

School Demonstrations in Georgia

As the fall semester began, Southern school systems were taking their first baby steps to desegregate their schools. The White House said that 88 percent of the South's five thousand school districts had made or were making preparations to desegregate and only 135 had done nothing. President Johnson said this token desegregation was "deeply encouraging." After the massive resistance of the previous decade maybe it was, but that did not mean that the dual school system common to the South was being dismantled. A survey by the Office of Education found that only 216,000 Negro children in 11 Southern states, or 7.5 percent of the total, were attending classes with white students. Those were mostly in the border states. In the Deep South states, only a few Negro students were let into the white schools and those only under federal court orders, or threat of the loss of federal funds. All but a handful of Negro students continued to be taught at Negro schools. Now that the 1964 Civil Rights Act made it difficult to avoid the Supreme Court's 1954 decision, many whites responded by deserting the public schools. They formed private "Christian academies" to educate their children. (Quote in *WP* 9-1-65, A2; *NYT* 9-1-65, 21; 10-11-65, 59; *Sun* 9-1-65, 6; *BAA* 9-4-65, 1)

September 1965 in the South was marked by school demonstrations and boycotts. Some Negro students protested exclusion; some protested token desegregation; some that their teachers were fired from the Negro schools; some that those same Negro schools were still underfunded, often overcrowded and lacking in basic classes, textbooks and equipment.

The school issue brought the movement to counties where it hadn't been before. One of these was Taliaferro County in NE Georgia. Its movement began in May of 1965 when seven teachers and the principal were fired from Murden, the county school for Negroes, for helping 88 students apply to Alexander Stephens Institute, the only white school in the county. Since there were only 205 white students in ASI, the school board decided to close it and ship the white students to schools in three adjacent counties – including one with a few Negro students. It spent the summer quietly arranging with those counties to accept Taliaferro students, to identify which school each child would attend and to organize the bus routes to take them there. At the beginning of the school year, after it was too late for any Negro students to apply to the schools where the white children were going, the board announced the closure of ASI. It gave as the reason that the 88 Negro children who had applied to attend were just too few students to keep ASI open. When the school year began on September 7, there were 585 Negro students and no whites prepared to go to a Taliaferro County school and only one public school ready to receive them. The school board had hired a new principal, but had not rehired the fired teachers. In addition to helping the students apply to ASI, these teachers were also suspected of helping Negro adults achieve sufficient literacy to register to vote. (*SC* 9-11/12-65, 1; *Sun* 9-30-65, A7; *BAA* 9-25-65, 1)

SCLC sent in a crew to organize, with J.T. Johnson in charge. At different points in time he was aided by Leon Hall, Big Lester (Hankersham), Charles Garrison, Edward Bedford, Bill Treanor, and Carl Ferris. They set up a Freedom School in an old building six miles from Crawfordville. A school for rural Negroes until 1955, it had opened the previous summer for a Head Start program and didn't have enough desks for the Negro students who were about to fill its rooms. Judith van Allen and Judy Price, both of whom had worked in Crawfordville during the summer, returned to teach in the Freedom school, joined by Cary Stone of New Jersey who

had worked in Perry Co. AL, Betty Jones of Minneapolis who had worked in Peach Co., GA, Ann Nesbit of Whittier College in California and Kathleen Rogan of Milwaukee. On September 10, half of the Murden students walked out of school. Gov. Sanders sent in the Georgia State Patrol to keep order. For two weeks local Negroes went to mass meetings, marched to the courthouse and picketed every day. Arrests soon followed. Five parents were charged with violating the compulsory attendance law; their bail was set at \$500. Five high school students were charged with interfering with the operation of a school for leading the walkout from Murden. Lynn Kilgore of SCLC and high school student Frank Bates were charged with "kidnaping" a student after they gave him a ride to the Freedom School; their bond was set at \$2,500. Gov. Sanders said the truancy laws would be enforced to compel the Negro children to attend their assigned school. Despite these threats, 400 Negro students went to the Freedom School, a little over one hundred attended Murden and another 75 stayed out of school altogether. (*CD* 9-25-65, 1; *Sun* 9-30-65, A7; *BAA* 9-25-65, 1; *AJC* 10-10-65; 2:12 *SCLC Newsletter* Fall 1965, 4; *Quaker Campus* 10-1-65, 1; Stone e-mail of 7-8-15)

On Sept. 23, Hosea told a press conference in Atlanta that SCLC would organize a march from Crawfordville to the state capitol, 110 miles away. Instead, Crawfordville's Negro students tried to board the buses taking the white students to the other counties' schools. For almost three weeks they played cat-and-mouse with the cops every school day. Led by high school student Frank Bates, one to two dozen Negro children of all grades gathered early every morning where the white students were boarding school buses and tried to board with them. Initially they were surrounded by the white parents, who shoved them out of the way and knocked them to the ground. Subsequently the state patrolmen blocked the Negro children from getting on the busses while trying to keep local whites at a distance. The police captain repeatedly told the children that they had missed the deadline to transfer to the other schools, as if that would deter them. The children also tried to block the busses from leaving by lying in the street, but the troopers pulled them to the side of the road. Once they knew the bus route, some children hid down the road in hopes of running in front of the busses to stop them. The bus drivers changed routes to one which had a large force of troopers ready to block any interference. Occasionally some Negro youths would break through the lines and race to get on the buses. They were tackled by the police and arrested. Arrests were relatively minimal, but some students were charged with interfering with the schools. (Ga. Code 26-6913) Gov. Sanders sent in more troops. After a week, there were enough troopers to simply surround the Negro children so that they couldn't get near the busses. (*SC* 10-23/24-65, 4; *CD* 9-25-65, 1; 9-29-65, 1; 9-30-65, 1, 3, 12; *WP* 9-29-65, A7; 9-30-65, A2; 10-2-65, A6; *Sun* 9-30-65, A7; 10-2-65, A5; *NYT* 10-1-65, 1; 10-2-65, 3; 10-7-65, 3; 10-8-65, 1; 10-9-65, 2; *SCLC IV* 167-4; 169-11p1017-19)

Blocked by the troopers in Crawfordville, the older students switched from playing "catch-me-if-you-can" to "whack-a-mole." Frank Bates drove 17 miles to Warrenton in a neighboring county where 112 former ASI students were attending school. When he and four friends drove onto the school grounds whites threw things at his car, causing him to lose control and hit a parked car. Several white men pulled him from the car and knocked him around until the state troopers rescued him. Other carloads of students went to Greene County High School in Greensboro, which already had 17 local Negroes in attendance. The next day 31 Negro students went by car to Warrenton, after trying once again to board the busses in Crawfordville. They were accompanied by the police, who blocked their entrance to the school grounds but also kept a large crowd of whites a block away. The young people kneeled in the driveway to pray and sing before being escorted back to Crawfordville by the cops. (*CD* 9-30-65, 3; 10-4-65, 8;

10-7-65, 5; *NYT* 9-30-65, 2; *Sun* 9-30-65, A7; SCLC IV 165:22)

The daily confrontation was a magnet for whites who had more on their minds than putting the white children on the busses. Sometimes more than a hundred white parents, augmented by a dozen or so white toughs, would heckle the Negro children and pull them away from the busses. SCLC photographer Brig Cabe was twice assaulted, as were several news photographers. During one demonstration Georgia Grand Dragon Calvin Craig grabbed Frank Bates, twisted his arm and hurled him against a car, while on looking whites yelled “kill him, kill him.” Troopers nearby quickly arrested Bates and charged him with interfering with the operation of a school. Mistaking Craig for an FBI agent they thanked him for his assistance. Wised up a few days later, they arrested him, booked him for assault and released him on \$100 bond. (*CD* 9-29-65, 1; 9-30-65, 1, 3, 12; 10-5-65, 3; *Sun* 9-30-65, A7; 10-5-65, A1; 10-6-65, A7; *WP* 9-30-54, A2; 10-5-65, A6; SCLC IV 165:22; 169:6)

