



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## African Americans of Florida Parishes, Louisiana, demand civil rights protection, 1967

- U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

July

1967

to: August

1967

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Louisiana

**Location Description:** Demonstrators marched from Bogalusa to Franklinton and from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge

### Goals:

To demonstrate that "Negroes may safely traverse highways at night, without fear of violence or intimidation"; "Equal rights for blacks in the face of the law"

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Written to garner government protection of people trying to exercise their constitutional rights
- 004. Signed public statements
- 038. Marches › 125 person march through the night
- 063. Social disobedience › Walking through traditional Klan areas

### Methods in 2nd segment:

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 038. Marches › 80-people march 106 miles protected by National Guard
- 063. Social disobedience › Walking through traditional Klan areas

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Leaders address crowd of 600 at state Capitol

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Bogalusa Civic and Voters League
- civil rights workers
- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

A.Z. Young, president of the Bogalusa Civic and Voters League (BCVL)

Lincoln Lynch, associate director of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

Robert Hicks and Gayle Jenkins had leadership roles in the BVCL; they also helped organize the marches.

**Partners:**

Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee (LCDC)

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Louisiana Governor John J. McKeithen and John Doar, head of the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- John Doar
- More black marchers from Bogalusa and neighboring towns

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- 500 black youth and young adults of Baton Rouge

**Segment Length:** 10 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Repressive white citizens, Ku Klux Klan, Local and State Government

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Lincoln Lynch, a leader, promoted the use of violence in his speeches, but the struggle remained nonviolent.

**Repressive Violence:**

Attacks resulting in beating and knocking down marchers; white onlookers threw bottles and eggs at marchers and spread broken glass and roofing nails on the path of the marchers.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

3 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The marchers forced political leaders to protect them from Klan violence, demonstrating successfully the equal rights of blacks and whites in the face of the law. However, the attacks the marchers sustained were evidence that blacks still could not travel safely through Klan territory on their own. The campaigners' growth was limited by the division into separate factions: Black Power advocates and more moderate civil rights workers.

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Despite passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, several outrageous incidents over the following two years demonstrated the double standard of justice for blacks and whites. Blacks were brutally attacked, murdered, and targeted in an attempted church burning, all of which resulted either in no prosecution or acquittal by an all-white jury. In 1967, the Florida Parishes of Louisiana still remained an active stronghold for the Ku Klux Klan.

Black activists, determined to carry on with their struggle for equality, decided to march straight through Klan territory.

On July 23, 1967, 125 African-Americans, many of them teenagers, set out on a 25-mile march from Bogalusa, LA to the steps of the courthouse in Franklinton. A.Z. Young, president of the Bogalusa Voters and Civic League (BVCL), was the main leader and spokesperson of the struggle. Robert Hicks and Gayle Jenkins, who also shared leadership roles in the BVCL, helped organize and served as marshals of the march. Lincoln Lynch, associate director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), recognized the importance of the BVCL's mission and came to help lead the march, bringing CORE's national recognition to the local struggle. The march intended to demonstrate that: "Negroes may safely traverse the highways at night, without fear of violence or intimidation." The marchers demanded equal rights for blacks in the face of the law.

The BVCL decided to march through Klan territory to dramatize the violence that blacks of Bogalusa routinely encountered traveling by night. The BVCL sent telegrams to President Johnson, the Justice Department, and several senators and congressmen with a message explaining that the march had been called off because of "intimidation, harassment, and terror imposed upon Negroes in exercising their constitutional rights." Their claim that the march had been "called off" was a strategic bluff meant to force the federal government to intervene and protect the marchers from the Klan. The politicians responded accordingly, ordering 50 state troopers and riot police to accompany the marchers for the length of their journey, ensuring that blacks could carry out their constitutional rights.

The Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee (LCDC) had recently won a case in federal court to repeal an ordinance banning

“night parades,” arguing that it impinged on the constitutional right to free speech. However, a new ordinance that banned “night marches” was then put into effect. Instead of waiting to argue in court for the new ban to be lifted, the leaders decided to work around it. The marchers left during the afternoon to ensure that they were out of city limits by 6 p.m.

