



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Pastors and students lead campaign to desegregate Danville, VA, 1963

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

May 31,
1963

to: August
1963

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Danville, Virginia*

Goals:

- (1) To form a bi-racial committee to determine a schedule for desegregation of various facilities
- (2) To end segregation of public places, such as restaurants, hotels, and schools, which *Brown v. Board of Education* had mandated nine years prior
- (3) To increase employment of blacks in both merchant and municipal jobs
- (4) To free and drop all charges against demonstrators that had been arrested

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 138. Sitdown
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 162. Sit-in
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 162. Sit-in
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Methods in 4th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 195. Seeking imprisonment

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Methods in 6th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Notes on Methods:

Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws included African-Americans using exclusively-white facilities.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- African-American students
- Christian activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA), an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Involvement of social elites:

On July 11, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., arrived in Danville to speak to demonstrators, but refused to lead a march due to the small number of participants (about 80).

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Congress of Racial Equality
- Danville Christian Progressive Association
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 2 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Danville city administration, spearheaded by Judge Archibald M. Aiken and Councilman John W. Carter

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

On June 10, 1963, police officers and deputized garbage men attacked a prayer vigil held by the campaigners for those that had been arrested earlier that day in a separate demonstration. Police also broke up several other peaceful demonstrations using clubs and fire hoses, and ultimately arrested over 300 people.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The city government firmly prevented campaigners from achieving their goals. After the demonstrations ended, segregation persisted, employers continued to discriminate against blacks, and charges against protesters were not dropped. However, in the autumn of 1963, city officials hired the first African-American police officer in Danville.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States gained momentum in the 1960's with campaigns and demonstrations taking place throughout the country. Following the success of the 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, and the strong leadership of that struggle by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), ministers and other activists in Danville, Virginia, decided to start their own campaign. They formed the Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA).

They were aware of the effort required to gain minimal desegregation of the Danville public library system, forced by a campaign in 1960. [Black high school students sit-in, desegregate public libraries in Danville, VA, 1960.]

The African-American citizens of Danville accounted for a quarter of the Danville population. They were tired of the slow move to desegregate public schools, which the Supreme Court had mandated as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education* nine years earlier.

The DCPA desired the desegregation of restaurants, hotels, and other public places. They objected to the white business owners who often discriminated against employing blacks, either refusing to hire them or giving them the lowest-paying menial jobs. The city government itself did not hire blacks and was exclusively white. The lack of representation for the black community meant that the government never truly addressed their concerns.

The DCPA leaders created a set of demands for the city, including the formation of a bi-racial committee to determine a schedule for the desegregation of public and municipal facilities, the employment of blacks in municipal jobs (particularly the hire of black policemen), and the absolution of previously arrested demonstrators.

Reverend Lawrence Campbell and Reverend Alexander I. Dunlap led students and others in the first action of the new campaign, a march on 31 May 1963. The local press and government ignored this first protest, and no one was arrested.

On 5 June two members of the DCPA (Thurman Echols and Ezell Barksdale) led a demonstration wherein protesters sat in the middle of a main road and blocked traffic. That same day Reverends Campbell and Dunlap and a woman demonstrator walked into city hall and peacefully occupied the city manager's office. The police knocked Reverend Dunlap down a flight of stairs. Both ministers were arrested along with the woman. Bail was set for \$5,500 each, a high bail at that time.

The next day Reverend Campbell telephoned the main office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Atlanta and asked for help. Fifteen SNCC workers came to Danville to help in the course of the summer.

On the afternoon of 10 June the campaigners marched again, targeting the municipal building. 37 were arrested after fire hoses fired water on them full blast and police beat some of them with clubs.

That same night Reverend Hildreth G. McGhee led 65 Danville black citizens, joined by a SNCC worker, in walking from the Bible Way Church to the city jail in solidarity with those arrested that afternoon. They sang hymns and circled the jail. Fire hoses were turned on them full force while Rev. McGhee and another SNCC worker recording the event with a camera were arrested, then police clubbed the protesters and arrested some of them. Nearly 50 of the 65 demonstrators were wounded and received treatment at the segregated wing of the hospital.