Both whites and cops went after SCLC’s workers whenever they could. When Bill Treanor drove up with a car full of Negro students, whites surrounded them as the kids exited to make a run for the busses. While the kids tried to board a bus, a group of angry whites pulled Bill from his car, pummeled his body and ripped his sweater until he was rescued by a GBI agent. (*CD* 10-9-65, 1) J.T. Johnson and Willie Bolden were arrested after one of the Hubbard brothers told the cops that he had threatened them. (*Sun* 10-9-65, A5; SCLC IV 165:22) Brig Cabe was attacked for simply trying to take photos. On October 12, Frank Bates and SCLC staffer Edward Bedford led 200 students into the Murden school, singing, shouting and chanting, while Brig Cabe photographed them. As they left the school, Cabe spotted KKKers Howard Sims, 43, and Cecil Myers, 26, who were well known for killing Lemuel Penn in 1964. When he pointed his camera at them they attacked him. Cabe tossed his camera to the marchers as the police grabbed him and put him into a police car. He was released a few minutes later, retrieved his camera, and tried once again to take pictures of the Klansmen. Both lunged for him; Sims was restrained but Myers broke past the police line to tackle Cabe and punch him in the face. All three men were taken into custody. Sims was released after questioning; Myers was charged with assault and released on \$100 bond; Cabe was searched. When the cops found three small firecrackers in his pocket, they charged him with misdemeanor possession and set bond at \$500. He was not released. (*CD* 10-13-65, 3; 10-14-65, 3; *NYT* 10-8-65, 1; 10-13-65, 1; *WP* 10-13-65, A1; *Life* 10-22-65, 47; SCLC IV 169:6)

All the newspaper stories identified Brig as a Negro photographer, but that was not true. Brig was Filipino. That meant that he didn’t fit into the black and white world of the South. The newspapers had to identify him as one race or the other. Since he worked for SCLC, they just assumed he was Negro. Given that there were separate jail cells for blacks and whites, he was safer in a cell with Negroes than with whites so he probably didn’t try to correct the impression. SCLC did not bail him out immediately. When his mother, who lived in New Jersey, read about her son’s arrest in the newspapers, she phoned everyone she could think of – SCLC, Hosea Williams, several Negro newspapers, priests in her local Catholic Church, the FBI, the mayor, the sheriff and all her NJ elected officials. After four days of phone calls, someone told her to call John Doar at the DoJ. Only then did the wheels start to move and Brig was released. (*BAA* 10-30-65, 14)

During the day, and sometimes at night, adults and children marched to the courthouse where they preached to each other and whomever was just hanging around. One day they heard

J.T. speak from his jail cell, which was in a little brick building right next to the courthouse. On three occasions they invaded Murden, parading and chanting throughout the halls. Occasionally KKKers would occupy the courthouse steps to keep the Negroes from using them. (*NYT* 10-6-65, SU8-3) There were two marches on Saturday, October 2. In the afternoon Negroes sat down on the steps of the former Liberty Café, across the street from the courthouse. The only eatery in town, it had closed in response to integration attempts in July and reopened as a private club for whites only. Local whites captured one demonstrator for special treatment. He was thrown to the ground and repeatedly kicked before the troopers broke up the crowd and arrested one of the white attackers. They also arrested SCLC staffer Charles Garrison and six locals. The other protestors were dragged away from Bonner's Private Club and released. On Sunday, October 3, Hosea and J.T. led 300 people from Friendship Baptist Church to the courthouse, where he announced that Dr. King would come, but not when. Dr. King soon announced that he would come to Crawfordville a week from Monday. (*Sun* 10-2-65, A5; 10-9-65, A5; *WP* 10-2-65, A6; *CD* 10-4-65, 10; 10-6-65, 1; 10-7-65, 5; 10-10-65, A2; *BAA* 10-9-65, 1, 2, 11; SCLC IV 167:4)

State Senator Leroy Johnson was also in Crawfordville that Sunday, on a fact-finding trip with several other Negro leaders from around the state. One of two Negro State Senators, he felt responsible for all the Negroes in Georgia. After he returned to Atlanta he held a press conference to say that Negro and white leaders in Taliaferro County weren't talking to each other and had no plans to do so. Governor Sanders came to the same conclusion after he conferred with local white officials and also with Calvin Turner. Neither side would back down. Neither would reach out to the other. Responding to Hosea's threat to organize a march on the Georgia capitol so the Crawfordville Negroes could bring their grievances directly to the governor and the legislature, Sanders said that they could go ahead and march, but he would not meet with a "mob representative." (*CD* 9-25-65, 1; 10-6-65, 1, 3; 10-9-65, 1; *Sun* 9-25-65, 5; *NYT* 10-9-65, 2; *BAA* 10-2-65, 1; Turner statement in SCLC IV 169:11p1015-16)

When Dr. King came on Monday, October 11, over 600 people jammed Friendship Baptist Church, while another hundred gathered in the church yard. He told them that the time might be ripe for a full-scale movement to dramatize the failure to integrate the schools. "We still have an overdose of tokenism," he said. After Dr. King spoke, he returned to Atlanta while Andy Young led 500 people to the courthouse. Dr. King had met with Crawfordville leaders that morning in Atlanta, while 250 Negro children were marching to the Taliaferro County courthouse after another confrontation at the buses. They told Sheriff Moore that they wanted to meet with the county School Superintendent, but he told them she was not there and would not let them inside. Instead the children sat on the sidewalk and sang freedom songs. In between the children's march and that of the adults, a branch of the KKK took over the courthouse lawn. About 250 Kluxers, men and women, gathered around the statue of Alexander Stephens to hear Cecil Myers and Howard Sims. They had formed their own KKK group, which they called the Black Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Members wore black shirts to distinguish themselves from the traditional white-robed Kluxers. By the time the Negro march arrived, there were about four dozen whites left at the courthouse. The Georgia State Patrol kept the two groups apart. Gov. Sanders had added 20 more state troopers to the 40 that had been in the county for the previous two weeks. The FBI turned a vacant grocery store into a temporary field office. Its agents just observed. (*SC* 10-16/17-65, 2; *CD* 10-12-65, 1; *NYT* 10-12-65, 34; *Sun* 10-12-65, A4; *WP* 10-12-65, A6)

The protests ended as quickly as they began when the federal district court issued its

ruling. After a 3-day hearing in Augusta, federal judges Bell, Morgan and Scarlett announced on October 14 that they were placing the Taliaferro County school system into receivership under the Georgia State Superintendent of Education. Claude L. Purcell was ordered to file a plan by October 25 stating how the 88 students who had applied to ASI would attend public schools inside or outside of Taliaferro County on the same basis as white students. Dr. King immediately called off the demonstrations, even though the judges' order had not reinstated the fired principal and teachers to the Murden school. Calvin Turner told the mass meeting that night that there would be no more demonstrations or attempts to block the school busses. Both Dr. King and the NAACP Inc. Fund, which had represented the plaintiffs, praised the court. Hosea summed up the casualties: There were 15 evictions, 24 firings, 25 foreclosures or repossessions, 13 beatings and a lot of arrests. (*Turner v. Goolsby*, 1965; *NYT* 10-15-65, 1; *CD* 10-16-65, 1; *SC* 10-23/24-65, 4; *SCLC* IV 169-11p1017-19)

Once the Taliaferro County demonstrations ended, Hosea sent staff into surrounding counties to try to start a movement, including Ed Bedford, Jimmy Wells and Dana Swan. J.T. Johnson had called for students in the surrounding six counties to also boycott their schools and attend a Freedom School although no others were created. (*CD* 10-6-65, 1) *SCLC* got something going in two counties, Wilkes and Lincoln, which were just to the NE of Taliaferro. Wilkes was a recipient of Taliaferro white students. Lincoln was not, but it was one of three Georgia counties which had not filed a school desegregation plan with HEW.

On October 18 a fire alarm emptied the Negro school in Wilkes County into the waiting arms of *SCLC* staff. Most students returned to class at the request of their teachers, but about 150 students marched to a church to protest segregation. The Board of Education immediately asked a state judge to issue a temporary restraining order to keep civil rights workers off of school property. As the judge issued the TRO, 165 students walked out for another day of demonstrations. Willie Bolden said the TRO would be ignored. The next day some Negro students ran through the hallways of their school, demanding that everyone leave. About 300 left for the third day of demonstrations. They marched to the white high school, where they were met by a line of state troopers. The youths sat in the street blocking the entrance to the school for about an hour, jeering at the police, before about 200 were arrested. The judge expanded his TRO to include the white school, and stayed late into the night for quick hearings on those arrested. The majority received suspended sentences and were released, but some were fined \$10. The five *SCLC* staff who were arrested were fined \$30 each. A week later, they were still marching, but not at the schools. (*NYT* 10-19-65, 27; 10-20-65, 30; 10-21-65, 29; *Sun* 10-20-65, A8; *CD* 10-23, 65, 1; 10-28-65, 3)