The marchers encountered a mob of 300 white teenagers and young adults blocking their path, but the local police moved the crowd to a vacant lot nearby. The local police arrested three white teenagers who were trying to instigate an attack on the television crews covering the march. 50 state troopers met the marchers at the end of city limits, and served as their escort for the rest of their trip through Klan territory. During the march, someone threw a dead dog with its throat slashed at A.Z. Young; attached to the dog was a placard reading: “Smell like a Nigger, A.Z. Young Next.”

Despite these obstacles, the marchers arrived at 9 a.m., the following morning. They climbed the steps of the courthouse singing the popular and powerful civil rights song “We Shall Overcome.” The mood of the rally shifted when Lincoln Lynch stirred up the crowd by recounting recent murders of black activists around the country. It was of his opinion that if the blacks were not given equality, the blacks would take it; from then on, he said, they “had to be ready to kill.” Although this message resonated with some of the crowd, the BVCL was determined to keep their struggle nonviolent.

Three weeks later, on August 10, the BVCL continued their struggle when they embarked on a ten-day, 106-mile long march to the state capitol of Louisiana in Baton Rouge. Young planned to present a list of grievances to Governor John McKeithen on the steps of the capitol. Initially, the group comprised about 25 blacks and a few white lawyers from the LCDC.

The march intended to dramatize the violent repression of blacks in the areas along their route. The stretch of highways that the marchers traveled was home to the most active of Ku Klux Klan chapters in the state.

Again, the BVCL called upon the federal government for protection. The U.S. Justice Department was not keen on the idea of sending federal troops, preferring to let states handle these matters on their own. However, John Doar, the head of the U.S. Civil Rights Division, who had lobbied for Bogalusa in federal court in the past, put pressure on the state. Governor McKeithen agreed to dispatch nearly 700 National Guardsmen and 500 state troopers to protect the demonstrators as they walked down the center of Highway U.S. 190.

Just outside of Satsuma, a group of whites, some of them children, broke through the ranks of the troopers and attacked A.Z. Young and others. The march was postponed for one day because of the attack, which allowed the LCDC to demand more troops to protect the battered marchers.

Before more troops arrived, 50 more blacks from Bogalusa and the surrounding area joined the march, bringing the total number to almost 80 marchers. Angry white onlookers threw eggs and bottles at the blacks, while others spread roofing nails and broken glass in front of the march. The soldiers found dynamite under one of the bridges the marchers were going to cross, which was later dubiously identified as “only a dummy.”

On the ninth day of the march, when the marchers reached the outskirts of Baton Rouge, Governor McKeithen increased protection to a total of 1,500 National Guardsmen. However, pouring rain kept most of the Klansmen indoors. The tired and cold marchers took shelter in a wooded area.

That evening allied civil rights demonstrators held a rally at the Capital Junior High School. A youthful crowd of 400 sang civil rights songs and rallied behind A.Z. Young and Lincoln Lynch as they addressed the crowd. That same night, the Klan held a rally in a nearby field, where they burned a 15-foot cross and the flag of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (a political grouping the U.S. was fighting in South Vietnam).

Once they reached the steps of the capitol, the original group had grown from 25 marchers to 600 supporters. Eight robed members of the Ku Klux Klan and 300 more spectators followed the demonstrators up the steps. Over 2,200 National Guardsmen and policemen watched as both groups held separate rallies. There were no reports of violence.

In his speech A.Z. Young voiced complaints about employment discrimination and called for the election of 10 blacks running for local offices in Bogalusa. Lincoln Lynch again took a more militant tone, calling for revolution and violence, and the need for a new movement of Black Power. This divided their rally into a faction of Black Power advocates and another consisting of more moderate civil rights activists.

The BVCL's demand for equal rights in the face of the law was met, because the police and National Guard protected the black marchers just as they would have protected threatened whites. However, their attempt to demonstrate that blacks could travel safely was undermined by the attacks that they sustained, despite being protected by the state police. One can only imagine how horrific it could have been had the marchers not been accompanied by the state troopers. The marchers' direct route through Klan territory forced the federal government to ensure that they were protected, a major step forward for the civil rights movement.

## Research Notes

### Sources:

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Walker Stole, 11/9/2011

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