

SPECIAL REPORT from
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
6 Raymond Street, N.W.
Atlanta 14, Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 26, 1963

SPECIAL REPORT:

S E L M A , A L A B A M A

Selma is located on the bluffs of the Alabama River. It is the county seat of Dallas County, the seventh largest in population of Alabama's 68 counties. "Selma is now a little country town that is typical of most small Southern towns," states M.B. Owen in Our State Alabama.

During the Civil War, Selma was one of the most important military depots in the lower states of the Confederacy. Today it is the birthplace and stronghold of the White Citizens Council in Alabama.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) first went into Selma in the fall of 1962. The SNCC project began in February 1963.

This fact sheet on Selma, Alabama is the story of tyranny in Dallas County. It is also a report on the patterns of police brutality, beatings, arrests and harrassment of people who want to gain the vote and achieve full status as citizens of America.

FACT SHEET

The majority of the residents of Dallas County are Negro (57.7 percent,) the minority (42.3 percent) white. But only 0.9 percent of the eligible Negroes are registered to vote, states the Civil Rights Commission Report, Voting, (1961). Registration of eligible whites is 64 percent.

Adjoining Wilcox County has never had a Negro voter, according to the Commission, although 78 percent of the county's population is Negro. Lowndes County, which also borders Dallas County, has never had a Negro voter.

The 1961 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report on Voting says:

Testimony at the Commission's Alabama hearing covered economic pressures and registrar's discriminatory practices which prevented Negroes from voting in this county (Dallas). ...In April 1961 the Department of Justice filed suit to enjoin such practices. The suit has not yet come to trial.

Two and a half years have passed since the suit was filed. In the meantime, conditions have not changed.

SPECIAL MILITIA INTIMIDATES PROTESTERS

The County Sheriff's Department, under the direction of Sheriff Jim Clark, (who has attended every mass meeting held by SNCC, the Dallas County Voters League or the Dallas County Improvement Association, with his gun on his hip and frequently, an electric cattle prodder in hand) maintains a 300 man strong militia.

This specially deputized posse was used to hinder union activity in Dallas County (there is only one union there now) and has been used to intimidate Negroes at mass meetings. At least one hundred of these deputies wear old army fatigues, boots and helmets, as uniforms. They are empowered to carry weapons and make arrests -- one struck 23 year old Willie C. Robertson from behind on September 16 as he was leaving a sit-in at Carter-Walgreen's Drug Store in Selma; he required seven stitches.

On September 23, the Selma Times-Journal reported that at least 50 state patrolmen, headed by Al Lingo of the Alabama Department of Public Safety, had come into the town at Sheriff Clark's request. For the past four days, at the time of this writing, the state patrol has kept the First Baptist Church -- at which mass meetings have been held and where demonstrations have originated -- surrounded. The Montgomery Advertiser reported today that 17 cars of state police made a "show of force" to aid in halting a picket of 28 students on September 25.

Prior to his arrest on September 24, SNCC Staff Coordinator John Long stated, "Selma is in a state of siege. Everywhere you look you see state patrolmen or members of the special posse brandishing clubs and cattle prods."

To date, about 100 high school students and students at Selma University (Negro) have been arrested on charges of "truancy". Police have stopped students while they walked along the street, on their way to school or from school, and arrested them under this charge.

ORGANIZED RESISTANCE TO EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Trailways bus station is the only desegregated public facility in the county. There is no Greyhound line.

52 percent of the Dallas County families have an income of less than \$3,000, or less than \$54 a week. However, 6 percent of the families have an income of \$10,000 or more. In 1959, some 750 families possessed about \$3,500,000 in income.

The president of one of the largest manufacturing companies in Selma is also the president of the county's White Citizen's Council. Reginald Robinson, a field secretary for SNCC reported in the fall of 1962 that, "Businessmen who do not support the White Citizens Council cannot make loans in the local bank. I was told that members of the Council are working in key positions in banks and the city government."

With the white power structure connected to the Citizens Council, and with the U.S. Armed Forces Defense Bases maintaining a supporting position in maintaining the racial status quo of this black belt county, the hope of fair employment for Negroes is dim indeed. The USO itself does not admit Negro servicemen.

The Commander of Craig Air Force Base has thus far refused to direct his attention to the rigid segregation policies which affect both the citizens of Selma, and the men under his command. Secretary of Defense McNamara's June 6, 1963 Directive makes it clear that, "Every military commander has the responsibility to oppose discriminatory practices affecting his men and their dependents, not only in areas under his immediate control, but also in nearby communities where they may live or gather in off-duty hours....The commander of a base, therefore, has the responsibility...to declare off-limits communities in which discrimination exists."