On October 20 about 140 students walked out of Lincoln County's Negro school. They marched two miles to the courthouse in Lincolnton, the county seat, in a steady rain. On the way back, two white men drove up in a truck and grabbed Rev. Charlie Brown, who had come from Americus to assist with the demonstration. They gave him a beating before the sheriff arrived to stop them. Although *SCLC* didn't go on the school grounds, about half of the 950 Negro students stayed out of class. Marches continued daily, generally from a church outside of town to the courthouse in its middle. On day three they were attacked in town by three dozen white men yelling "kill the niggers." Ed Bedford was knocked down. As whites hit the Negro children, they scattered. The next day the same state police captain who had been keeping whites and Negroes away from each other in Taliaferro County told them that they couldn't march at all because a group of whites was waiting in town to attack them. He didn't think he had enough troopers to

protect the 70 marchers. Bolden called SCLC in Atlanta and was told to call it off for the day; there were a lot of small children among the marchers. The threats had their effect. Only a few local Negroes showed up for the next day's march, which was also called off. The members of the Negro church which had been the starting point for the marches told SCLC that they couldn't meet in the church again. Gov. Sanders sent more troopers. A few dozen Negroes marched the following week, under a heavy guard. The courthouse square was almost empty. (*NYT* 10-21-65, 29; 10-23-65, 21; 10-24-65, 78; *Sun* 10-22-65, A5; 10-25-65, A5; *WP* 10-24-65, A7; *CD* 10-25-65, 10; 10-28-65, 3)

On Thursday, October 28, about 40 marchers, most of them children, came to a halt on reaching the highway when they were confronted by about 50 Negro men who told them to go no further. Their spokesman told Willie Bolden and Rev. Charles Brown that they wanted the marches to stop because their children were afraid to go to school and that more marching would not "turn these white folks around." About half of the 900 students at the Negro school were absent, though only a few dozen joined the marches. The two groups debated for well over an hour, while several white men, including the Mayor of Lincoln, stood off a ways, just watching. Bolden tried to lead the youths around the line of Negroes without success. When blocked, they led the children back down the road, singing freedom songs. SCLC believed that the same white power structure that emptied the courthouse square of white hecklers also brought the Negro men, who were most likely their employees, to stop the marchers. SCLC was used to dealing with apathy, but open opposition from the very people they were trying to free was a major shock. Bolden said it "shakes me right down to the bottom of myself." Hosea just shook his head in disbelief. "I have never heard of such a thing," he said. (First quote in *NYT* 10-29-65, 1; second quote in *CD* 10-30-65, 9; 11-1-65, 7; third quote *Sun* 10-30-65, A4; *WP* 10-30-65, A2; *CD* 11-1-65, 7, 8; *BAA* 11-6-65, 1)

Bolden and the children were back the next day but the confrontation had left its mark. The Negro men who had stopped them on Thursday were not there and neither were the whites, as 40 troopers escorted 65 marchers to the courthouse. At the courthouse the Mayor could be seen convincing the few whites who were around to stay back. It was clear that the white power structure had a lot more power in this small town than SCLC had seen elsewhere. SCLC marched again on Saturday, joined by the four white women from the Crawfordville Freedom School and guarded by a squadron of state troopers. Bolden and Brown denounced local Negroes as "uncle toms," but mostly talked about the importance of registering to vote. (*NYT* 10-30-65, 12; 10-31-65, 60) The marching didn't stop immediately, but it did stop. Ed Bedford of SCLC shifted the staff to canvassing to bring Negroes to be registered. The number of registered Negroes in Lincoln County was tiny. In 1958 only 3 Negroes were registered to vote in the entire county. That hadn't changed by 1962, the next time the count was published, though emigration had reduced the NVAP by several hundred. In the three months since the VRA became law only 8 more Negroes registered to vote. (USCCR: 1959, 565; in *Hearings* 1965, 169; Nov. 1965, 58) But on November 1, 20 Negroes came to the courthouse to register to vote. There were no incidents. (*NYT* 11-2-65, 20; *CD* 11-2-65, 10)

The court-appointed receiver of the Taliaferro County school system reported back to the court on October 25 that opening ASI was not feasible at that time and there was no reason to believe that any white students would return if it were reopened. After consulting with the 88 students and their parents he recommended that those students who still wanted to go to school with the Taliaferro County white students be allowed to go to the school of their choice. On

Wednesday, November 17, 42 Negro students boarded the busses carrying students to the three neighboring counties. There was no heckling by whites at either end of the trip but there were a lot of white spectators staring at them at the receiving schools. Another 20 young Negroes joined the daily busses later. Not all lasted the school year. Frank Bates only went to the Wilkes County high school for two days. On the second day the police stopped the school bus, took him off and drove him to jail. Someone had filed a complaint against him. The next day the principal of his new school suspended him because of the criminal charge. The criminal charge was eventually dismissed, but Frank had to move to Atlanta and live with his older brother in order to graduate from high school. (*NYT* 11-18-65, 32; *WP* 11-18-65, G1; *CD* 11-18-65, 4; *Sun* 11-18-65, A5; *BAA* 11-6-65, 15; Bates, 2014, 48-55)

The federal court held another hearing on February 23, 1966 and issued a supplementary opinion on May 20. At that time 180 whites and 49 Negro children from Taliaferro were attending school in Wilkes, Warren and Green counties, but those counties had stated that they would not accept *any* Taliaferro County students for the 66-67 school year. The Taliaferro County Board of Education agreed to reopen ASI as an elementary school for students of both races, and Murden as a high school (renamed ASI High) for both. However, the white parents wouldn't enroll their children in a school where they would be in the minority. A Fifth Circuit judge in a subsequent court decision observed that "The records of the Georgia State Department of Education as of January 19, 1967, indicate that there are now 527 Negro students enrolled in the Taliaferro County School System and no white students." (*Turner v. Goolsby* 1966; quote in *United States v. Jefferson County Board of Education* 1967)

After declaring victory in October, Dr. King predicted that Taliaferro County would become "the most integrated county in Georgia, or even the South." That was wishful thinking. The combined school system did not achieve desegregation, let alone integration. As late as 1970 there were no white students in the public schools of Taliaferro County. Even Lincoln County was doing better than Taliaferro; a handful of Negroes attended classes in the formerly white schools and the white students were still there. (quote in *BAA* 10-23,65, 1; *Turner v. Fouche* 1970; *U.S. v. Bd. of Ed. Lincoln Co.* 1969)

Although SCLC repeatedly threatened a two week march to Atlanta from Crawfordville over the issue of school desegregation, this did not happen. It didn't even start to happen. After withdrawing from Taliaferro County, SCLC decided to pursue a completely different issue and to do it in Alabama. Perhaps it had learned from Selma and Birmingham and Albany that a major movement isn't built overnight. It takes months, years, of slow steady work to get people ready to take the risks and face the hardships that inevitably come with a major confrontation with the white power structure. Taliaferro and the other NE Georgia counties weren't ready for a major movement. Americus might have been such a place if SCLC had chosen to stay and do the necessary groundwork. Indeed, students walked out of Staley Jr. High, the Negro school, in early October to show sympathy for the Crawfordville students. When they sang and shouted to other students to leave class, 10 adults and 33 juveniles were arrested and taken to a work camp about 20 miles away. This prompted three times that many students to leave school. Increasingly, they voiced complaints about the inadequate facilities in the Negro schools, in particular that their text books were all hand-me-downs from the white schools. But they couldn't complain that there was no desegregation. Sumter County was in its second year, with 40 Negro students attending classes in four previously all-white schools. (*CD* 10-6-65, 1; *BAA* 10-6-65, A6; *Sun* 10-6-65, A7)

Calvin Turner stayed in NE Georgia, even though his teaching career ended. Initially SCLC put him on staff as co-director of Georgia. Then he got some OEO money to form Crawfordville Enterprises to provide jobs for the poor. Essentially a sewing factory, it survived at least until 1969. His daughter was the plaintiff in a case filed by NAACP Inc. Fund attorneys in federal court. *Turner v. Fouche* attempted to change the way in which the school board was chosen so it wouldn't be dominated by whites. Since all the students were Negro, the sitting Board was more interested in keeping costs and taxes down than in educating the next generation. Turner ran for County Commissioner in 1966 and school superintendent in 1972. He didn't win even though a majority of the registered voters were Negro and he was well known and respected among them. Indeed Negroes were a majority of the voters in Taliaferro County by mid-1966, but their electoral impact was minimal. They were new to politics and had a lot to learn. Whites shifted from exclusion of the Negro voter to co-option. White candidates had learned to manipulate the system long before they had to campaign for Negro votes. Finding it easier to get Negroes to vote for white candidates than to get whites to vote for Negroes, they successfully applied their traditional techniques to elect public officials who favored low taxes over everything else. The real "bloc vote" were the white voters. (*CD 2-24-66*, 4; *BAA 3-26-66*, 6; *Gadsden Times* 4-25-68, 13; *Tuscaloosa News* 9-22-69, 16; Miles, 1968; *Turner v. Fouche* 1968; House, *Hearings*, 1981, 287-293, reprinting *AC 12-9-80*)

