

"Niggers Ain't Gonna Run This Town": Militancy, Conflict and the Sustenance of the Hegemony in Bogalusa, Louisiana

by Seth Hague

This paper was selected by the Department of History as the Outstanding Paper for the 1997-1998 academic year.

The battle for civil rights in Bogalusa, Louisiana was a struggle for power, but it was different from the prototypical struggles in the agricultural South during the 1960s. Industrialization is the main reason for this difference, as the black laborers met challenges distinctly different than the problems associated with the struggle in the agricultural South. Oppressed rural black populations were much more inclined to follow the leadership from groups like CORE and SNCC, whereas the laboring class of blacks in industrialized towns such as Jonesboro and Bogalusa fought themselves for power and demanded that outside coalitions like CORE follow them. They exercised militancy, embedded in them as the result of the rigid class-consciousness imposed by an oppositional white power structure, through an armed self-defense organization they created known as the Deacons for Defense and Justice. The efforts already made by the Jonesboro black laborers, entrenched in a similar situation in another industrialized Louisiana mill town, further inspired militancy in Bogalusa. Once Crown-Zellerbach laborers A.Z. Young and Robert Hicks assumed leadership of the (all-black) Bogalusa Civic and Voters' League, the community came to embrace the militant rhetoric of the Jonesboro Deacons. Many violent conflicts ensued under this ideology and culminated in a climactic summer in 1965. Consequently, the black workers' militancy threatened not only the power of the middle class blacks, but also the political and economic hegemony of the white power structure in Bogalusa. Except for a few noteworthy courtroom "victories" versus Crown-Zellerbach, *threatening* the power structure was virtually the struggle's only effect as the white power structure subsumed the militancy and rhetoric of the revolutionary Bogalusans.

The Deacons for Defense and Justice arrived in Bogalusa under extremely turbulent conditions. On February 21 Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick, Ernest Thomas, and CORE worker Charles Fenton set out from Jonesboro to Bogalusa. The trek was over three hundred miles through rough Klan country. When the group reached Baton Rouge that night, they heard a news update on the radio announcing that Malcolm X had been assassinated. Ominously, Malcolm was in Selma, Alabama less than three weeks prior to his assassination, predicting that the campaign for racial equality may be forced to abandon its non-violent image. The carload of militants from Bogalusa attested the accuracy of that prophesy.

When the group arrived in Bogalusa at the labor Union Hall, A.Z. Young, Robert Hicks, and Charlie Sims were on hand to greet them. The meeting hall was packed, with some CORE workers like Yates and Miller in attendance. After an introduction by Young, Kirkpatrick took the podium to speak. He placed a bible on one side of the podium and a

gun on the other as he stressed the need to be well-armed and well-organized. He talked about what worked in Jonesboro, such as roving patrols who kept watch over their neighborhoods at night. Speedy response was important, too; he noted that walkie-talkies and citizen-band radios were effective to ensure proper and quick deployment. Thomas discussed the need for proper firearms; for example, he discouraged the use of .22 caliber rifles and endorsed more high-powered weaponry, such as shotguns. Building a strong supply of ammunition was essential as well. The main tenet of Deacon philosophy was defensive, whereas they had to be prepared to repel Klan attacks. Several members of the crowd, including Young, Hicks, and Sims, listened intently and thought seriously about the benefits of having such protection; by the end of the night, Bogalusa had set up its own chapter of the Deacons of Defense and Justice. <1>

