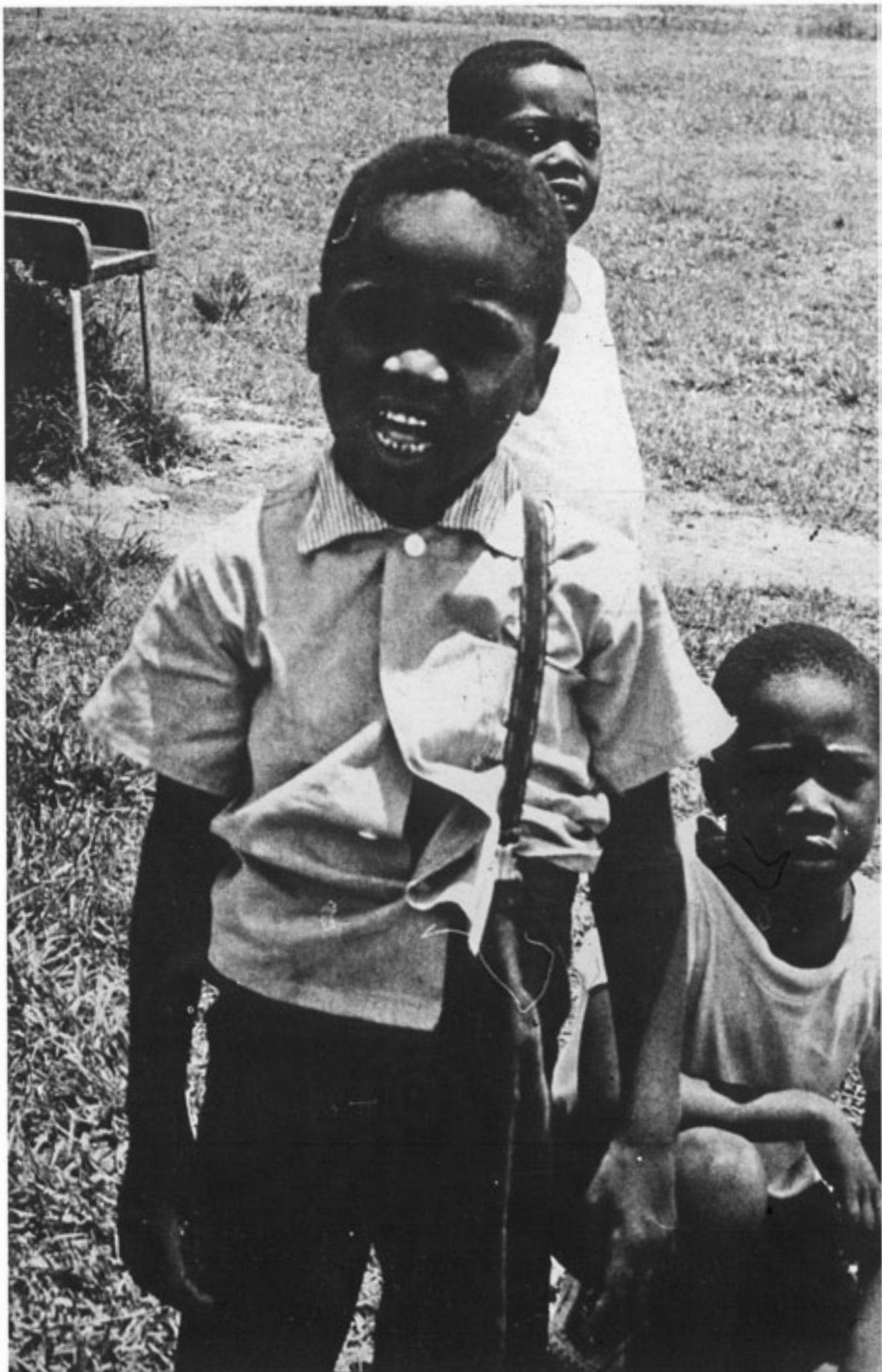




Photographs by
James H. Pepler

*Project Head Start:
Selma, Alabama*



SELMA: Quiet After the Battle



TEXT BY DAVID M. GORDON; PHOTOGRAPHS BY GLEN J. PEARCY

SELMA--"Six months ago," a Selma Negro says, "I would have been lynched if I had tried to go into Perrins Cafeteria. Now, nobody pays attention to me."