Alabama Schools

“Educate a nigger and spoil a good field hand.”
Common Southern saying, quoted in Going, 1992, 157

After the War, Alabama struggled to create a public school system. There were no high schools outside the major cities; attendance at any school was not compulsory and often required tuition. The only Negro schools were in Mobile, where special codicils to the international treaties which made Mobile a US territory gave rights to the original Creole population and their descendants. Elsewhere it had been a crime since 1832 to teach a Negro to read or write. The 1868 Constitution created a State Board of Education empowered to create free schools for all children. The Freedman’s Bureau established schools to teach literacy but relied on the American Missionary Association (AMA) to provide most of the teachers in Alabama. A long financial depression in the 1870s reduced AMA funds, leading it to turn its schools over to local school districts and give its other educational functions to the State Board. Funds were limited. Schools struggled to function at all. Black schools got less than white schools but neither got much. (1868 AL Const. XI:6; Going, 1951, 150; Bond, 1939, 15, 74, 81-2; Sherer, 1997, 114-15)

The “redemption” Constitution of 1875 severely limited taxes for education, and practically prohibited local taxes for local schools. Article XIII provided that “separate schools shall be provided for the children of citizens of African descent.” As the school population increased in the late 19th Century, the state budget stayed the same and the amount per pupil slowly declined. The inadequacy of the schools was one of the major complaints during the populist revolt. Rather than raise taxes to pay for schools, the legislature allowed the local school boards to decide where their state allocated funds should go. They diverted them from black schools to white schools. As they did so, whites rationalized the transfer on the grounds that Negroes needed a different kind of education than whites – more practical than academic – which would fit them for the available occupations. (Bond, 1939, 96-7, 151-6; Going, 1992, Chapter 10; Sherer, 1997, 13-14)

During the debate over taxation for education at the 1901 Constitutional Convention whites made it clear that they did not want to pay taxes to educate black children. This was of particular concern in the blackbelt, where there were several rich white families and a lot of poor black families. They thought that Negroes were already too educated. The delegates from white counties, where Negroes were few, didn’t care if they educated Negroes as long as they could raise the money to educate their own children. The final draft provided for a school fund from monies collected by the state which would be distributed to the counties in proportion to the number of children of school age, plus a poll tax which would remain within each county. Local school boards could decide how to use the money. While “[s]eparate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race,” the taxes collected from each race weren’t restricted to the schools for that race. (1901 AL Const. Sec. 256, 259) The difference between the amounts spent on white and Negro children continued to widen. In 1924, when Alabama’s population was 60 percent white and 40 percent black, the state spent \$13 million to educate white children but only \$1.5 million on black children.

The funding gap was partially filled by Northern philanthropy. While Rockefeller spent money on rural Southern schools for both races, the Jeanes Fund focused on training teachers for rural Negro schools. The Julius Rosenwald Fund provided money to build those schools. The first ones were built in Alabama in 1914, providing a model when the Fund itself was created in 1915. By the time the Fund closed in 1932, 389 Negro schools had been built in Alabama. Rosenwald required local communities to provide matching funds; Jeanes supervisors were prominent in raising those funds. In Alabama, blacks contributed \$452,968, whites \$137,746, tax funds contributed \$445,526, and the Rosenwald Fund \$248,526 for Negro education. Between 1915 and 1936 the Slater Fund built 44 county training schools in Alabama, plus one urban high school, run as public schools by local boards of education. They were called training schools to reduce opposition from those who didn't think Negroes needed education beyond the primary level. They were promoted as schools to train Negro teachers for those primary schools. Most offered a 4-year program, but were not accredited. (Bond, 1939, Chapter XVII; Redcay, 1935, 76, 132, map insert; Jackson, 1939; Brown, 1959, 4; <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2327>; [article/h-2126](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2126); [article/h-3421](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3421))

The poll tax, which was used to keep so many poor people from voting, had its origin as a way to finance the public schools. The Constitution of 1868 authorized local districts "to levy a poll tax on the inhabitants of the district in aid of the general school fund, and for no other purpose." The Constitution of 1875 shifted this authority to the State School Fund and capped it at \$1.50 per person – a considerable sum at that time. A state law provided that the poll tax would go to the school of the taxpayer's race. It was the Constitution of 1901 that twisted the poll tax into a mechanism for disfranchisement, by requiring that it be paid but providing that there be no process for collecting it. The only penalty for failure to pay the poll tax, for all past years due as well as currently, was that one could not vote. (1868 AL Const. XI:12; 1875 AL Const. XIII:4; 1901 AL Const. Sec. 178, 194, 259)

The NAACP Inc. Fund began its assault on segregated schools with suits to equalize teachers' salaries. *Gainer v. School Board of Jefferson County* settled with a consent decree in 1945 but the defendant school board still did not equalize the salaries of Negro and white teachers. (*Gainer*, 1955) During the ten years the case was fought in federal court, pay for Negro teachers increased more rapidly than did that of white teachers but never reached the same pay scale. In 1952 Autherine Lucy and Polly Myers applied to the University of Alabama. Judge Harlan Grooms waited until after *Brown* was decided before ordering the University to admit Lucy. The Supreme Court affirmed on appeal. Lucy was admitted in February of 1956, but attacked by a mob on her third day. The University expelled Lucy and Judge Grooms upheld the suspension. Inc. Fund finally succeeded in 1963, when Vivian Malone and Jimmy Hood were admitted. President Kennedy had to federalize Alabama's National Guard to prevent Gov. Wallace from interfering with their admission. Hood left after a few months, but Malone survived to graduate in 1965. (*Lucy v. Adams*, 1955; 1964 Atty. Gen. Report 176; BN 6-7-65, 30)

After *Brown*, the Alabama constitution was amended to remove any right to an education at public expense and to specify that parents could send their children to a school restricted to one race. (1901 AL Const. Amt. 111) In 1955 the legislature passed a Pupil Placement Law

ostensibly to provide an orderly mechanism to decide which children should enter which school. Students could be tested in order to determine “the suitability of established curricula for particular pupils” and “the adequacy of the pupil’s academic preparation for admission to a particular school and curriculum....” Race wasn’t mentioned. (Title 52§21(4) Ala. Code of 1940)

Negro schools continued to provide an education which did not prepare students for any but menial jobs. Indeed, the school year was organized around agricultural needs. In many counties, the Negro schools opened a month later than white schools because the children were needed for the harvest. They went to school full time only November through January. As planting began, fewer and fewer children would show up at a rural school; the older children dropped out first because their labor was the most valuable. However, the younger children often wouldn’t get to school until the morning chores were done and all the farm animals fed. Rural areas often had one-room schools, whose single teacher taught all levels. Parents had to buy the books and other items needed, as well as maintain the building. Parents who were serious about education, and had the money, boarded their children in towns with relatives or other families

As a consequence, graduates of Negro schools were often barely literate and did not have the skills for jobs other than agriculture or housework. At Dothan in 1966, the Alabama State Advisory Committee to the US Civil Rights Commission heard testimony that graduates of Negro schools could not “pass employers’ tests or the Federal Government’s civil examinations.” ASAC was told “that the Civil Service Clerk Typist Examination had been given to 54 graduates of [five] Negro high schools with commercial departments.” None “passed any portion of the examination, including the clerical aptitude test.” (USCCR, 1966, 18)

The NAACP Inc, Fund continued to file school desegregation suits in the federal courts. In 1962 it filed several cases against Boards of Education in the Middle District because it expected Judge Johnson to order and enforce desegregation plans. These would then become models for those counties in federal judicial districts with less demanding judges. Each was a class action suit, in which the parents filed on behalf of their school-aged children. The most important of these cases was *Lee v. Macon County*. (Gray, 1995, 205-6) Filed on January 28, 1963, two weeks after Governor George Wallace declared at his inauguration that he stood for “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,” the case would go back and forth in the courts for many years. Initially aimed at allowing Negro students to desegregate white Tuskegee High School (THS), Wallace’s actions caused it to be expanded to include all of the state’s primary and secondary schools. Judge Johnson thought it appropriate that the United States also be a party to this case so it was added as a plaintiff and amicus curiae. (*Lee v. Macon County*, 1964)

