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Benjamin Franklin



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Demonstrating for civil rights, youthful Negroes kneel and pray before the City Hall in Albany, Ga. They were arrested by police when they refused to disperse.

# Negro Youth's New March on Dixie

A new generation of Negro leaders is pressing home the bitter battle against segregation in the Deep South. • By BEN H. BAGDIKIAN

Robert Parris Moses is a twenty-seven-year-old Negro of soft voice and hesitant manner whose life up to February of 1960 was focused on his native New York City, scholarly work in the Ivy League and teaching in an expensive private school. He had never been in the South and had never wanted to go. But he did go, at last.

On the morning of August 29, 1961, Moses was walking in khaki chinos and a T shirt down the dusty main street of Liberty, Mississippi (population, 642). There he was struck down by a cousin of the local sheriff and beaten on the head until his face and clothes were covered with blood.

Considering where he was and what he was up to, the violence is not surprising. Moses—A.B. Hamilton College, M.A. Harvard, Ph.D. candidate—was trying to upset the social structure of the Deep South and change party politics in the United States. His method: helping rural Negroes register to vote.

"One day at home in New York," Moses told me, "I saw a picture in *The New York Times* of Negro college students 'sitting in' at a lunch counter in North Carolina. That was in February, 1960. The students in that picture had a certain look on their faces—sort of sullen, angry, determined. Before, the Negro in the South had al-

ways looked on the defensive, cringing. This time they were taking the initiative. They were kids my age, and I knew this had something to do with my own life. It made me realize that for a long time I had been troubled by the problem of being a Negro and at the same time being an American. This was the answer."

Robert Moses and his project are significant, but more significant still is the new generation of American Negro that he typifies. It is a body of young men and women who will make an impression on the history of their country. It is the first generation of American Negroes to grow up with the assumption, "Segregation is dead." It has transformed integration from a legal contest to a mass movement, fighting not for future change but for results here and now. Sensitive to the emergence of colored men all over the world, conscious that there is a time bomb ticking in the crowded Negro slums of the United States, the Negro college students of 1962 are welded into one of the most fiercely united, dynamic and optimistic social movements of our time.

Characteristically, they seek out the toughest problems in the toughest places. Liberty, Mississippi, is the county seat of Amite County, where 54 percent of the population is Negro. Of

the 5000 voting-age Negroes, one is registered to vote. Moses and his friends were—and are—conducting semisecret schools to coach local Negroes how to pass registration tests. What happened to Moses is not unique; a week later a colleague was kicked to semiconsciousness, a month later another was shot dead. Much is at stake, for Amite is one of 137 counties in the South where Negroes are a majority but have few votes. Such counties are the backbone of a powerful conservative white force in American politics. When Negroes begin voting in these counties there will be profound changes in Southern and national politics.

Nonviolent themselves, the students appear unmoved by the violence of others. In 1960 their battleground was the lunch counters. In 1961 it was Freedom Rides on buses. From 1962 onward it will be the ballot box, and in this they march with a massive army. With them are all major Negro civil-rights groups, strengthened by \$325,000 in cash from the Field Foundation in Chicago and the Taconic Foundation in New York. Backing the vast drive to register Southern Negroes to vote is the United States Department of Justice, which gives the movement moral support and intervenes with lawsuits and court orders to strike down barriers.



Robert Moses, a teacher, went south when the sit-ins began.



Charles McDew attended college in the South, stayed to fight.

## Technique of nonviolence: "If they are insulted, they do not answer back. If they are attacked physically, they do not hit back."

Who are these young Negro revolutionaries? How did they get this way? Why are they so different from their parents? How do they work? What have they done so far?

In two years they have revolutionized the drive for integration. With sit-ins and Freedom Rides they have won equal treatment at lunch counters, buses, terminals, public parks, swimming pools, theaters, churches, libraries, museums and beaches in many cities and towns of the Deep South which orthodox civil-rights groups had privately written off for decades.

They have done it with the sophisticated technique of nonviolent protest, adopted from their patron saint, the Indian Mahatma Gandhi. They ask politely for equal service in a public place and wait until something happens. If they are insulted, they do not answer back. If they are attacked physically, they do not hit back. If they are arrested, they stay in jail as long as they can in order to dramatize their point and add the expense of imprisonment to the cost of maintaining segregation. If they are tried and convicted, they proceed to challenge the constitutionality of the whole procedure.