The next morning Yates and Miller left town with Fenton, Kirkpatrick, and Thomas out of Bogalusa; the newly formed Bogalusa Deacons escorted them. A taste of what massive resistance lay ahead for the Bogalusa Deacons was in store that morning, as several carloads of Klansmen chased them for twenty-nine miles at speeds of over one hundred and ten miles per hour. The high-speed pursuit went from Bogalusa to Covington; Royan Burris, one of the new Deacons from Bogalusa, followed the pack alone. He witnessed one of the Klan car's false license plate fall off en route and was eventually stopped by one carload of whites who told him: "Next time, nigger, we'll kill you." There were many "next times" and the Klan was successful in killing and intimidating many black and white civil rights workers. But the Deacons put up the fight of their lifetime and made their memory a legacy. The State Police could sense blood in the water and opened up a permanent office in Bogalusa on February 23. And on February 25 two FBI agents, Quackenbush and Sass, came to the Hicks residence. Agent Sass told Hicks not to get involved with the Deacons and informed Hicks that if a white person was shot by a black in self-defense, then the black would be charged with murder. When Hicks replied that self-defense was a Constitutional right, Sass and Quackenbush stormed angrily out of the house. Bogalusa was preparing for a racial war. <2>

For the next few months, CORE led the BCVL and Bogalusa's black community in several demonstrations. Other than CORE, the BCVL received no support from any other group or organization, especially any affiliation with the white power structure. Furthermore, the white power structure continued to insist that conditions were harmonious in the mill town. Louisiana Governor John McKeithen even claimed that he did not know of a single reason why blacks in Bogalusa would ever stage demonstrations. Richard Haley, CORE's Southern Regional director in New Orleans, sent the Governor a letter outlining several pieces of empirical evidence to dispute his claim, including violent near-death beatings of civil rights workers, explicit refusals to comply with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and an attack on March 29 of a BCVL meeting where a protester threw a tear gas grenade through an open window. Then the city council followed suit reiterating the Governor's claim, insisting that "race relations" in Bogalusa had always been harmonious until civil rights protests excited the race relations. The BCVL rebutted: "Negroes are not interested in 'race relations.' We speak of freedom, justice, and equality. We are citizens, not 'race relations'; and we assert our citizenship."

On April 6 the BCVL not only reiterated their rights to citizenship to Mayor Cutrer, they also united the power of the black community. The League presented a list of demands to the Mayor, Police Jury, Community Affairs Committee, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and CORE defining "full citizenship" as:

- Equal economic opportunity in public and private employment and in city licensing practices.
- Equal educational opportunities in integrated school facilities.
- Desegregation of all public accommodations and facilities.
- Extension to all of the community of sewers, paved roads, bright street lighting, and adequate enforced housing codes.
- Inclusion of Negro leaders on a decision-making level on City and Parish general and industrial development planning boards.
- Removal from city ordinances of all unconstitutional discriminatory laws.
- Employment of Negro city policemen with all proper police power to help insure the equal enforcement of laws. <3>

CORE and the BCVL did not stop with the list of demands, and local vigilantes did not stop at just listening to them. Motivated by the "full citizenship" demands, civil rights activists set up a voter registration clinic on April 7; this brought out serious violence. Outside the Union Hall, where the voter registration clinic was taking place, Bill Yates saw about seventy Klansmen protesting. The FBI did appear and prevent violence, but that night a ten foot cross was set ablaze, accompanied by two coffins with floodlights on them; one coffin had Yates' name on it. While CORE and the BCVL met that night at Hicks' home, on April 8, three carloads of Klan members passed and fired shots into the house. Anticipating an ambush, armed Deacons swarmed the house in a defensive formation and Mr. Hicks fired back one shot at the cars. The Klan did not retreat until Mrs. Hicks stormed outside with a pistol and stood on the lawn. When the police arrived after a second round of exchanged fire, they attempted to confiscate the weapons from the Hicks house but the activists refused to give them up. Activists in the house reported that about thirty shots were fired upon them by Klansmen, but assistant police chief L.C. Terrill told national newspapers that *his* investigation revealed that only about eight shots were fired, all *from* the Hicks residence. No arrests were made. <4>