Judge Johnson issued the requested preliminary injunction on August 13, ordering the Macon County School Board to admit Negro students to THS. He agreed that it could select the students to be admitted in accordance with Alabama’s Pupil Placement Law, but only in a non-discriminatory manner. On September 2, Governor Wallace ordered the Macon County Board to close THS for one week “to preserve the peace.” A week later Wallace issued three Executive Orders specifically prohibiting integration in the public schools of Tuskegee, Mobile and Birmingham and a fourth activating the National Guard to keep the Negro children out of

those schools. The DoJ asked the court for a TRO to prohibit Wallace's use of state troopers to interfere with integration. After a hearing on September 16, the TRO was turned into a preliminary injunction which was signed by all five federal district judges in Alabama. However, the white students at THS all transferred to other public schools, or to the private Macon Academy which opened across the street. In January of 1964, at the Governor's request, the Alabama State Board of Education officially closed THS. (Ex. Orders of 9-2-63, 9-9-63 and TRO of 9-9-63 at 8 RRLR 912-24; *U.S. v. Wallace* 1963; Guzman, 1984, 153-4; Norrell, 1998, 138-149; *Lee v. Macon Co.*, 1963, 1964; *WP 2-15-64*, A6)

This was a blessing in disguise. Until then, desegregating each of the state's 118 school systems required a separate law suit against each school board. This was quite costly in time and personnel. When Wallace used his authority as Governor to close the schools, he in effect stated that the State of Alabama had final authority over all the school systems in the state. That meant that a single lawsuit could lead to an order to desegregate all of the schools in Alabama without requiring individual cases, hearings, and findings. Inc. Fund quickly filed an amended complaint adding the State of Alabama as a defendant and asking the court to order desegregation statewide. Judge Johnson asked the Fifth Circuit to appoint a three-judge District court to hear a single case for all the school systems in Alabama. (*Lee v. Macon Co.* 1964)

The statewide case went to a hearing in November of 1966. Before the decision was rendered in March of 1967, only 19 Alabama school districts were under a court order to desegregate. The opinion by Judges Rives, Johnson and Grooms identified the myriad ways in which state authorities had tried to impede school desegregation throughout the state, with the result that in the 1965-66 school year only 1,009 Negro children were in desegregated schools, out of 294,734 Negro children attending public schools statewide. The court was clearly fed up with the state's resistance when it "permanently enjoined [it] from discriminating on the basis of race in the operation or the conduct of the public schools of Alabama." The judges told the defendants to "take affirmative action to disestablish all state enforced or encouraged public school segregation and to eliminate the effects of past state enforced or encouraged racial discrimination in their activities and their operation of the public school systems throughout the State." It followed this with detailed instructions. (*Lee v. Macon Co.* 1967) Gov. Lurleen Wallace denounced the decision as an usurpation of a state's right to run its own schools. She asked the legislature for the power to prevent "the destruction of our public school system." (*NYT* 3-29-67, 29; quote in 3-31-67, 19)

Lee v. Macon County stayed in the courts for decades, as various schools systems were required to bring their desegregation plans to the district court. Sometimes the court had to review delaying tactics; sometimes problems in the merger of the dual school systems; sometimes plans rejected by HEW that had been approved by the court. Numerous issues were raised never contemplated by the original case. Judge Johnson told a law school audience in 1970 that school desegregation cases took up fifty percent of his time. "The courts have had to forbid segregated P.T.A.s, buses and bus routes, extracurricular activities, athletic associations, libraries, faculties and staffs." He went on to say that "[t]he general pattern has been that in those schools where the whites are a majority of 60 percent or more, the desegregation has been accomplished without serious incident. Where the whites are in a minority, they have withdrawn

from the public schools and established private schools [even though] [t]he cost of tuition is a staggering burden for many parents.” (Johnson, 1970, first quote on 1165-6; second quote on 1173)

Negro teachers and administrators also went to court because they were often on the losing end of desegregation. When schools were consolidated, the inferior Negro schools were often abolished, but only some of their faculty were transferred to the joint school, even when the white students fled and mostly Negro students remained. The merged school usually retained its white principal, while the former principal of the Negro school was demoted to associate or assistant principal, or removed as redundant. Joe Reed, executive secretary of the (Negro) Alabama State Teachers Association, was kept busy trying to keep his members' jobs without opposing desegregation. When his organization merged with the Alabama Education Association, he became the associate secretary. (SC 9-23/24-67, 1)

School Desegregation in Alabama's Wiregrass Counties

Over a decade after the Supreme Court declared segregated schools to be unconstitutional, Henry County made its first reluctant effort to desegregate its public schools. This was largely in response to the 1964 Civil Rights Act which empowered the federal government to require school desegregation without first getting a court order.

Negro children wanting education past the 8th grade attended the Henry County Training School (HCTS), five miles west of Abbeville. It was built by Rosa Parks' father, Jim McCauley, in 1917. A master carpenter, he designed and constructed buildings all over Henry County. White children went to high school in Abbeville, Newville or Headland. Abbeville High School was located in the middle of one of Abbeville's Negro neighborhoods. The Negro children who lived in that neighborhood took a bus to HCTS, while the white children of Abbeville and the surrounding area were bussed in. All Negro children, regardless of where they lived in Henry County, took the bus to HCTS, one of the county training schools financed by the Slater Fund. In 1917 HCTS was one of only seven in the state and 53 throughout the South. At that time all but ten Alabama counties had a white high school. (Bond, 1939, 265-66; Brown, 1959, 4; Redcay, 1935, 76, 132, map insert)

In 1965 training schools were still the norm for Negroes throughout rural Alabama. The few high schools were in the cities. Most training schools were unaccredited; graduates could not meet the minimum requirements for entry into an accredited college. However, their purpose wasn't to prepare Negro children for college but for work. What work, was hard to say. Teacher training was now done in the Negro colleges. Farming crops was in decline as landowners shifted to raising cattle and growing trees. HCTS didn't have the equipment to teach vocational skills. In 1965 HCTS had 600 students. It didn't have a science teacher, a physical education teacher or much of a library. Class size averaged 50 students. The few tools in shop class were old and mostly broken; the eight sewing machines for home economics worked with foot pedals; the typing class shared four ancient typewriters. At one time the school year started in August and classes were suspended in September so that children could pick cotton for the roughly six weeks of harvest time. The mechanical cotton picker was slowly making human hands less necessary. In 1965 the school year started just about the time harvest season began. We were told that approximately forty percent of the Negro children were kept out of school to pick cotton in the fall and hoe weeds in the spring. (USCCR-ASAC, 1966, 303-309)

A new primary school had been built in Abbeville with federal funds. Rain had so badly eroded the soil in front of the school that the concrete path students took to the building ended about three feet above a gully. It was a nice-looking red brick building, but there was little inside. There was no lunchroom, library or playground. Families of students had to pay for their own school supplies including notebooks, paper and pencils. The textbooks were all used, hand-me-downs from the white schools, as was pretty much everything else in that school from boilers to desks. Negro families paid a "school fee" of about \$125 per student to cover other costs. Teachers paid out-of-pocket for many things that were just given to the white teachers in the white schools. (Pottle, 1975, 11-12)

Threatened with a cut-off federal funds, in 1965 Henry County adopted a "freedom of choice" plan which allowed students to choose their school. In the South, no white child chose to

go to a Negro school, so the burden of integration was on the Negro school children. After federal troops were sent to Little Rock, Arkansas to contain mob violence in 1957 when nine young Negroes tried to integrate Central High School, Southern towns shifted to more subtle methods of intimidation. These were very effective. At the beginning of the 1965-66 school year the parents of eleven black students in Abbeville pre-registered their children to attend a white school and six did so in Headland. When school started, only one of these went to a white school. Martha Parker attended Abbeville High School. She was the niece of our local leader, J.B. Newman. (USCCR-ASAC, 1966, 292-333)

In July of 1966 local residents went to Dothan to tell the Alabama Advisory Committee of the US Civil Rights Commission what happened when they enrolled their children in the white schools. Mattie K. Burnette said that after she signed up her two children to attend Abbeville Elementary School that she got numerous phone calls. Many times people just hung up when she picked up the phone. Her sister also received phone calls. Mrs. Burnette reported that her sister told her that “they” were going to kill her (Mattie Burnette). She would simply “come up missing one day and nobody was going to know what happened.” Her husband worked for the Dixie Veneer Company. His boss dropped in on Mrs. Burnette and told her it would be better to take the kids out of the white school. He didn’t say he would fire her husband if she didn’t; he just said he thought it would be best for everyone. The children were eleven and eight. One child decided on her own that she was too scared. She thought that “they are going to be rocking at them and picking at them.” The other child still wanted to go, but in the end he was withdrawn. (USCCR-ASAC, 1966, quotes on 311, 326)

