

SOUTHERN STUDENT ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

"We as young Southerners, hereby pledge to take our stand now to work for a new order, a New South, a place which embodies our ideals for all the world to emulate, not ridicule. We find our destiny as individuals in the South in our hopes and our work together as brothers."

— Nashville, Tennessee
April, 1964

On the weekend of April 3-5, 1965, forty-five student leaders and representatives from approximately fifteen predominantly white southern campuses in ten states gathered in Nashville at the invitation of students from Vanderbilt University and Peabody and Scarritt Colleges. The goals of the conference were several: to assess the extent of involvement in civil rights by students at Southern campuses; to ascertain the amount of interest in action along other political, social, and economic lines; and to assess their student needs and set up a structure through which felt needs in these areas could be met.

Briefly these goals were achieved. It was determined that there is a great deal of activity on these campuses, ranging from moderate to radical. Furthermore, it was confirmed that students are interested in not only civil rights but in other areas beyond civil rights, e.g., peace, academic freedom, civil liberties, capital punishment, and unemployment. It was pointed out that the specific activities the local groups might engage in would be up to them. Finally, a structure was set up. The group has called itself the SOUTHERN STUDENT ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (SSOC). A Continuations Committee was directed to formulate specific proposals and programs.

Since its first organizational meeting, the Southern Student Organizing Committee has instituted the following programs:

- a) Campus Travelers: Three field secretaries have traveled campuses in 12 southern states encouraging students to initiate local education-action programs, recruit for conferences. Another important task of the traveler is to help students communicate with other active groups in their area or region.
- b) Newsletter: The newsletter is our central channel of communication which publishes reports on the various types of activities of local social action groups as well as try to encourage discussion on issues relevant to the building of a new and just order in the South.
- c) Southwide conferences: 144 students from 43 colleges and universities, representing 11 southern states were present at the fall conference. The conference dealt with four major topics: Students in Politics, Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Southern History and Economy. The spring conference was attended by approximately 100 students from 50 colleges, and representing 12 states. In addition to discussion of local campus programming and special speakers, students attended workshops on the civil rights bill, poverty, peace, university reform, labor unions, and tutorials.

- d) University Reform: The SSOC has sponsored a tour by Steve Weissman of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. Steve spoke to approximately 2500 students at 27 colleges in ten southern states.
- e) A statewide conference, sponsored by SSOC, was held in Mississippi at Tougaloo College, March 6, 1965. The purpose of the conference was to bring Negro and white students together to discuss the problems that confront this deep southern state.
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At its spring conference in Atlanta, a statement of programming and goals was adopted by the conference body which read in part:

The last five years of southern history has stripped the "southern way of life" of its magnolia blossoms and southern belles. Mythical racial harmony has been replaced by fire hoses, cattle prods, and police dogs, and the illusion of comfortable plantation living is slowly fading in view of sharecropper shacks and the poverty stricken homes of coal miners in Eastern Kentucky and Tennessee. The decaying system of segregation has helped to clarify other social and economic problems of the South, so that today we are living in a region where there is an obvious need for broad secular changes if the "New South" is to be a well balanced and just society where all of its citizens have the opportunity to grow and live in freedom.

The technological revolution followed closely by the Negro revolt has projected the South into 20th century America. We have a choice of meeting and dealing with the problems of a new era, or retreating into traditionalism and struggling vainly for a way of life that was always more myth than reality.

As students living in this generation, and believing in the dignity of all mankind, we affirm our belief in a new South that will bring democracy and justice to all of its people. The freedom movement for an end to segregation inspires us to make our voices heard for a beginning of a true democracy in the South. The South that we would work for must be free of racial prejudice, of poverty and deprivation, manipulation by vested interests, and the tensions that come from the threat of nuclear war.

The SSOC is based on the idea that people can change, that it is essential to reach a large number of southern students, that educational and action programs are needed throughout the South, and that channels of communication must be opened and remain open among those students who are active in the "movement." If we are to continue working on our dream of a New South, we need your help. Please fill in the following form and return it to Sue Thrasher, Executive Director, Southern Student Organizing Committee, Box 6403, Nashville, Tennessee, 37212.

I WANT TO HELP. I WILL:

_____ Make a monthly contribution to the general budget of SSOC.

_____ Raise funds for the SSOC

_____ invite friends to a fund raising affair (perhaps SSOC can provide a speaker for the occasion.)

_____ mail materials to personal mailing list.

_____ Pledge \$ _____ in support of a specific SSOC program.

_____ Distribute copies of the SSOC newsletter on my campus.

_____ Personally contact possible contributors.