, or that they could be...that different ones should be recruited? Or do you think that they were oriented properly when they came in here?

A: I think the...the orientation week was good; but it wasn't sufficient. And really, I don't think that you could really take workers that is going to work in voter registration with Negroes and put them in a classroom, and tell them what they're going to find for problems out in the community. It will help them recognize them, after they are there, but I think the best orientation one could have, is to go into the community and let the community orientate them. I think that most of them spent a week in orientation; but I think it's one of the most richest experiences, that one can receive, when he comes into a community and really goes to work. And this is where he finds the problems as they are, and not as someone would describe them.

Q: Have the SCOPE workers told you what they have gained from their...can you say?

A: Well, not directly; however, they have mentioned it different ways. I think that they are very much pleased with the experience that they are getting.

Q: Have you heard anything from the people that they're living with? About what they think of students down here?

A: Yes; I think that each home in which the volunteer SCOPE workers are living, there were some problems, and these were psychological--they just didn't know how I can live with white living in my home--but after they got there, they were willing, they were perfectly willing for them to come into their home, but this was something they had never been used to, they had never thought of. Well, after they got to living together, and I think that the people which have provided homes for SCOPE workers, are happy and pleased, and find it a rewarding experience to have them in the home.

Q: How did you go about preparing the community to go about getting ready for the SCOPE project?

A: Well, really, we did it by taking one community, and this is the community in which I live, which I think that really we can say that this community is the community that spearheaded the...all of the movement, the SCOPE project, and after this community went ahead, others began to fall in line.

Q: How did they get going? What preparations did they make?

A: Well, in our meetings we had to talk with the people, and prevail with them, that this is the thing that we need, it's going to be hard to accept it, but this is one of the ways that we can achieve our goals, and we felt this way: that our children, our younger people need to acquaint themselves with northern whites, because we felt that the SCOPE people have contributed more than just working in voter registration, because we find that we have very intelligent people, and we believe that their background and we know that their background is the much better background than even the southern whites. We want, I mean, that means, that it is much better than the Negroes, and we feel that our children have gained a lot from the association.



Q: When you first broached the idea, that there might be a SCOPE project here this summer, what kind of reception did it get?

A: Well, generally it was what I expected, and that was, they were willing for progress, but the matter of working with their...with a personal problem, as these are white people, and I wonder if I can get along with them, I wonder if... you know, when we had a problem like this: We had people to respond, "Yeah, I'll take them, but well, I don't have a plumbing facility." They had in their mind that we were going to fix something real special for them. That these were special guests, that they had to go to a whole lot of expense, which they were not able to do. Now this was the biggest problem. In other words, we just had to get the Negroes to realize that there's no use of making believe that you're going better than you actually are; if you don't have the type of food to give them that you would desire, it's just to give them what you have, and to provide those conveniences and accommodations that you have, and make them comfortable with that. And I think at this point, that this has been generally done. I've asked people, "Will you take SCOPE workers?" "Well, I could draw my own water. And I'm sure we don't have no SCOPE workers who are used to drawing water." And this type of thing.

Q: And then did these people finally agree to take SCOPE workers? Or did most of the people wind up in the more well-to-do families?

A: No, some of them are with the more or less, the middle class, from the middle to upper, but I don't think that we have any really, you know, people that are really well-to-do.

Q: I remember the other evening you asked for housing for eight more workers from Atlanta. What happened on that?

A: Well, we didn't get the people. The housing would have been provided. You were there that night, and I mean, the people seem to have been slow, in speaking, but I knew this wasn't a problem, because it's the same thing, it goes right back to it. Some of 'em wanted to do a lot of explaining and saying that "I don't have this" and they wanted to talk with somebody about it. But we would have been able to provide housing for them. There wouldn't have been a problem.

Q: How have been your relationship with Atlanta and with the SCLC leadership in Atlanta? Have been things you disagreed with? In their emphasis on what the SCOPE chapter should do?

A: Well, there have been some things that I didn't fully agree as to my community. And they were general, but specifically, I haven't disagreed with, you ;know, SCLC at all, because there were many things said, there have been many rules made, and some of them would apply directly to my situation and some would to others. But I think generally SCLC, SCOPE has done a wonderful job, in uh, in working with the SCOPE people, and my relationship with them, I think, has been very very good.

Q: You know, they're very interested in the things that they might be doing wrong, you know, because they want to plan for the future. What were some of the specific things that uh that they missed when they were here?

A: Well, for an example, uh, when SCOPE workers first came, and the first evaluating team came down, uh, they would say, "Get the people down to the courthouse, Get the people down to the courthouse and register." Well, it just wasn't that easy; there was something else needed to been done. First, they they had to be prepared, and uh, where we were spending most of our time at that time in organizing the community, finding out where our resources was, uh, our contact people. And then when we found that out, which I practically knew, the problem that we were gonna have was gonna be a problem of of the people couldn't