

MONTGOMERY STUDENTS SIT IN STORY

On the night of February 24th, a representative number of students from the Alabama State College visited the home of Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, pastor of the First Baptist Church and the President of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Inc. These students were seeking advice and guidance from Reverend Abernathy relative to a "sitdown" demonstration which they had already decided among themselves to have. Reverend Abernathy called in other consultants. The students were finally advised to think as carefully as possible of the sites where the demonstrations might be made. A number of places were pointed out and it was finally decided to make their demonstrations at the lunch room county court house.

On February 25, thirty-five students from the Alabama State College went for a "sitdown" in the snack-bar in the Montgomery County Court House. They took seats and ordered coffee. Those in charge refused to serve them and proceeded to close the establishment. As the doors were closed, the students quietly took a position along the wall leading to the entrance of the snack bar. After a brief conference among themselves, the students filed out in two's and went quickly back to the campus, taking time to observe all traffic laws. From all indications the students had a deep sense of satisfaction that they had identified themselves with the sitdown movement among the colleges of the south. But they were soon to learn that this was not the end of just a peaceful demonstration.

On February 26, Harold M. Stoutermire, a student at Alabama State College was tried and found guilty of perjury. He was fined one-hundred dollars (\$100.00) and costs. The case developed in connection with Stoutermire's efforts to become a qualified voter. He had applied before but he had not heard from the board. In making application this time, he came to the following question: "Have you previously

On February 27, the downtown section of the city was patrolled by bat-carrying white men. Several colored people were attacked by these men. One Negro woman was beaten. A picture of the man swinging the bat to hit this woman from behind was printed in the paper the next morning. None of those attacked were students. The students met at First Baptist Church. They had no intention of visiting the downtown area on a "sit-down". None of the whites who attacked colored people were arrested, although, it was proven that policemen saw the men attack the woman.

On March 1, the mandate of the governor for the expulsion of all students taking part in the "sitdown" demonstrations at the court house had been issued to President H. Councilll Trenholm. The student body expressed their attitude toward this act on the part of the governor by a quiet and prayerful march on the state capitol. About 1800 students stood on the capitol steps, prayed and sang two selections; the Lord's Prayer and the National Anthem.

March 2, Governor John Patterson called the state board of education in a special session. He recommended that nine (9) of the thirty-five (35) students that visited the snack bar at the court house be expelled. President H. Councilll Trenholm recommended that all of the students be placed on probation. The board acted on the governor's recommendation. The nine (9) students expelled were:

Bernard Lee
St. John Dixon
Marzette Watts
Howard Shipman

Joseph Peterson
Leon Rice
James McFadden
Edward Jones

Elroy Embry

March 4, the Montgomery Improvement Association voted to join the protest against the expulsion of the nine (9) students. The plan was to conduct a prayer meeting on the steps of the Capitol, Sunday, March 6th, at 1:30 P. M.

in and start a riot. Presided over by Rev. Mather Petway, the marchers conducted a prayer meeting. A few people were struck by officers, but there was no bloodshed.

The program consisted of the National Anthem, Prayer, America, Scripture, Prayer for Our Opressors (the Governor & The Board of Education), Hymn, Battle Hymn of the Republic, Greetings by Mr Bernard Lee, Student Leader and Miss Ella J. Banker, Director, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Statement Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy, Prayer for Strength and Courage, Hymn, Negro National Anthem, Benediction.

Tuesday, March 8, Thirty-five students (35) and one instructor, Mrs Olean Underwood and her husband, Dr. Jefferson Underwood were arrested. They were charged with disorderly conduct and disobeying an officer. The students were carrying placards and marching on the campus in protest of the expulsion of the nine students. When they failed to obey the orders of the superintendent of buildings and grounds to leave the campus, the police was called by him.

The students reported that these policemen had a field day in the use of profanity and name-calling. They referred to the five girls arrested as "nigger gals". Mrs Underwood was arrested with this group. When Dr Underwood went to the jail to see about Mrs. Underwood, they put him in jail because he refused to "get the hell on away", from there.

On Wednesday, March 9, this was a cold and rainy day. The students had planned a demonstration in protest of the arrest of the thirty-five (35). Because of the inclement weather, Mr. Bernard Lee, President of the student group, called the demonstrations off. Mr. Sullivan had called out to meet these students, a number of giant trucks, the through bred horses, policemen, sherrifs, deputies and patrolmen from other counties. They were hid away on a back street running past Oak Park....a spot not far from the college. It was

were made to stop them.

On Friday, March 11, the students and instructor and her husband were tried and found guilty. The students were fined one-hundred dollars (100) on each count. Dr. and Mrs. Underwood were given less fines. Appeal bonds were made for them. The students were ably represented by Attorneys Fred D. Gray, Solomon S. Seay, and Charles D. Langford.

On March 25, more than three hundred (300) students were the victims of a scheme of the schools to eliminate them for their participation in the demonstrations. The three hundred (300) students were thrown out of school because of not meeting the deadline stipulated on the ultimatum issued by the college's administration.

The ultimatum was issued, but seemed to have affected only the students who had participated in the demonstrations.

On the following date of the issuing of the ultimatum the student body had planned to delay registering in protest to the strategy used by both the governor, and the college president in dealing with the student leaders and demonstrators and their taking part in the movement.

With the slow and maladjusted system used at Alabama State College for registering the students, it was known that the students could not make the ultimatum.

On March 31, Professor R. D. Nesmith and ten of his students in Sociology from Macmurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois were visiting Montgomery as a part of their annual field trip.

As the students with their professor, his wife and their two- and a half year old baby were chatting over a lunch of fried chicken with Rev. S. S. Seay, Executive Secretary, of the MIA, Rev. E. B. Dubose, Episcopal Minister, Rev. Ed King and several Negro college

The next day when the defendants were brought to court, they had to face charges of disorderly conduct. "calculated to breach of the peace".

Everybody was found guilty. Most of the whites were fined fifty dollars (50) and cost while most of the Negroes one-hundred (100) dollars. All of the convictions will be appealed. Some of the white students have declared that they would rather serve jail sentences than pay a fine for doing what they consider within the rights of all american citizens. Several of the Negro students had already established their reputations as leaders in the sit-down demonstrations against Jim Crow. Two of them Marzette Watts and Elroy Embry were among the nine (9) expelled from Alabama State College by order of the Governor and the State Board of Education. They were charged on two accounts, disorderly conduct and vagrancy.

The students who are still in school are being humiliated every day by the law enforcement office. They can no longer enjoy the normal school life they had before.

The corner grill where the students go to hear a full record and gossip over cake, is now being over run by police. They can no longer enjoy this meager privilege.

The police just last Sunday, April 11, 1960 keep students in the "grill" and they were not allowed to come out. Their only and untrue excuse was that a fire had broken out in the place.