Mayor Stinson was quoted in *The Washington Post*, "We will hose down the demonstrators and fill every available stockade." Danville's two local newspapers acknowledged that hoses and nightsticks were used.

The next day, 11 June, 200 marched to city hall to see the mayor, who refused to see them.

On 12 June 250 citizens went to see the mayor, led by two pastors and Jim Forman, the SNCC director who had just arrived from Atlanta. The crowd waited at city hall until 11pm when fire trucks arrived, hoses unwound, and police arrived with nightsticks ready. Forman created a diversion so the crowd could get out of the way of the punishing fire hoses. In the meantime, eight reporters were detained inside city hall by police to prevent them witnessing the action outside.

State troopers were dispatched to Danville to assist local police. Municipal employees were deputized to add to police ranks. U.S. military personnel and helicopters (presumably from the National Guard) were reportedly seen. Police not only followed cars driven by SNCC workers, but also pulled out in front of them and drove slowly.

In the meantime, city authorities sought to strengthen the legal grounds for repression. Danville City Council passed an ordinance setting bounds on the size, place, and time of demonstrations. A few weeks later the Council required protesters to apply for a parade permit 30 to 60 days before the parade date.

Despite these measures to limit the scope of demonstrations, protests continued and grew, with activists from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), as well as attorneys from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) arriving in Danville to participate in various parades and marches. Police arrested protesters for a variety of crimes, including trespassing, disorderly conduct, parading without a permit, resisting arrest, and even simply for being the parent of a minor who had been arrested.

Trials for those that had been arrested began on 17 June. The court was merciless, setting bail at \$5,000 for each indicted person in a city where the average non-white household income was \$2,578. The judge refused to allow out-of-state attorneys to practice in the court and declined to release those who were convicted while awaiting an appeal. By mid-July, police had arrested over 250 people.

On 9 July the movement announced a boycott of the products of Dan River Mills, the city's major industrial firm. A week later a demonstration in New York City in solidarity with the boycott was mounted by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in Danville on 11 July to speak to a gathering of protesters. However, he refused to lead a march due to the small turnout of about 80 people. Dr. King's failure to effect change in the static situation was a pivotal disappointment and reflected the slowly diminishing spirits of the African-American community in Danville.

On 28 July 28 campaigners attempted a mass jail-in, but only 70 of the 311 who had agreed to participate were actually jailed.

By 28 August, the day of the massive March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, an estimated 600 people in Danville had

been charged with 1200 offenses. The trials and appeals did not end until ten years later, in 1973.

In September demonstrators decreased activity as students returned to school and protesters, frustrated at the lack of progress, returned to their pre-campaign lives.

In February 1973, after the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals reviewed all of the cases from the Danville Corporation Court, the VA Court overturned 270 convictions, upholding only the convictions for trespassing, illegal picketing, and obstructing traffic.

Danville's 1963 campaign was largely unsuccessful. However, protesters were able to win one concession: in the autumn of 1963, the city officials hired Danville's first black policeman.

Research Notes

Influences:

The organizers of the Danville campaign were influenced by the demonstrations that had taken place in Birmingham, Alabama, earlier in 1963 (see "African Americans campaign for equal accommodations, Birmingham, Alabama, USA, 1963") (1).

Sources:

Danville (Va.) Corporation Court. 1963 Civil Rights Case Files, 1963-1973. Local Government Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219. <<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/findaid/38099.htm>>.

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Garrow, David J. "Negro Demonstrations and the Law: Danville as a Test Case." We Shall Overcome: the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's. Vol. 1. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Pub., 1989. Print.

King, Mary E., "Danville." Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (NY: William Morrow and Company, 1987), pp. 79-119.

Additional Notes:

Some pictures of demonstrations from this campaign can be found here:
<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/reHIST604/LVAcatalog/index.html>

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