James J. Vaughan testified that after his wife signed up their son to attend the high school they received a visit from Councilman Horace Maddox. “What do you have against the colored school?” Maddox asked Vaughan. When told that his son wanted to go to the school in town, the councilman “advised” him that this would not be for the best. He said the city didn’t have enough police to protect his son and he didn’t know what might happen to the child. Vaughan reported that he too got phone calls and his wife heard rumors that “they were going to burn my place up and a lot of things.” He said he was going to hold out, but his mother got sick from worry so he took his son out of the white school and sent him back to HCTS. (USCCR-ASAC, 1966, quotes on 317)

A list of 16 of the 17 children signed up to go to a white school circulated sub rosa among whites. Many whites who knew the parents or guardians of those children paid them a visit. Lawrence Roberts visited Mack Hogan, who owed him for some fertilizer. Roberts told Hogan that he had to pay up, but that if he’d take his boy out of the white school, Roberts would carry the debt for another year. Seven of the kids who had signed up to attend Abbeville High were visited by the Negro principle of HCTS accompanied by two white men. One by one, the children were withdrawn. The father of one of these was one of our strongest supporters – he drove us around when we needed it and did other things to help us out. I was surprised when he pulled his boy out of the high school and even more surprised that he wouldn’t tell me why. A World War II veteran, he was a strong man. On his truck was an American Legion bumper sticker which proclaimed “I’m proud to be an American.” Whenever I looked at that slogan I winced. That summer I wasn’t proud to be an American.

Martha Parker was the one child whose name wasn’t on that list. She stuck it out in the 11th grade for the entire year even though she and her family were harassed throughout the fall.

“Students would spit at her, tacks were placed on her chair, and rocks were thrown at her in the corridors...” “They shoot around there every night just continuous, just continuous shooting big old firecrackers, throwing them up in the yard, until after Christmas we got some adjustments about it, and from then on, they didn’t bother us,” reported her uncle, Mr. Newman. Unfortunately, she did not live in the Negro neighborhood which surrounded Abbeville High so she had to take the bus. Her uncle said that “she ended up school all right, and three boys on the school, on the bus, that chunked her, and just do everything to her – they called her different names, the superintendent finally transferred those boys to another school, and she didn’t have any more trouble about the school, so she be back to go to school this fall.” (First quote in Pottle, *A.D.* 1975, 57; USCCR-ASAC, 1966, other quotes on 323-24)

As part of a statewide school desegregation order, many of the dilapidated schools were closed and their students bussed to integrated schools elsewhere in the county. Both the Negro and white schools in the village of Newville were supposed to close in 1967; they finally closed in 1968. (*SC* 8-1/19-67, 2) The Newville school had been one of the two Rosenwald schools in Henry County. The other was in the northwestern section. Henry County Training School was closed in 1970. An historical marker celebrates the McCauley/Parks connection. In its 53 years of operation, 1,297 students graduated from HCTS. [<http://www.archives.state.al.us/markers/ihenry.html>] The same year that HCTS closed, Abbeville Christian Academy opened its doors to the white students who fled the public schools. It is still in business, operating under the motto: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12) [<http://www.abbevillechristianacademy.com/KDCweb.aspx>]

Next-door Barbour County made no effort to integrate its schools. It was one of 63 school districts in the South and nine in Alabama that didn’t even send in a desegregation plan as required by the HEW guidelines. Instead the county board of education sent a letter stating that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was unconstitutional and that it didn’t maintain separate schools for Negroes and whites. A county could only get ESEA money by making a good faith effort to integrate its schools, which many did not want to do. HEW held hearings in Washington in October for those districts which had not sent in acceptable desegregation plans as the first step in cutting off ESEA funds. (*BN* 8-23-65, 2; *NYT* 10-19-65, 26)

When the hearing began, no one appeared for the Barbour County Board of Education, nor for the Alabama State Board of Education, even though three Alabama school districts still had not made the first step in compliance. The hearing proceeded with only the “prosecution” there to present its case. The HEW attorney did not present any local people as witnesses, only documents. In May of 1966 HEW Secretary John W. Gardner approved the cut-off of federal funds to 12 school districts for failure to comply with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Barbour County was *almost* on that list; it filed a desegregation plan at the last minute. (*CD* 5-16-66, 5)

The following July a teacher at the Center Ridge High School told the US Civil Rights Commission how bad schools were in rural Barbour County. She said the school was overcrowded, with 40-50 students in each class. Two teachers held classes in an old house across the road from the school. The house had coal heat and insufficient electricity; the few windows provided little light but were drafty. The entire school used a pump for water, which was muddy when it came up from the well. The teacher also testified that there were “any number of just old buildings, just two-room shacks all over the county, junior high and high school, some that are

with out-door plumbing facilities.” (USCCR-ASAC, 1966, 338, quote on 340) Barbour County had enough families with incomes below \$2,000 a year to receive \$602,943 in federal funds. The Office of Education estimated that 4,222 children would be eligible for programs funded by this money. Most of these children were Negroes, and therein lay the dilemma. The County could only get the money by making a good faith effort to integrate its schools, which it did not want to do. Those who lost by this refusal, were largely poor, Negro children. If HEW denied the county the ESEA funds, it hurt the children it most wanted to help. (BN 8-23-65, 2; NYT 10-19-65, 26)

Eufaula had a separate school system, with its own board, which went through the motions. In May, after HEW accepted its “freedom of choice” plan, the school superintendent ordered that application forms be given to each child who would be entering one of the five grades selected for integration in the fall. Of the forty Negro students who signed up to go to white city schools, only five were accepted. Those not accepted were not given any explanation. When school started in September, the four who had applied to go to Eufaula High withdrew. Encouraged by SCOPER Larry Butler, they took the position that four was too few. Butler told a mass meeting that “We’re not interested in tokenism... Thirty-five or nothing.” They knew that there was a lot of federal money at stake. The woman who wanted her daughter to start first grade in a white elementary school also withdrew, saying that family members had told her their jobs were at stake. When the Spring semester started, she changed her mind and enrolled her daughter in Western Heights Elementary School, making her the only Negro child to go to a formerly white school in the county that school year. (Quote in SC 11-27/28-66, 4; ASAC-USCCR hearing, 1966, 334)

In the spring of 1966 the Barbour County Board of Education gave up resistance for limited accommodation. It submitted its signed compliance form with HEW by the May 9 deadline. In September, 16 Negroes entered the new George C. Wallace High School in his home town of Clayton and another 20 went to other county schools that had been all-white. Almost 50 students transferred to formerly white schools in the Eufaula School district. Not all was rosy. Several students were denied admittance to these schools because they didn’t live on bus routes that took them there. The bus routes had been in place for years to take white students from white neighborhoods to white schools and Negro students from Negro areas of the county to Negro schools. The school systems were under court order to desegregate, so attorney Fred Gray and the Inc. Fund asked Judge Johnson for an injunction ordering the admittance of the students who weren’t on the right bus routes. He issued the injunction on September 22, and ordered the school boards to transport the students to the schools of their choice, with the exception of one child who lived eight miles away from the closest bus route to the school of his choice (Wallace High). The court ordered the county to revise its bus routes by the following school year, so that all students could be bussed to the schools of their choice “without regard to race or color.” (SC 5-21/22-66 1; 9-10/11-66, 1; *Franklin v. Barbour Co.*, 1966)

Bus routes were also an issue in the Crenshaw County case that Judge Johnson ruled on the next day. For the 1965-66 school year 21 Negro students applied for admission to two white high schools, one in the county and one in Luverne. However, only six students entered the county high school and all but one dropped out because they weren’t on a school bus route. The young woman who stayed was driven to school each day by her mother or aunt. She graduated in June of 1966. Even before she got her diploma, HEW was threatening to cut off funds because the Crenshaw County schools were out of compliance, in part because of their failure to bus Negro students to white schools. In the Spring of 1966, 202 Negroes applied to enter three white

high schools. Right before the beginning of the school year, all but 23 learned that their applications had been rejected due to “overcrowding,” prompting the lawsuit. None of the white students received rejection letters. Judge Johnson ordered that all Negroes who had applied to enter grades 1 and 7-12 in a “white” school be admitted immediately. He ordered that all grades be desegregated by the 1967-68 school year with busses be rerouted to accommodate every child’s “freedom of choice.” (SC 6-11/12-66, 1, 6; 9-24/25-66, 1; 10-1/2-66, 2; *Harris v. Crenshaw Co. Bd. of Ed.*, 1966)