Long lines of Negroes now stand in the Dallas County courthouse, waiting to register to vote. Six months ago, they would have been yelled at, shoved, and harassed. Now, Dallas County registrars must get them registered or disobey a federal court order. The only link with the past is head registrar V.B. Atkins, who occasionally walks out into the hall, spraying deodorant in the air.

Civil rights workers stay up all night, phoning local Negroes to get them to come to a mass meeting and demonstration the next morning. The hot Alabama sun rises, and three-quarters of the seats in Brown's Chapel are empty.

Selma has not had the "long, hot summer" that many people had predicted. This is a different city from the one where a Unitarian minister was killed four months ago. It is different from the city which was the site of mass demonstrations and arrests. Changes are apparent all over this once quiet Southern town. One of the most important is the change in the civil rights movement itself. At the beginning of the year, the movement was overflowing with active participants. Everyone wanted to protest segregation, brutality, and discrimination. "Then, the movement's job was to give form to people's energies," says Chuck Sager, a veteran civil rights worker. "Now, since the march, we've had to call the people to get them out. They just aren't as available as they were."

"It used to be a Christian movement," a local Negro woman declares. "But since the march, everyone has been involved in getting food and clothes for themselves." The reason for this, many people feel, is that the Negroes have much less to protest. Brutality and violence have begun to disappear. Jim Clark's famous posse was reorganized after the march, but a large portion of the white community in Selma--including segregationists--has decided that Clark's violent methods were not the best way to handle civil rights protests. "Clark's not dumb," one staunch segregationist said last week, "but he did some things that played right into the hands of the civil rights forces."

"Our only concern in Selma today," says Chris Heinz, president of the Dallas Coun-

ty Citizens Council and former mayor, "is to keep down violence, not to encourage it."

Selma Negroes are better off for other reasons, too. Negro voter registration has become much easier than it used to be, because a federal court injunction has barred the county board of registrars from discrimination.

Before February, when the court injunction was handed down, only 300 Negroes in the county were registered. Now, 1100 Negroes are registered, and 1500 more have been processed for registration. Over 12,000 eligible Negroes are still voteless, however.

In addition, 11 years after the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation, the Dallas County school board has finally submitted a plan for integrating the local schools. The plan has been approved, and integration will begin in September. So far, 31 Negro children have applied to attend the first four grades in formerly all-white schools.

Even the last remains of segregation in public facilities in Selma has crumbled. Only one drugstore still refuses to serve Negroes, and its case is now being fought in the courts.

All three of these bits of progress are very token, but very real. It is true that registering to vote is still a slow, difficult process. It is true that only a tiny number of Negro children will enter white schools this fall. It is true that few Negroes now use the newly integrated public facilities. Yet, the gains have been great enough to make Negroes ask, Where should we go from here?

It is not as easy as before to build a mas-



sive drive against everything. In many areas, demonstrations would accomplish nothing.

As a result, Selma Negroes differ on what should be their next steps. Many want to continue pressing the voter registration drive. They believe that the day is not far when Negroes will be able to elect their own officials to public office. "When you get the tools," a Negro cab driver said last week, "you can do just about anything you want."

Many others believe that education is the most important question. Attendance is heavy at freedom schools and VISION classes for college preparatory students. The Headstart program had more applications than it could handle. But probably the largest number of Negroes look to the problem of jobs. For about three months, civil rights leaders have been running a boycott of white-owned downtown stores, demanding better jobs for Negroes.

"They're trying to freeze us out of jobs," a local Negro explains, "and we've got to teach them they can't treat us that way."

Not all the people participating in the boycott believe it will bring better jobs. To many, it is the one way of general protest--

as one woman said, of teaching "the white man that he needs us."