Meanwhile on the same day, CORE's national director, James Farmer, addressed a crowd of about five hundred students at the all-black Central High School. More than one hundred city and state policemen were present and at one point turned away thirty-two carloads of Klansmen, approaching the school. No individuals were injured, but two black men's cars had acid poured on them. The next morning Farmer led over four hundred black residents, including the BCVL and CORE field workers, in a march on City Hall as promised and presented the point-by-point list of demands to ensure equal rights. Part of the march was broken up when a few whites darted through police lines to attack marchers. Four white men were later arrested, including Randall Pounds, who tried to hit Farmer with a blackjack. Hattie Mae Hill, a seventeen year old black activist, recalled seeing a police car side-swipe Farmer in an apparently deliberate attempt. Local police ordered the marchers to return to the Union Hall. Farmer left Bogalusa on April 11

for a meeting in New York with CORE's twenty-eight member National Action Committee. At the meeting CORE decided that Louisiana would be their primary target that summer in 1965. They would focus on three key issues in the Klan infested parts of the state: voting rights, civic conditions, and public accommodations. <5>

On April 19, Farmer returned to Bogalusa and led another march on City Hall in order to demand the ousting of three police officers for "improper conduct"; no further details were ever given. Black pickets marched along a dozen downtown stores and carried their energy on to City Hall. A petition, which they presented to the Mayor, demanded not only the discharge of three police officers, two of whom identified only by badge number and the third identified as Captain Wascom, but also an "end to unequal enforcement of law in Bogalusa." The officers were never discharged but the demand did highlight the growing problem of police brutality and inadequate protection which would only hinder the struggle. Farmer stayed in town until April 23 and left to give mediators, organized from around the state by Governor McKeithen and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, time to help cool off the racial turmoil. The mediators only temporarily dissolved tension; Klan resistance never rested as they circulated handbills that read: "We have never appreciated outsiders telling us how to run our city. Outsiders have often caused trouble in our city." By the end of April there were thirty-four city police officers, twelve deputized firemen, three hundred state troopers, and thirty FBI men, all assigned to the city; Bogalusa was ready for a race war. <6>

In an attempt to head off this race war, and with the help of John Martzell, a young, white lawyer from Shreveport, Jesse Cutrer agreed to meet with representatives of the BCVL. On May 16, ten members of the black voter's league met with the Mayor and city council. The meeting produced a number of promises from the city. The council promised to repeal all segregation ordinances, to integrate all public accommodations, to improve lighting and sewerage, to pave roads in black neighborhoods, to enforce housing codes, to hire more black police officers, and to be more conscious of hiring more blacks in other city departments. In a radio speech a few days later, Mayor Cutrer announced the new commitments: "The time has come to try to find solutions to our problems and recognize the rights and responsibilities of all our citizens."

The Klan, which circled City Hall during the negotiations, responded immediately with a leaflet which circulated the town. The leaflet was entitled, "Who Bought Jesse Cutrer?" and named a list of city (and state) officials who should be "tarred and feathered." But the list excluded certain high city officials such as commissioner of public safety Arnold Spiers and Chief of Police Claxton Knight; historically, this shed some light on the allegations of police brutality and their inability to protect civil rights workers. <7>

Farmer, though, aligned CORE in support of the mayor and the negotiating team. Just after the radio address he spoke at a rally at Ebenezer Baptist Church and applauded Bogalusa for being "on the threshold of the greatest breakthrough in any southern city in the past five years," and urged that "...now we must see to it that the deeds follow the words. The fight is not ended--the most difficult part is ahead. You must hold your movement together." The black community did not hesitate to test the city's new

promises. On a steamy afternoon on May 19, just three days after the negotiations, Robert Hicks and Sam Barnes, both Deacons, drove into Cassidy Park with a group of black children and adults; the Park, previously segregated, was presumed to be integrated following Cutrer's radio announcement. As Hicks and Barnes began unloading the testers, the whites who were already at the park packed up and left. Shortly after that a new carload of whites appeared in a large station wagon. The station wagon circled the park at a very fast speed and attempted to run over a group of black children. City police, who were stationary on one side of the park, watched and remained silent with canines as the station wagon circled about five times. Then a mob of whites, one with a belt wrapped around his knuckles and others with sticks, bricks, brass knuckles, guns, and rifles, began walking toward the black testers. They were cursing the blacks as they neared and screaming epithets while they insisted that the park did not belong to the blacks. When the angry whites confronted the blacks a massacre began. About twenty whites were beating the blacks; a few minutes later five police officers, two of whom had dogs, and three state troopers appeared at the onslaught and took over the beating of the blacks with their billets. One of the dogs bit Gregory Hicks, Robert Hicks' fourteen year-old son, on the leg. The "law enforcement officers" fought the blacks for fifteen minutes, then told them to return to their vehicles and go back to Union Hall. <8>