The other wiregrass counties peacefully integrated in the fall of 1965, but with only a handful of students. In Pike County 13 Negroes entered the formerly white high and junior high schools in Troy. Geneva County schools enrolled two Negroes; Coffee and Covington Counties took four each. All of this was done without incident. During the summer, school principals throughout the state met several times to discuss ways to achieve token integration without any disruption. At the same time, Governor Wallace was urging them to “go slow” and do only the barest minimum required by federal law and court orders. With or without his urging, that’s pretty much what they did. (SC 9-25/26-65 6; 10-9/10-65, 2; *BN* 9-1-65, 1; 9-5-65, A24; 9-7-65, 2)

The Dothan Horse Show

I returned from Atlanta on August 31 with a hand-cranked mimeograph. Two Berkeley friends, Tony and Carolyn Scarr, had obtained it from their church when it upgraded to an electric mimeo. They sent it to Newberry, not knowing that I had been shifted to Abbeville, AL. The Newberry SCOPERs brought it to Atlanta and gave it to me. The timing couldn't have been better. We had been using a ditto machine loaned by a local woman to crank out our mass meeting leaflets. She had asked for its return a week ago. Her husband had just been paroled and she was worried that he would be given a hard time if it became known that she had loaned us her ditto. For the previous week we were reduced to writing out mass meeting leaflets by hand, using carbon paper to create multiple copies. We still needed to get stencils and mimeo paper (ditto machine stencils didn't work on mimeographs) but having a mimeo was a great asset. If we could just find a typewriter we could now print a newsletter.

In addition to mimeograph stencils I needed a day off. When the guys wanted some relaxation, they went to a local Negro honky-tonk. Not me. First of all, I didn't like bars and I don't drink. More important, I knew that a white girl going to such a place would reinforce all of the negative stereotypes local whites held about white female civil rights workers – not to mention those of many local Negroes.

In early September I saw signs pasted around Henry County advertising a horse show in Dothan – the big town 36 miles from Abbeville. I was a horse crazy kid. In high school, going to a horse show was my favorite thing to do. I earned the money to do that by shoveling horse manure at the local stables for \$1 an hour and actually liked the smell. Since this show would surely be full of white folk, the trick was how to pull it off.

I needed some supplies – specifically mimeograph stencils and a ream of legal size paper on which to run off a project newsletter – that I couldn't get in Abbeville. Sensing an opportunity to combine pleasure with business, I arranged to get a ride to Dothan and back on the day of the horse show. After we reached the outskirts of town I told my driver to drop me off about two blocks from the show grounds. I got his phone number so I could call him to pick me up when I was ready to leave.

I had a good time watching the horses go through their paces. In between classes I just hung around and chatted people up. I knew horse lingo; that was the easy part. The hard part was maintaining an identity that wouldn't arouse suspicion. My first decision was whether to be a Northerner or a Southerner. If the former, I had to come up with an acceptable story which explained what I was doing there. If the latter, I risked talking to someone who would ask me if I knew so-and-so and I'd have to keep up a Southern accent. I decided the former would be easier.

I picked a fake name but kept as much of my real story as possible. I was from California visiting a cousin. I loved horses and rode. She didn't. That's why I was there alone. In the white horse world, with no hint of what I was really doing in the South, this story worked.

I loved just being around the horses, savoring their scent and stroking their hides, but I wanted to ride. I hadn't been on a horse in four years, and I was itching for a chance. These people were there to win ribbons. No one would loan a horse to a stranger to ride in a class that the owner might win. I did cozy up to one family. I walked and curried their horses for them when they sweated up after a class and favorably compared the Dothan horse show to ones I had been to in California.

My chance came at the end of the show. The last class was a "novice" class – open to anyone who hadn't won a ribbon that day. In my experience, "novice" classes were limited to those who in fact *had* entered another class, which I hadn't. But the horse the family let me have had been in a class, and the show personnel took my \$2 entry fee.

The horse had English tack. As a child I rode Western but I had learned English, so I knew how to post. Of course I wasn't wearing riding clothes, only jeans. And I was on a horse I'd never ridden before. So I was very surprised when I was awarded a fourth place ribbon in a class of about ten people. I was also thrilled that I still "had it" – at least enough for a novice class.

After getting my white ribbon and saying goodbye to my new friends, I asked where I could find a pay phone to call my "cousin" to pick me up. I was directed to a large barn off to one side with offices in it.

As I walked down the aisle I saw signs saying "white" and "colored" over the drinking fountains and on the bathroom doors. Those signs irritated me. They jerked me out of my temporary retreat into the white horse world and back into the reality of what I was in the South to do.

I didn't find a pay phone, but at the end of the aisle I saw an open office door. I stuck my head in cautiously, but no one was there. A phone sat on the desk. I used it call my driver and arrange to be picked up at our designated spot.

Then I rifled through the desk drawers until I found a large black marking pen. I walked back up that aisle and I vandalized those signs.

Over the white drinking fountain I wrote "Bigot Spigot." At the white women's restroom I scribbled the words "pristine only." I crossed out "White" on the men's room door and wrote "Albino." Where the sign said "Colored," I added "Which?"

I knew this was not the time to get caught. I wouldn't be able to talk my way out of this one and running was not realistic. The eyes in the back of my head were wide open and all my antennas were on red alert. I kept watch for nooks and crannies to duck into should I see any motion or sign of life.

Fortunately, no one came up that aisle. When I finished with all the signs, I returned to the office and put the black marking pen back where I had found it. Then I got the hell out of

there.

I still have the white ribbon I won that day and I still wonder what those nice, friendly white folk thought when they saw what I did.

Picking Cotton

On September 13, two days after blowing our budget on mimeograph supplies, I got my first paying job since graduating from college – picking cotton.

This was harvest time; I'd been thinking about doing this for days. During the summer that I spent with my relatives in Marion County I had been surprised to learn that school started in August so it could close for a few weeks in September. Children were needed to pick cotton. They used their earnings to buy school books and other stuff that in California was generally provided by the school system. Marion County only had a small cotton crop, but it had so few Negroes that the picking was done by whites. Henry County in 1965 had a large cotton crop and the hard labor was done by Negroes, but only rarely by able-bodied adults. In only ten years the use of mechanical cotton pickers had gone from a quarter of the overall harvest to three-quarters. Some farmers still couldn't afford to rent, let alone own, a mechanical cotton picker so used human pickers. There were always the gleanings – the stuff that escaped the machine.

I had learned that growers paid local people with a vehicle to find and transport pickers for the day. The driver was paid by the head. It took me several days to find someone who would take me to the fields; most were afraid they would be turned back if they brought a white girl. The old man who finally agreed to haul me did so *very* reluctantly. Three times he agreed; twice he backed down, and three times I browbeat him into doing it.

It was pitch dark when the truck arrived early Monday morning and the horn pierced the night. I raced out and clambered in without the driver even looking in my direction. That was part of our agreement; if the white farmer asked, he would claim he didn't know I was in his truck. As we bounced down the road a pale moon glimmered through the wispy clouds.

For over an hour we criss-crossed the streets of Abbeville; at each stop the ritual was the same. The horn honked, doors opened, and people of all sizes and shapes poured into the truck: young kids kept out of school, old men and women in their eighties, young adults out of work or not able to do much else.

It was light by the time we got to the fields, eighteen miles out in the rurals. We had barely stopped when everyone leaped out and rushed to pick while it was cool. Pickers got paid by the pound, and today's rate was two and a half cents a pound.

Cotton was put into an eight foot canvas bag as it was picked, sort of like stuffing a sausage. Pickers dragged this bag behind them from a shoulder strap, freeing both hands to pick as rapidly as possible. The cotton boll is conveniently star shaped so all five fingers can grasp the cotton between the hard petals of the flower (the cotton boll is a flower) and pull it out. When the boll opens to display its white wealth, the petals harden. Grabbing the petals instead of the cotton can cause a lot of pricks and scratches.

Pickers were expected to provide their own bags, which cost three to twelve dollars each. If the farmer had to supply one, he would withhold fifty cents a day until it was paid for. My driver had some extra bags of his own. He let me use one and took care of a couple other people who did not have their own bag.

It was good cotton, heavy and not too dry. The bushes were from three to five feet high, with scratchy leaves and strong, thick stems. The furrows were just wide enough for a picker dragging a bag. People divided themselves up so that there was one picker for roughly every five rows. Anyone who tried to cut across the furrows walked into a thicket.