"You don't buy on Tuesday from the man who beats you over the head on Monday," a common Selma boycott slogan says, despite the decrease in violence.

"Those white folks aren't going to accept us," one boycottter says. "Things have to be a lot better than they are before I'll spend money downtown."

A final reason for the lull in the Selma movement this summer is that the recent charges against local civil rights leaders have confused the people. The Rev. F.D. Reese has been indicted on three charges of embezzling funds from the Dallas County Voters League. He is currently waiting trial.

Although most Negroes insist very strongly that Reese is innocent, they feel that they should wait for more facts to be made public.

"Many have lost confidence in their leaders because of Reese," one rights worker said.

Mrs. Mozell Thomas, a Voters League ward leader, put it differently. "We get tired and hot in the summer, and then get told these rumors about Reese," she said, "It's hard to pick up steam again."

Despite the Reese arrest, the massive protests last spring left a vague sense of unity in the Negro community. The many Northerners who poured into the city in March gave Selma's Negroes a new feeling of purpose. Many still correspond with and visit the Northern friends they made during the march.

As one local veteran said, "The majority of Negroes in Selma want their freedom now, but they don't know how to go about getting it. At least that's some improvement. Before the march, some people didn't even want their freedom."

But if the march brought Negroes together, it had the opposite effect on whites. In that crisis, no one could remain neutral, and all the hidden differences in the white community were brought into the open. "Ninety percent of the people want to do the right thing," says Wilson Baker, director of public safety. "We've just been prone to let the other ten percent speak for us."

But an important segregationist leader disagrees with Baker's figuring. "The sentiment is usually 90 percent for or 90 percent against whatever problem arises. We are more than that for segregation, George Wallace, and Sheriff Jim Clark. We believe in local self-government, and not giving up easily."

While the white moderates are quite willing to talk about the split in the community, the segregationists try to deny it.

"There aren't two groups of whites in the town," says Heinz, "and there shouldn't be. The thinking people of Selma are together."

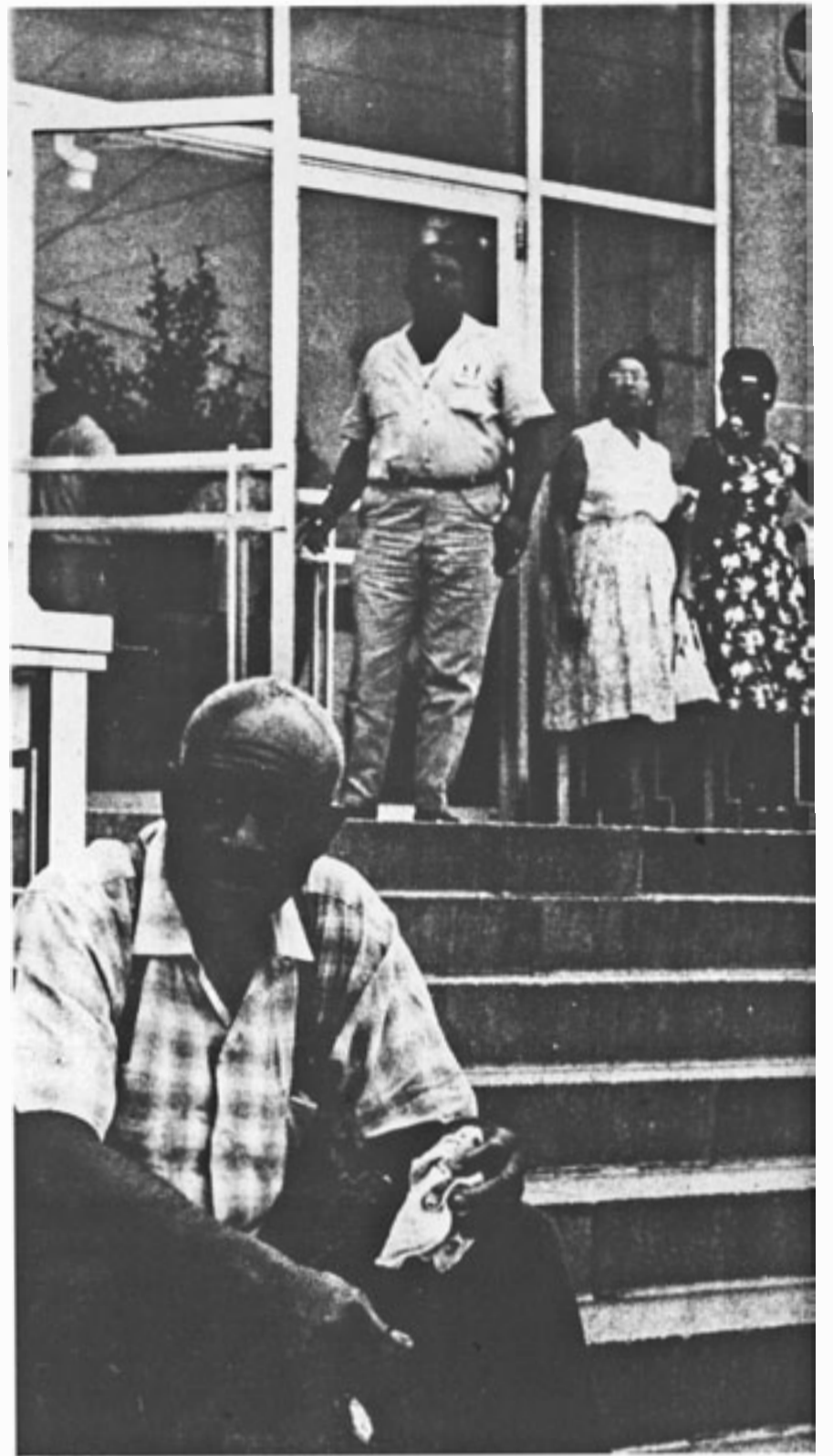
About the only thing on which moderates and segregationists agree is that the demonstrations of last spring did no good whatsoever.