A dairy company, Clover Leaf Cream, which supplies products to Craig Air Force Base, has a government contract. It hires no Negroes.

"ONE MAN - ONE VOTE"

The first demand of the Negro community in Selma is for "Voter Registration without Intimidation." The Selma movement has adopted the SNCC slogan "One Man - One Vote" as its own.

Other demands at present call for fair employment practices; the release of all demonstrators and dropping of charges; and the integration of public facilities.

The Negroes of Selma and Dallas County are politically impotent without the vote. They have no way of influencing the choice of those who hold public office, even though they are in a majority.

Further, they have no channels for redress of grievances. It is not possible for them to appeal to the sensibilities of influential whites to pressure city officials to relieve the suppression of First Amendment freedoms for the Negro community. The leading businessmen of Selma placed a full-page advertisement in the Selma Times Journal on September 22, 1963, which makes clear the connection between business interests and the "inherently unequal" system of segregation. (see Appendix I)

They cannot turn to the average white citizenry when between 200 to 500 white males in the town are deputized in a special vigilante force.

They cannot go to local and county law enforcement officials, who have made it plain that they are there, not to protect rights of protest and the vote, but to keep down any dissent or any concerted attempts to get the vote. On September 24, billy clubs and electric cattle prodders were used on bystanders who were forced off Sylvan Street in front of the First Baptist Church. They had not been demonstrating.

The Negroes cannot hope for the protection of the Federal Government which, at best, filed suit two years merely to enjoin the registrar's practices. On the basis of past experience, there is little hope that the Federal Government will now prosecute those who are now depriving Selma Negroes of their constitutional rights.

PRESENT DAY LYNCHING METHODS USED

Between April 1882 and January 1913, there were 21 lynchings (reported) in Dallas County. All of the victims were Negroes. The Dallas Gazette carried the following notation on November 24, 1859:

Because so many slave crimes were punishable by death a relatively large number of executions occurred. They were morbid and horrible spectacles.... Often they were held on the plantation where the crime had been committed and all the slaves from the surrounding countryside were required to attend, so that the full impact of the fearful consequences of wrong-doing might sink deep into their minds.

The consequences of wrong-doing today take the form of beatings, shots in the night, and state-organized police brutality. The following is a brief chronology of harassment of voter registration and protest efforts during 1963.

April 17--Voter registration worker Lonnie Brown reported today that "persons unknown" fired two shotgun blasts into his home.

June 12--SNCC voter registration worker Bernard Lafayette, 22, was beaten by two white men in front of his house after he answered their plea to help push a stalled car. Lafayette had two stitches taken in his head after the beating.

June 17--^A young voter registration worker for SNCC was punched and shoved by a Deputy Sheriff here today. Bossie Reese, 19, was "literally thrown" into the sheriff's office while he

watched Negroes take a registration test. He was arrested and charged with "failure to obey an officer" and "resisting arrest."

July 12--Bosse Reese was tried and convicted of "conduct calculated to breach the peace."

July 23--16 year old SNCC worker Alexander Brown was arrested here two days before he was scheduled to testify at a Justice Department hearing on discrimination against Negro voters in Dallas County. Brown, who was arrested by Sheriff Jim Clark, was charged with "false identity."

September 15--Five Negro students were arrested during a sit-in demonstration here. Two others were beaten by bystanders during sit-ins; one of them Lula Brown, 15, was knocked off a lunch counter stool by the owner of the Carter-Walgreen Drug Store. She was knocked by an electric cattle prodder by a man believed to be a member of the special posse. 63 other youths--including SNCC Staff Coordinator Worth Long and local SNCC worker Benny Tucker--were arrested during a march staged into downtown Selma. Long and Tucker were picked out of the crowd by Sheriff Clark.

September 17--SNCC worker Worth Long, 27, reported he was beaten in the county jail by Deputy Sheriff W.T. Marvell in front of 22 arrested demonstrators who witnessed the beating, on September 16. Long was released from jail this morning when charges were dropped because he was not in the demonstration but watching it.

September 18--Demonstrations continued with picketing by young Negroes. SNCC worker Wilson Brown was arrested as he stood watching a picket at the Carter-Walgreen Drug Store. He was wearing a t-shirt with "don't buy downtown" printed on it, to emphasize the selective buying campaign which got underway last week.

September 20--The boycott of classes by Negro students continues here for the fifth day. Between 500 and 1,000 students have remained out of school to protest segregation in the public schools. 25 more students make applications at the library before it closes again.