Just as Sam Barnes approached his vehicle, a plain-clothes policeman looked into his car and saw a pistol on the front seat. The officer reached into Barnes' car and seized the pistol and arrested Barnes, even though having a pistol on the front seat of a car is legal in Louisiana. While in jail at Franklinton, the parish seat, Barnes was beaten numerous times by other black inmates. The inmates, according to Barnes, were given a dollar by the police and told to beat him. Police thus reduced even inmates of the same color to enemy status of the struggle for equality; they did not stop there. Before he was released, but after his bond was paid, the jailer made him mop the entire jail and clean the commode with his bare hands. Wounded blacks from the park went to the hospital in Bogalusa where they were met by a Dr. Foster who refused them treatment, stating that "If you are fool enough to go over there, I am not going to get involved." They had to go to New Orleans, sixty miles away, for medical attention. <9>

Ten days later on May 29 the BCVL led pickets on Columbia Road in downtown Bogalusa. Shortly after the stores opened, a handful of pickets led by A.Z. Young and Charlie Sims, arrived. Sims was financial secretary of the BCVL and president of the Deacons. The demonstrations lasted for about six hours. By the end of the picket late in the afternoon, a phalanx of white onlookers formed and began heckling and assaulting the blacks. With the presence of the Deacons, fighting reached such an intensity that local police had to form a human barricade in front of the picketing headquarters at Royan Burris' barber shop. The barber shop, also a Deacon meeting place, is where the police persuaded Young and Sims to stop picketing. But the racial confrontation began again the following Monday; this time the city was better prepared with thirty-four local police officers and one hundred twenty-five state troopers on hand to stop violence. With his back to the wall, Mayor Cutrer banned all marches in the city.

A hot summer was under way and the intensity of the struggle beat down on Bogalusa as situations reached a climax. The day after Cutrer banned all marches, June 2, two black Washington Parish sheriff's deputies were attacked. O'Neal Moore and Creed Rogers were newly hired peacekeepers who brought the first black representation to law enforcement. While patrolling near Varnado, just north of Bogalusa, a gunman in a passing pick-up truck fired several shots into the patrol car. One shot caught Rogers in the shoulder; Moore was not so lucky. He was hit in the head, a blow which killed him instantly. Shortly after the murder, a man driving a pick-up truck which matched Rogers' description of the assailant was picked up just across the Mississippi state line. The man was Ernest Ray McElveen, a forty-one year old white Bogalusa resident who worked as a lab technician for Crown-Zellerbach. He was a member of the National States' Rights Party and the Citizens' Council of Greater New Orleans and was charged with Moore's murder. For lack of evidence McElveen was never convicted and Moore's murderer never brought to justice. <10> This slaying electrically charged Bogalusa's atmosphere for summertime.

Such was the situation when the Deacons surfaced in full force in Bogalusa. Until this time they had only cautiously existed in a clandestine manner; under cover they stockpiled a huge arsenal of weaponry for this anticipated hot summer. Only once had the Deacons' presence been known, when they returned shots to Klan members who fired into Robert Hicks' home earlier in February. Foreseeing violent problems Mayor Cutrer announced after the Cassidy Park massacre in late May that "Anyone, white or Negro, who attempts to violate the rights of another or cause bodily harm will be promptly arrested, charged and prosecuted." Obviously a veiled threat at the Deacons, (and possibly only at the Deacons), white Bogalusa now anticipated, after the brutal murder of O'Neal Moore, a major racial battle. Fletcher Anderson was the first to feel the arbitrariness of the racial battle after Moore's murder. Late in June one early morning, a group of Klansmen posing as police kicked his door and demanded that he open it. When he refused, they fired seven shots into his house, while Anderson phoned the police. Bogalusa police responded that they would not help him because he had been in New Orleans to testify against them. With his wife in the hospital, Anderson, a known Deacon, stood armed guard over her room after the white men fled from terrorizing his house. Other Deacons responded in total defiance to the Mayor's proclamation, as well; the night after Moore's murder, several Deacons stood guard over their neighborhood in their first public display of arms. <11>

