

TITLE FOR APPENDIX

TESTIMONY OF  
THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY, MAY 28, 1963

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee  
6 Raymond Street  
Atlanta, Georgia

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Room 1025  
New York 38, New York

STATEMENT OF THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, TUESDAY, MAY 28, 1963

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am appearing on behalf of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee whose central office is located in Atlanta, Georgia, at 6 Raymond Street. I wish to express our appreciation to the Committee for this opportunity to comment on the proposed voting rights legislation.

It should be appreciated that we do not pretend to come here as lawyers to analyze and comment on all the numerous legislative proposals before you, but rather to stress some of the special features we would like to see embodied in any Congressional Act on the subject of voting rights. We have come to tell you of our earnest and urgent concern for better Civil Rights legislation, along with something of the accumulated experiences which have led to this concern on our part.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is a federated organization of student groups dedicated to the advance of Civil Rights throughout the South. The Committee was called into being in the immediate wake of the mass student sit-in demonstrations against lunch-counter segregation which spontaneously swept the South in the spring of 1960. At a southwide convention of student leaders held in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April of that year, the Committee was first chartered and an executive structure set out in a constitution that was unanimously adopted. Since that time, the Committee has variously devoted its efforts to the desegregation of public accommodations, the insurance of Negroes rights to unintimidated interstate travel, the expansion of employment opportunities, and most recently to the extension of the right to vote to the Negroes of the rural South. It is out of our special concern for the latter that we come here today.

Currently our Committee is engaged in the support of voter registration efforts in Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Ala-

bama, Mississippi, Missouri, Georgia, South Carolina and Louisiana. We have included brief descriptions of some of these projects as item "A" in the appendix to this statement.

In order to carry on this work we have recruited a team of some seventy college students, both Negro and white, to take either a semester or a year from their academic work to serve as full time volunteer staff. These students have been assigned to various rural communities on a subsistence salary of twenty dollars a week or less to explain the meaning of the Constitution, the importance of the voting process and the technique of registration.

The chronicle of their experiences during this short period of operation reads more like a chapter in the history of nineteenth century despotism than that of twentieth century democracy. During the past two years our staff of students has suffered every manner of abuse from constant vilification in public, to attempted murder in private. They have repeatedly been arrested and physically abused by local law officers acting in open defiance of the Constitution. Time after time have they been tried, fined and imprisoned on spurious charges to impede the success of their work. With very few exceptions, they had to carry on their work without the slightest semblance of police protection. We have collected an abbreviated list of these experiences under items "C" and "D" of the Appendix.

It is our belief that the Federal Government has only weakly asserted its existing powers to act in our defense. Accordingly, we have initiated a federal suit against both Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to compel them to perform their duties on our behalf. The substance of our complaint in that action can be found as item "B" of the Appendix.

In this light, we would like to urge this body to consider seriously the introduction of a declaratory resolution concerning the preventative powers of the Department of Justice in the defense of federally guaranteed rights to accompany any other proposals this committee reports out on voting.

In addition, we would urge that the bill introduced by Chairman Celler, H. R. 5455, be restudied in light of the enumerated criticisms set out in our "Comments on Legislation." We believe that the amendments we advance there, add considerable strength and effectiveness to the substance of each of the four principle elements of that proposal.

In advancing these criticisms we want to impress upon Congress the needs for much more stringent measures to deal with the kind of recalcitrance with which the South seeks to defy the rest of the nation. It would appear that the accepted strategy of all forces seems to concede that we can best deal with this problem by being modest in our legislative proposals. We disagree. Indeed, of all the legislative proposals introduced on voting we are most impressed with the H. J. Res. 3 which proposes a Constitutional amendment to establish a "free and universal franchise throughout the United States." This is the kind of broad unequivocal enactment the struggle we confront might very well demand before we can effect the basic purposes for which this country was founded, in the face of the scope and magnitude of the Southern conspiracy to injure, devastate and even murder before it will allow Negroes to vote as free men and women. We, the seventy students, who make up the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the thousands that make up its base, have staked our lives on the principle that an interracial democracy can be made to work in this country, even in the fields, bayous and deltas of our deep South.

We have not spared ourselves in attempting to make that faith good. We call on the federal government to do likewise. We would have it understood that we are not calling on the country for what she might do for us, but rather to inform her of what she must be prepared to do for herself. President Lincoln perceived almost a hundred years ago:

The fact is the people have not yet made up their minds that we are at war with the South. They have not buckled down to

the determination to fight this thing through; for they have it in their heads that we are going to get out of this fix somehow by strategy. They have no idea that this War is to be carried on and put through by hard, tough fighting, that it will hurt somebody. No headway is going to be made while this delusion lasts.

We share a similar conviction when we look at both the South and the Nation today. We can see that the time has run out. It has run out both in terms of the patience of the Negro community, and it has run out in terms of our successful delusion that a moderate effort is enough.

We only trust that both the Democratic and Republican wings of Congress will be prepared to take this perception of our predicament in earnest.