If some are jailed or hospitalized, others take their place, for the new Negro generation has reversed a historic trend. For 300 years the most ambitious and militant Negroes fled the rural South, leaving colored communities without aggressive leadership. Today the most vigorous young Negroes are pouring back to Dixie, and what once was enough to suppress Negro protest only invites more into battle.

### After Each Battle, More Recruits

In Orangeburg, South Carolina, for example, when a few Negro students were refused service at a lunch counter, twenty-five classmates demonstrated in protest. When their college threatened to expel the students, 500 others marched downtown. When the city said it would arrest all demonstrators, 1400 paraded silently on City Hall. Within twelve months of the first incident that called this generation to battle—a sit-in at Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960—a total of 1600 demonstrated in Mississippi; 4000 in South Carolina; 4200 in North Carolina; 5500 in Alabama; 7000 in Georgia; 10,000 in Louisiana; 16,000 in Tennessee. In one year this silent rebellion of 70,000 Negroes—with some white sympathizers—challenged public authority in the South; 3600 were arrested.

They have shaken the old certainty of white segregationists. Twenty years ago I could live in a Deep South community and know that my fellow whites believed implicitly that segregation would never change. In the turbulent years of school

integration, I could return as a reporter and still find most working-class whites proclaiming that in the Deep South integration would never come. But today doubt is replacing certainty. I have just finished talking with Negro leaders in New York, Washington and Atlanta, and with Negro students and their leaders through the Deep South. I listened as well to whites. For the first time, in places like Birmingham and Jackson, one could hear the hard core cracking. There was the Mississippi farmer in town for the day saying, "I suppose integration's coming, what with the Federal Government pushing it"—and then with bitter puzzlement—"and those damn young niggers."

### New Heroes, New Expectations

"Those damn young niggers" not only puzzle older whites of the Deep South, but they sometimes astonish their own elders. They behave like no other generation of Negroes in American history, perhaps because no previous generation has seen so many colored men rise in other nations. There are new heroes, new rules and new expectations. Parents measure how far Negroes have advanced since World War II; the children measure how far they have yet to go. Most older Americans look upon the 1954 Supreme Court decision as the historic foundation of modern desegregation; not one Negro student in over a hundred interviewed had any vivid personal recollection of the day of that decision. They all regard it as a failure.

But almost every student could remember precisely where he was and what time of day it was when he first heard of the event that galvanized them all and launched the new Negro generation into contemporary history: the sit-in at Greensboro. Students, faculties and college presidents testified that after the Greensboro incident a strange fever swept the campuses of the country's 120 Negro colleges. Within a week of Greensboro there was scarcely another topic of conversation on Negro campuses. Students began organizing sit-ins and protests in their own college towns. The subtle alterations of history, the tide of change throughout the world and the painstaking groundwork of older organizations and earlier generations had prepared the new Negro for that particular moment.

After his first demonstration in a picket line, Moses felt the same emotions that many students describe.

"I had a feeling of release. From the first time a Negro gets involved in white society, he goes through the business of repressing, repressing. My whole reaction through life to such humiliation was to avoid it, keep it down,

hold it in, play it cool. This is the kind of self-repression every Negro builds into himself. But when you do something personally to fight prejudice there is a feeling of great release."

Something like this was happening to other college Negroes. Charles Frederick McDew had been a high-school athlete in Massillon, Ohio, so accepted by everyone in his town that he grew up without race consciousness. His father had gone to a Negro college in South Carolina, and to please him McDew went to the Deep South for the first time, to go to college. In his first three months he was arrested three times and struck by a policeman for doing or saying things that had been normal back in Massillon—trying to enter the main YMCA in town with his Ohio membership card or sitting in a "white" railroad car.

During Religious Emphasis Week several white Protestant ministers described their denominations to the Negro college students. When McDew asked them if he could attend their churches, they said he could not. McDew asked a rabbi who was present and was invited to the temple. Ultimately McDew left Christianity and adopted Judaism. Still, he felt no urge to take up the civil-rights fight. Like many Northern Negroes he tended to look down on the South and on the Southern Negro.