At this point a cleavage formed regarding not only CORE's involvement in Louisiana, but also in the national organization's commitment to nonviolence. A nonviolent clause remained in CORE's original constitution which devoted the organization to peaceful direct action. But after the summer riots in 1964 and the inception of the Deacons in Jonesboro, alongside CORE, in 1964, the nonviolent philosophy was losing its gravity. David Dennis, the director of CORE's Southern Regional Office in New Orleans, defended the relationship with the Deacons and explained that the militant group "support[s] CORE in all respects except in our nonviolent approach." Officially, though, CORE continued to denounce the use of violence, whether retaliatory or riotous. This tenor began to change at the beginning of the summer of 1965, just after Moore's murder

and Farmer's presence (under armed guard) at his funeral. At the national convention in Durham, North Carolina in the week following Moore's murder, CORE was more willing to officially address its alignment with the militant rhetoric taking shape particularly in Louisiana. <12>

Ernest Thomas, the president of the Jonesboro chapter and main national organizer of the Deacons, addressed the 1965 convention. Farmer spoke as well on the issue and emphasized to the delegates the importance of Deacon protection in the heavily Klan-infested portions of the state. The main premise CORE began to consider was the constitutionality of the right to self-defense. Thomas and Farmer, both victims of the most violent oppositional forces in Louisiana, illustrated the crucial demarcation between Deacon self-defense and CORE nonviolence. Thomas emphasized that the Deacons recognized the use of nonviolence in demonstrations and tests of federal desegregation laws and argued that CORE's traditional rules were appropriate for the demonstrations. He said that the Deacons would be prepared to use their guns if necessary at the demonstrations, but stressed that their philosophy was purely self-defense in nature. Until Thomas and Farmer's careful distinction between nonviolent demonstrations and the Deacon's constitutional right to defend against attacks at the demonstrations, the Resolutions Committee and Constitution Committee was prepared to rescind CORE's commitment to nonviolence. Ultimately the convention took no action on the issue of retaliatory violence, but it became clear that situations were changing so that they required some tactical re-consideration; the 1966 Convention repealed the nonviolent clause from the organization's constitution. <13>

The 1965 Convention did announce that CORE would devote its energy completely that summer to the project in Louisiana. They could not have foreseen more clearly where their energy would be needed most. On July 7, the BCVL, in collaboration with CORE, began what was to be a series of marches on City Hall. During the first march, the BCVL presented a list of demands to the mayor calling for a more concerned effort to solve the murder of O'Neal Moore, as well as an end to discriminatory practices by Crown-Zellerbach. The mayor responded saying that the city had nothing to do with the murder of the black sheriff, nor with any of the other demands on the petition. Furthermore, he felt it unfair that CORE decided to spend so much time in Bogalusa as a major civil rights drive. And Crown-Zellerbach denied that it participated in racially discriminatory practices. The march, with only 350 supporters soaked from a heavy rain, proved to be not much of a success.

During a march the next day on a downtown street, Hattie Mae Hill dropped out of the masses after being struck "by a bottle or something" which caused a huge gash to her head. Soaked in blood, she scurried and found Leneva Tiebeman, a Los Angeles nurse working for the medical committee on human rights. Tiebeman was able to carry the bleeding girl to a car at the rear of the procession. Milton Johnson and Henry Austin were driving the 1964 Cadillac which A.Z. Young owned. Johnson and Austin were both self-styled Deacons, driving in Young's car to (presumably) protect the marchers. With a mob of angry whites chasing and harassing the car, Tiebeman threw Hill to the floorboard and covered the wounded girl with her body. Immediately a white man, twenty-five year old