September 21--The Air Force refused today to act on a request from SNCC that Selma be declared off-limits for personnel from Craig Air Force Base because of discrimination in the city. The request was made by SNCC worker Worth Long, Selma student leader Celophus Hobbs and Mrs. Amelia Boynton, a local businesswoman, in a conference with Craig Commander, Colonel Richard Ault. When Ault refused, SNCC Chairman John Lewis in Atlanta wired the defense Department in Washington. The Department also refused to act on the request.

September 23--50 state patrolmen headed by Al Lingo surrounded mass meetings at the Brown Chapel A.M.E. and First Baptist

Churches as SNCC Chairman John Lewis spoke. SNCC worker Benny Tucker, 21, a clergyman, sought sanctuary in the Baptist church when he learned of a warrant out for his arrest.

September 24--Police arrested Worth Long and Rev. Benny Tucker in the middle of a prayer led by Tucker at First Baptist Church. Tucker was charged with "contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile," (bond: \$2,500) and Long was charged with "interfering with arrest," (bond:\$2,500). A total of 122 young Negroes were arrested for "unlawful assembly" as they started walking toward the downtown area. 85 others were picked up earlier on charges of "truancy" when they left school.

September 25--John Lewis, Chairman of SNCC, was jailed here with 27 students from Selma University. Lewis, the first to be jailed, was leading a picket at the county courthouse demanding "Voter Registration Without Intimidation," and "One Man - One Vote."

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For further information contact:

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"ONE MAN - ONE VOTE"

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The attached advertisement for the Dallas County White Citizens appeared in the Selma Times-Journal on June 9, 1963.



The fund appeal for the Dallas County Citizen's Council of Selma, Alabama on the other side of this sheet directly affects the two boys above as it affects you.

the fund appeal appeared in the SELMA TIMES-JOURNAL. Its readers will heed the plea to "prevent sit-ins, mob marches and wholesale Negro voter registration in Selma."

Its readers will prove their dedication "by joining and supporting the work of the Dallas County Citizens Council today."

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee also has an active program in Dallas County and in neighboring Wilcox County.

Bernard LaFayette, a 22 years old minister and his wife, Colia, have been working out of Selma since January, 1963. They have set up six voter education classes in Dallas and Wilcox Counties, and in April, accompanied the first group of Negroes to ever attempt to register in Wilcox County to the courthouse there. Significantly, no county officials--sheriff, registrar, or judge--were to be found.

When SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman spoke at a Selma mass meeting in May, 500 white men in cars surrounded the church and kept a crowd of 300 Negroes inside until midnight.

Three weeks ago, 19-years-old Bosie Reese, a local youth who has been working with the LaFayettes, was roughed up and arrested by a deputy sheriff when he accompanied some Negroes to the registrar's office.

LaFayette was beaten by two white men in June after he answered their call for help with a stalled car.

Now four other local people have joined the LaFayettes in the vote drive. One is a minister, fired from his job when his employer learned he had been attending voter registration meetings.

Others have also lost their jobs because they want to register and vote.

But LaFayette - and other Alabama Negroes (who in Wilcox County are 0% of the registered voters but 77.9% of the population) - will continue to try to become real American citizens.

But they need your help.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
6 Raymond Street, N. W.
Atlanta 14, Georgia

ASK YOURSELF THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION: What have I personally done to Maintain Segregation?

If the answer disturbs you, probe deeper and decide what you are willing to do to preserve racial harmony in Selma and Dallas County.

Is it worth four dollars to prevent a "Birmingham" here? That's what it costs to be a member of your Citizens Council, whose efforts are not thwarted by courts which give sit-in demonstrators legal immunity, prevent school boards from expelling students who participate in mob activities and would place federal referees at the board of voter registrars.

Law enforcement can be called only after these things occur, but your Citizens Council prevents them from happening.

Why else did only 350 Negroes attend a so-called mass voter registration meeting that outside agitators worked 60 days to organize in Selma?

Gov. Wallace told a state meeting of the council three weeks ago: "You are doing a wonderful job, but you should speak with the united voice of 100,000 persons. Go back home and get more members."

Gov. Wallace stands in the University doorway next Tuesday facing possible ten years imprisonment for violating a federal injunction.

Is it worth four dollars to you to prevent sit-ins, mob marches and wholesale Negro voter registration efforts in Selma?

If so, prove your dedication by joining and supporting the work of the Dallas County Citizens Council today. Six dollars will make both you and your wife members of an organization which has already given Selma nine years of Racial Harmony since "Black Monday."

Send Your Check To
THE DALLAS COUNTY
Citizens Council

SELMA, ALABAMA

YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS GOOD FOR 12 MONTHS