"I felt," he said, "that it was the Southern Negro's problem, not mine. Then one night I was reading the Talmud when I came across this: 'If I am not for myself, then who is for me? If I am for myself alone, then what am I? If not now, when?'"

### Commitment to the Struggle

McDew read the Talmudic passage just after the Greensboro incident. Within a week he had enlisted in the movement at his own college, had become a leader, had been arrested and jailed. Today he is chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a small band of former students working as full-time professionals in the Deep South. (Like Moses, McDew tried to register Negroes to vote in Liberty, but he first called Washington and told the Department of Justice. When McDew and two local Negroes appeared in the town, there were some well-dressed strangers, recognizable to all as FBI agents, keeping an eye on the courthouse. There was no violence that day; there was no registration either. Every door on the courthouse was padlocked.)

Or take the case of a girl I shall call Emma, a bright, lively freshman in a Negro college, whose commitment to the struggle began seven years ago when she was still in junior high school. It was only this year, however, that she burst to the surface. In 1955 when she was twelve years old,

# "beyond the veil of the veil"

papers than the students, but which permeates the slums in large cities. These are the Black Muslims.

Muslims mean business. They pray to Mecca five times daily, they dress soberly, work hard, pay their bills, forbid drinking and smoking, manage their own apartment houses and department stores, and teach in their state-accredited schools that the white race is rotten and the colored races will inherit the earth, including the U.S.A. They teach members not to strike first, but if struck to be prepared to die in retaliation.

For millions of Negroes unable to accept the Muslim theology or puritanical life, the Muslim message still has a powerful, emotional appeal. The influence is strong in every large Northern city and seems to be growing in Southern ones. The group had 100,000 practicing members in 1960; spokesmen said it would have 1,000,000 by the end of this year.

Thus the Negro masses are moving, but in what direction no one can guarantee. The move can be bitter and destructive, like the program of the Muslims. Or it can be channeled into the traditional pattern of protest, reform and ultimate cooperation, on which the students have placed their faith.

Even the agitation of the students, however, causes deep fear and resentment among many whites in the Deep South. A white cab driver in Birmingham told me, "Everyone knows this whole integration business is Communist. The old niggers in town, they don't want no part of it. They like it the way it is. See that old nigger at the stand on the corner? I asked him about it and he said he wanted no part of it. But these younger ones. . ."

### Private Praise From Their Elders

Two hours later I talked to the old man at the corner stand. What did he think of the student campaign? He gave me a long, hard look and said, "I'm with them. The only way our people can move ahead is to stick together."