Albert Crowe, Jr., began pummeling Milton in the face through the car window. Austin got out of the car, pointed a .38 Smith & Wesson "peacemaker" at Crowe, and told him to let Milton go because he had a gun. Ignoring the command, Austin then pushed Crowe on the ground and fired a shot in the air. Crowe continued to run at Austin until Austin fired two shots at his attacker, hitting him both in the chest and the neck. state troopers arrested the two black men, booked them at the Bogalusa jail, then transported them to Covington where they stayed for a few more hours before going to New Orleans. Milton reported that in Covington, one of the state troopers said that "If you niggers were in my town, you'd never make it to jail." On leaving jail, there were about fifty whites congregated outside yelling: "There's them two niggers. We're gonna hang them two niggers." <14>

That night there were two rallies: one with the BCVL and the other with the National States Rights Party. The National States Rights Party, a right-wing, anti-Semitic organization headquartered in Birmingham, welcomed J.B. Stoner, an Atlanta attorney, who urged a crowd of 1500 whites to counter-demonstrate in the streets of Bogalusa and urged them to fire all blacks, thus forcing them out of the South: "The National States Rights Party does not preach tolerance. We don't believe in tolerance. We don't believe in getting along with our enemy, and the nigger is our enemy." A minister from California also told the crowd that "if they mean by being free, imposing on the white man, then I'm for helping them die and go to heaven." <15>

The next two days were met with open violence and random shootings of both blacks and whites. Then on July 10, the BCVL received a federal injunction against the Bogalusa chief of police, Claxton Knight and safety commissioner, Arnold Spiers. The federal judge, Herbert W. Christenberry, in *Hicks v. Claxton Knight*, ordered that the Bogalusa police provide full protection of civil rights workers and stop using threats in order to deny them their civil rights. The judge finally granted the BCVL the right to continue with their marches, but at the request of city attorney John Martzell, A.Z. Young called off the march scheduled for that day and planned to resume the following day. Immediately after the federal court injunction, James Farmer returned to Bogalusa for the next march, while Governor John McKeithen sent his personal plane on July 13 to fly Hicks, Young, and Louis Lomax, (who was in Bogalusa for an interview with a local news show), to Baton Rouge in order to persuade them to enact another thirty day "cooling off" to avoid further violence. The two BCVL/Deacon members and Lomax were met in Baton Rouge with phone calls from Vice President Hubert Humphrey and John Doar, head of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, both of whom urged that the black community participate in this "cooling off" period. Hicks and Young somewhat accepted the proposal, only if ten blacks be hired immediately in downtown Bogalusa, ten at the Crown plant, and some black women at the plant as well. McKeithen said he could have one black hired downtown, one black woman at Crown, and one black for the state; other than that, his "hands were tied." Hicks and Young refused the proposal and the "cooling off" period. But at least, the black leaders felt, they had not only acquired the protection of a federal injunction, but had also attracted the attention of state and national officials. <16>

Six days later, the BCVL and CORE felt just how "successful" their recent legal triumph would prove to be. On July 16, while John Doar was in Bogalusa to discuss with Mayor Cutrer, civil rights leaders, and the city council, possible solutions to the already violent summer, marchers picketed at the Pine Tree Plaza Shopping Center. A mob of white segregationists looked on and jeered the pickets, while state troopers watched some fifty yards away. About thirty-five minutes into the picket, an activist walked up to about twenty troopers and asked for protection from the white hecklers. The policemen responded saying that the shopping center was private property and was therefore out of their jurisdiction; the pickets were on their own. The line then received a series of seven attacks from the white segregationists, complete with blows from fists and beatings with sticks. At one point a white barber turned a water hose on the picket line and smeared soap on two white men, proclaiming that "you pickets smell like niggers and need a bath"; the troopers sat and watched. While picketing, Ivory Perry recalled seeing "John Doar of the Department of Justice standing inside the doors of the supermarket watching them spraying water on us. All he did was take notes, when there was FBI, state troopers, and police officers all around." <17>