We started off strong in the morning, when the air was cool and we were fresh. As the morning wore on, some proved to have more endurance than others. Although I was young and strong, I wasn't used to this kind of hard labor and I began to drag. I was impressed with the spirit of those around me, who talked almost as fast as their fingers flew. This was a social occasion as well as work.

What impressed me was how conscientious everyone else was. We were paid by the weight, and it didn't take long to figure out that the quickest way to pick was to grab the whole boll and jerk it off of the stem, husk and all. The cotton wasn't as pure that way, but it was quicker than extracting the fiber from the husk and also increased the weight.

I was the only one I saw doing that. Everyone else within my view did it the right way, grabbing only the cotton and extracting it from the boll in one motion. They took pride in their work. Doing a good job and being called a good picker was a point of honor, even though the pay was puny. People called out that so-and-so could "really pick some cotton." Others would say "Let's jump now. Bend your back and let your elbows fly." I even got a compliment or two, though I really didn't deserve them.

I picked 53 pounds in my first three hours; then I ran out of steam. In the next two hours I only picked another 14 pounds. I couldn't go off to rest, so I "rested in place" by contemplating the cotton. Everyone else kept up a steady pace. The cotton plant is a rather beautiful shrub. Inside the hard brown cornucopia were five individual but connected sections, strongly reminding me of canned grapefruit. While still fresh they would be slightly moist and tightly packed but as the sun warmed and dried them they would break open into a terrestrial cloud. Inside each section were eight to ten small grey seeds, firmly enmeshed within the fibers. It was the invention of the cotton gin to remove those seeds in the 1790s that made cotton such a profitable crop.

The white farmer drove his tractor with its large chicken-wire wagon on the road where the furrows ended, stopping where pickers waited with bags for weighing. From a scale at the end of the wagon he hung each sack. He reduced the weight shown on the scale by a pound to allow for the bag, wrote the amount on a scrap of paper for the picker, and then dumped the cotton into the wagon. Pickers later presented their scraps for payment.

When I dragged my sack up for weighing I said nothing but observed carefully. Initially the farmer eyed me skeptically, then acted like I was no different than everyone else. Whenever I was waiting he would have me write down the weights, or add up the scraps. I soon realized that this farmer was barely literate. As I tired, I hung around the wagon longer and at some point got him to tell me more about growing cotton.

A bale of cotton weighs roughly 1500 pounds before ginning – removal of the seeds and roughage – and 500 pounds afterwards. The current market for a ginned bale was around \$150.

Of this about \$15 went for ginning and about \$10 to \$15 for seeds and fertilizer. The pickers got two to eight cents a pound, depending on the quality of the cotton and the lateness of the season. That made the cost of production around \$50 a bale. However, the farmers were only sharecroppers. They had to give one third to one-half of the price per bale to the landlord. That left them with \$25 to \$50 per bale at the end of the harvest.

By noon I was ready to drop. When we broke for dinner I persuaded the truck driver to take me back to Abbeville. In five hours of back-breaking labor I had picked 67 pounds and made \$1.68 cents. That came to 34 cents an hour. Although I was the only one who gave up so early, the amount I picked in five hours was around the mean for the pickers I saw that day. Of course most of the pickers were very young or very old; I was a healthy 20-year-old. The normal picking day lasted about twelve hours. I estimated that the median weight picked per day was about one hundred pounds, with the old women and the little kids picking only about 40-50 pounds. That's \$2.50 for a very long day – in a year when the federal minimum wage was \$1.25 an hour. I acquired a new appreciation for the burden of the \$1.50 per year poll tax, with payment of two years required before one could cast a vote.

Although the white farmer had not questioned my presence, my driver told me later that the farmer balled him out and told him to never bring a white girl to the fields again. A few weeks later I wrote my mother about my first paying job since graduating from college. Her only comment was that in her day (the 1920s) pickers only got one cent a pound. At one cent a pound and averaging 100 pounds a day, it would have taken a lot of hard labor to earn enough to pay one year's poll tax – and in those days the tax was cumulative.

Leaving Abbeville

After Jim and David returned to Detroit we continued our work in Henry County as best we could without a project car. Sometimes we could get local people to drive us out into the rurals and small towns to talk to farmers about registering to vote, but most of the doors we knocked on were in Abbeville because we could walk. In September we brought 138 Negroes to the county registrars and all were registered but two.

Mike said that initially over a hundred people had come to mass meetings. While I was in Abbeville we were lucky to get a dozen. I don't know if they were just tired of it all, or if word didn't get out in time. We asked ministers to make announcements on Sunday. While they rarely said no, they usually didn't mention our forthcoming meetings. We also passed out flyers announcing the meetings, but often at the last minute. Meetings were at night. Eddie usually did the talking while the rest of us listened. He was a pretty good preacher and his stem-winders weren't deterred by the tiny audience. When he finished preaching, he would tell everyone what the project would be doing during the next week. It was always news to Mike and me, since he never discussed these things with us beforehand.

Now that we had a mimeograph, paper and stencils, Mike and I decided to put out a newsletter. We called it the *Henry County Freedom Banner*. Vol. 1, No. 1, covering both sides of two sheets of legal sized paper, was issued on September 23. On p. 1 we wrote about "Demonstrations in Eufaula" and "Token Integration in the Schools." P. 2 featured an essay entitled "Stand Up for Freedom" by a local woman. Our editorial saluted Mr. John C. Forrester, whose race for City Commissioner in Dothan made him the first Negro candidate in that city. He came in fourth out of nine candidates with 563 votes. P. 3 featured news about a sewing co-op in Mississippi and a community service project in Harlem. On p. 4 we had a short piece on the SCLC convention. Needing to fill space, I included excerpts of a speech by California Comptroller Alan Cranston on "extremism." My last Berkeley address was on his mailing list because I had worked for his Senate campaign in the Spring of 1964. From there it was forwarded to Northridge. My mother slipped it into a care package.

I mailed out 80 copies of the newsletter to my friends around the country accompanied by a fundraising letter. We'd been running this project off of prayers and promises and those were getting thin. In our letter we reported that the eight weeks of the summer project had cost \$1,400 of which \$700 went for fines, \$300 for room and board, \$200 for gas and transportation and \$200 for office supplies and miscellaneous. We were \$300 in debt.

We asked for money to support our voter registration work and to set up classes in literacy and Negro history. We wrote that we needed money to pay bail and fines; to buy a car and a typewriter, more supplies and books. "All contributions should be sent to Henry County SCLC-SCOPE, P.O. Box 3A, Abbeville, Alabama. Please send money orders instead of checks as the local bank will not cash checks for civil rights workers."

All three of us signed the letter. I asked some of the friends I sent this to to circulate it to

their friends and whatever political groups they were members of. Mike and Eddie may have done the same but I don't think so. No money showed up in Box 3A.

Late in the afternoon of the day we issued the newsletter, we received a Special Delivery letter telling us to come to Selma the next day for a state reorganization meeting. The Henry County project had done pretty well in the month I'd been canvassing there. Between passage of the VRA on August 6 and the last registration day in September (Sept. 20) 343 Negroes and 41 whites had become registered voters. Only three Negroes had been rejected, but so had two whites. The registrars were not giving us too a hard time. (USCCR, 1965, 54; *BN* 10-24-65, B4 reports 381 Negro and 46 white registrants in August and September)

Anticipating that the Henry County project would be dissolved I took everything with me, including my mimeograph, and gave Mrs. Trawick some money to pay for my room and board. Before reassignment we were given an overview of what SCLC thought would happen next. Staff were already in Chicago putting together a movement and big things were expected to come from it. Natchez, Mississippi was also a hot spot, but people there were mobilizing on their own.

Finally the list of people being asked to stay on was read. I wasn't on it. Mike and Eddie were being sent to Barbour County to work with Larry Butler; all the other SCOPers in that county had gone home. We were told that those not on the list could still stay and work; they just wouldn't be paid anything. I noticed that virtually no women were on that list. I sat there wondering what I was going to do. I didn't want to leave but my little nest egg – the money I raised by selling buttons on and around the Berkeley campus the previous Spring – was just about gone. If I didn't have some income from someplace, I would soon run completely out of money.

As I was pondering, Hosea announced that they still needed a few secretaries, specifically women who knew how to type. Who would volunteer? After a long pause and some deep if quick introspection, I raised my hand. If there was anything I didn't want to be it was a secretary. I'd spent my life trying to avoid being channeled into a future as an office drone – the usual fate of all young women in my day who didn't become teachers or nurses. I was assigned to the SCLC regional office in Selma. The three month budget for this office included \$15 weekly for the office worker. I might have to type, but at least I wouldn't starve.