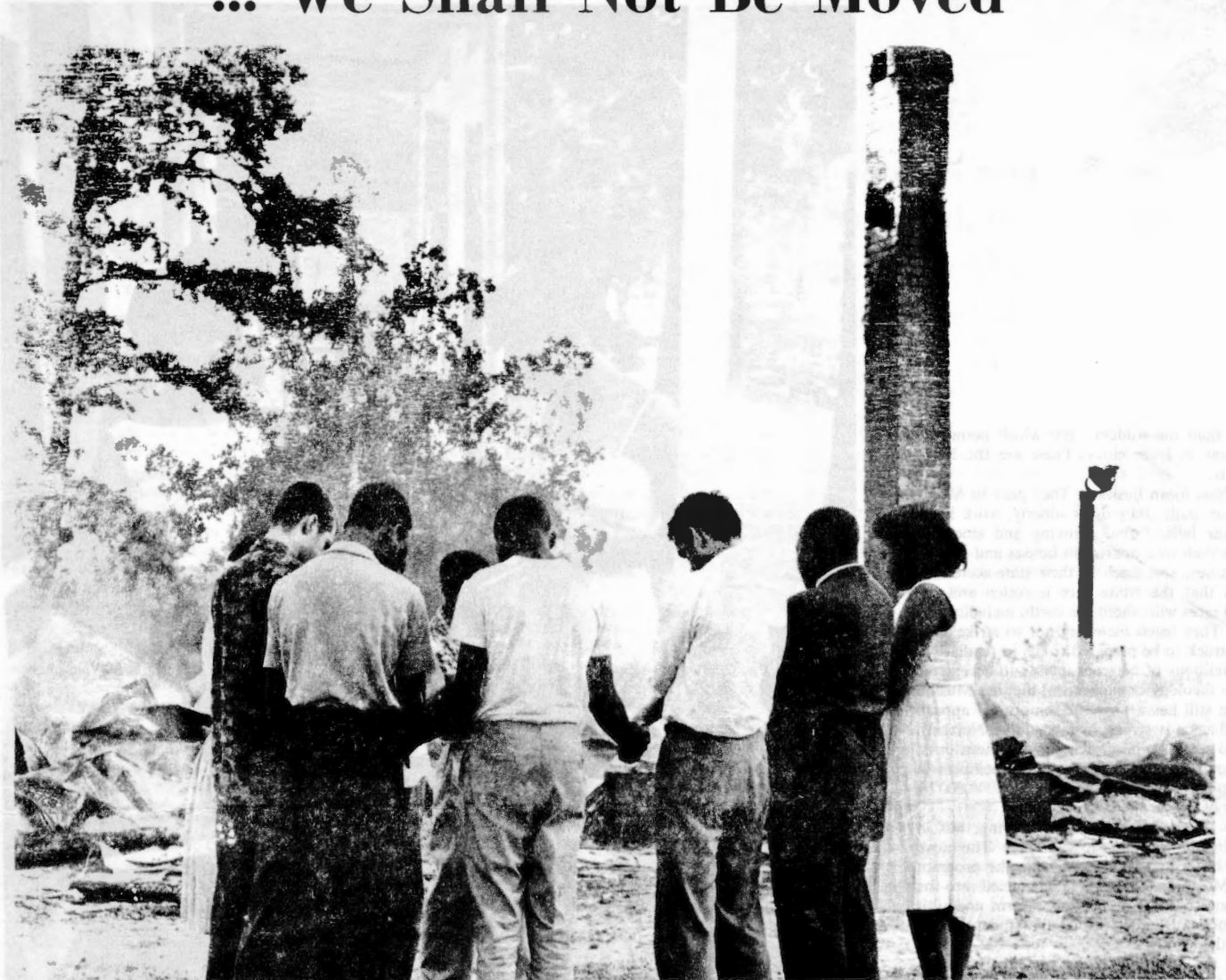
Thus, if the students seem to be rejected by older Negroes speaking to their white bosses, they are privately praised and supported. If the students rely on dangerous direct action, it is nevertheless significant that they reject personal violence and plan for ultimate peace with the white community.

"It's a race against time," one man put it. "At one end you've got groups like the Muslims saying, 'To hell with the white man.' At the other end you have the student movement saying, 'Stand up for your rights with non-violence.' I think the students are gaining. If they aren't, then God help us all." THE END



Pushing ahead with the voter-registration drive, Robert Moses and girl field workers whom he has trained urge a potential voter in Jackson, Miss., to make an attempt at registering.

## “... We Shall Not Be Moved”



This photograph was taken hours after the Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Sasser, Georgia -- a church used for SNCC voter registration meetings -- was burned to the ground. Standing near the smoking ruins, their hands joined in prayer, are voter registration workers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Negro citizens from Terrell County -- “Terrible Terrell” as it is called.

As you have just read in the SATURDAY EVENING POST, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee faces real danger in its campaign for democracy in the South.

Since the POST article was written, a wave of terror has swept over Georgia and Mississippi:

Four churches -- two of which were used as meeting places for registration rallies -- have been burned to the ground in Southwest Georgia.

Prathia Hall, Jack Chatfield, and other SNCC workers were shot at in Dawson, Georgia.

Two young Negro girls were seriously injured in Ruleville, Mississippi, when nightriders shot into the home of a couple prominent in a SNCC voter registration drive.

Samuel Block and three other SNCC field secretaries had to flee over the roof of their office in Greenwood, Mississippi, to avoid a potential lynching by a white mob armed with guns and ropes.

Robert Moses, SNCC field secretary, and others were arrested in Indianola, Mississippi, for “distributing handbills without a license.” (The handbills advertised a meeting on voter registration to take place that evening.)

And yet, despite the terror and the intimidation, SNCC’s program of voter registration and direct action WILL continue.

For information on how you can help these students and their efforts, please contact

**The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**  
**799 1/2 Hunter Street, N.W.**  
**Atlanta 14, Ga.**