The troopers did not move into the attack until a man and his wife, who were not picketing but were trying to go into the grocery store, got pulled into the attack and began receiving blows from the white on-lookers. When the city policemen arrived, they arrested seven of the pickets for trespassing charges and turned back about four hundred others, threatening to arrest them. One of the arrestees, Carolyn Bryant, reported being thrown against the walls of the jail cell while the policemen laughed and cursed the blacks. Jacquelyn Butler received serious injuries when she was thrown into a K-9 car and hit her head against one of the dog's metal cages. Later, after Louis Lomax, still in town and recovering from being hit in the head by a brick in a march the day before, bonded her out of jail, the police in the office demanded that she leave the prison in order to face the wrath of an angry mob of whites outside. Initially, the police refused to let her make a phone call once released, and attempted to push her into the mob. Finally Gail Jenkins, secretary of the BCVL, showed up with a carload of Deacons to escort Butler home. <18>

When questioned, Louisiana Public Safety Director, Colonel Thomas Burbank, said he did not send his men in earlier "because the shopping center is private property and not within our jurisdiction," and Mayor Cutrer protested that there just were not enough state and city policemen to protect all of the activists. John Doar and Herbert Christenberry saw the matter differently. They felt their judicial power threatened by a local and state power structure who ignored not only a federal injunction, but also the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Doar intervened in the *Hicks vs. Knight* case and sought a civil and criminal contempt judgment against Arnold Spiers and Claxton Knight. Christenberry gave it to him after he watched a film of pickets being assaulted while police did nothing. On July 30, he ordered Spiers and Knight in contempt of his July 10 injunction and demanded that they devise a new plan for police protection of civil rights workers. The plan must include a training program for officers, written compliance from every member of the force, and weekly reports to the court, announcing the department's performance. For every day of non-compliance, he would fine the men one hundred dollars per day and

would subject them to jail. The civil rights battle in Bogalusa now seemed to be one which would be waged in the courtroom as the United States District Court assumed control over the Bogalusa police department in a sweep of judicious decisions in favor of civil rights.

But these decisions, including Christenberry's harsh contempt order against the police department, proved once again to be empty and unenforceable. In October, the city banned all night marches conducted between six and nine p.m. When black students began to protest and boycott the public schools because of unequal educational opportunities, Bogalusa police arrested six members of the BCVL and charged them with contributing to the delinquency of minors. This led to some of the most violent outbursts in Bogalusa, following the most violent summer in the history of the civil rights movement. On October 20, after canceling two student marches, the police ran amok, charging not only the mass of marchers, but also cafés and restaurants, arresting forty-two juveniles and twenty-five adults. They did not stop at simply arresting the activists. Henry Austin recalled sitting in the Bamboo Bar near the chaos after Mrs. Hicks, desiring not to violate the city's ban on night marches, advised that the protesters go home. Drinking his beer, he witnessed a group of police officers beat up a defenseless black man. Then his eyes caught Deputy Vertrees Adams, and Adams immediately stormed into the bar with two other officers, demanding that Austin come with them. As Austin stood up, Adams delivered the first of several blows from a billy club, connecting with Austin's body. When he was brought to the bus awaiting to bring the arrestees to jail, he noticed that most of the detained sustained similar afflictions. Just before the bus pulled away, Police Chief Claxton Knight boarded and proclaimed, "I'll show you who runs this town." Vertrees Adams followed the Chief and reiterated, "You niggers ain't gonna rule this town." The events that culminated on this day, despite being reported by local newspapers in terms of the injunction against the six members who allegedly contributed to the delinquency of minors by instigating that they absent themselves, became known notoriously as "Bloody Wednesday." These local newspapers continued to support a denial of police brutality on that day, while Richard Haley, CORE's southern director in Baton Rouge, issued a memorandum to all CORE offices and described the situation as "a night of terror in typical Bogalusa style." <19>

After that "night of terror" in Bogalusa, the black community's fight for power became characterized less as one of activism and more as a legal struggle in courtrooms. In December, Judge Christenberry revisited the contempt charges against the Bogalusa police and expressed disbelief in the policemen's testimony that they used "reasonable force" during the events of "Bloody Wednesday." But none of the defendants cited for contempt received any punishment. There was only one criminal trial for one officer, Vertrees Adams, brought up on criminal charges for beating prisoners in jail and paying inmates to beat up Sam Barnes. In 1966, Adams was acquitted of all charges. While the law offices of Collins, Douglass, and Elie in New Orleans did have the state injunction against the BCVL for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" dropped, they were only able to do so after dropping the contempt charges against the Bogalusa Police Department. It seemed that any "successes" made as a result of the uphill struggles during

the incredibly violent summer in 1965 were met only with harsh words and cowardly rulings.

Notes

- 1 *States-Item*, 4 February 1965; Joanne Grant, *Black Protest: 350 Years of History, Documents, and Analyses* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 336; CORE Box #2, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall Collection, ARC.
- 2 "Summary of Bogalusa Incidents," box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; "Bogalusa, Louisiana, Incident Summary: January 25-February 21," LCDC, reel 9.
- 3 Letter from BCVL, 6 April 1965, series 5, box 12, folder 7, CORE, SHSW; George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 102.
- 4 *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*, *op. cit.*, p. 103; "Whole Bogalusa Thing, from standpoint of deb," LCDC, reel 9; *New York Times*, 9 April 1965.
- 5 Interview with Hattie Mae Hill by Miriam Feingold, June 1966, Miriam Feingold Collection, SHSW; "Summary of Incidents: Bogalusa, LA, 28 January-1 July 1965," series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; Christopher B. Strain, "'We Walked Like Men': The Deacons for Defense and Justice," *Louisiana History*, 38 (Winter 1997).
- 6 Handwritten letter to Mayor Jesse Cutrer, 20 April 1965, box 1, folder 2, CORE, Bogalusa Files, SHSW; "Farmer Leads March in Bogalusa," series 5, box 12, folder 7, CORE, SHSW; *New York Times*, 12 April 1965, 20 April 1965, 25 April 1965.
- 7 Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 365-66.
- 8 Handwritten incident report by Robert Hicks, Jr., n.d., box 1, folder 6, CORE, Bogalusa Files, SHSW; "Armed Whites Attack Group Desegregating Park," 20 May 1965, series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; "Bogalusa's Mayor Announces New Policy, Farmer Hails It," n.d., series 5, box 12, folder 7, CORE, SHSW.
- 9 "Report from Gayle Jenkins on Bogalusa Situation," 19 May 1965, series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; "Incident Report of May 19, 1965 as Given by Sam Barnes," LCDC, reel 8; List of Intimidations as cited in *Hicks vs. Knight*, LCDC, reel 30.
- 10 "Incident Reports," 1965, box 1, folder 6, CORE, Bogalusa Files, SHSW; "'We Walked Like Men': The Deacons for Defense and Justice," *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 11 "Wats Line Report, Bogalusa, LA," 29 June 1965, series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; *New York Times*, 24 May 1965.

12 August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 398-99; *New York Times*, 10 June 1965.

13 *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, op. cit, p. 402.

14 Feingold interview with Hattie Mae Hill, 1966, Miriam Feingold Papers, SHSW.

15 *New York Times*, 8 July 1965, 9 July 1965, 10 July 1965; Statements from Henry Austin, Milton Johnson, Hattie Mae Hill, and Frank T. Lossy, reel 8, LCDC.

16 "Washington Parish, Bogalusa," 13 July 1965, series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW.

17 *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*, op. cit, p. 108.

18 "Washington Parish, Bogalusa, Cont'd," 16 July 1965, series 1, box 7, folder 6, CORE (SRO), SHSW; *New York Times*, 17 July 1965; Statements from Carolyn Bryant and Jacquelyn Butler, reel 8, LCDC .

19 *Times-Picayune*, 19 October 1965, 21 October 1965, 22 October 1965; Statements from Henry Austin, Murray Adams, reel 9, LCDC; "Bogalusa, La, Police 'Run Wild;' Beat, Jail Negroes in 'Night of Terror,'" reel 30, LCDC.

[Back to the 1997 Table of Contents](#)