"All the march did was to create more bitterness between the races," says a woman who considers herself liberal.

A conservative is more specific. "Every conversation I get into these days ends up with people cussing out the Negroes. You can't get away from it. That wasn't true before."

What divides the moderates and the segregationists is the way they are reacting to the changes in Selma. The segregationists have abandoned the tactics of violence and have turned to other methods to try to halt Negro progress. They are preparing



WAITING TO REGISTER AT THE DALLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

for the day--which they fear will be soon--when Negro gains pose a challenge to white supremacy.

They have formed the Private School Foundation to plan for the day when "floods" of Negro children--not just 31--start attending white schools.

No one is really sure that their private school will ever get off the ground. They claim to have enough money to begin, and say they only need to find a headmaster and a building.

But if integration comes slowly, they may never find enough people who are concerned enough to pay the \$25 per month tuition. Most moderates think the segregationists will never get started, precisely because the "flood" of Negro children will only be a trickle.

The segregationists are preparing for other possibilities. To offset the increasing numbers of Negroes who have been seeking to vote, the whites have mounted a registration drive of their own.

"Never before in the history of this country," said Heinz in a recent speech, "has it been more important for every white person of voting age to make an application to become a registered voter."

His calls have been answered. As a result of a door-to-door campaign led by the Women for Constitutional Government, about 1000 whites tried to register during the last month, a great increase over past periods. Over 5000 out of the 14,000 eligible whites are still unregistered.

"The problem up until now," one segregationist explains, "is that the whites have been too complacent. We still are, but not as much as before. We're really afraid of the Negroes being able to vote in a bloc."

Some segregationists have already had their clash with Negroes. One middle-aged lady, who used to work in a supermar-

ket which hired Negroes only in menial jobs, quit work altogether when a Negro woman got a job at the cash register next to her.

"I wouldn't go back to work if the owner got down on his knees and begged me," she says. "There was no reason in the world for him to put that Negro woman there."

While the extremists are determined to keep the Negroes down, the moderates are paralyzed. While sincere in wanting to find solutions to Selma's problems, they cannot find the courage to speak out. For moderates in Selma have been stung by the bitterness which the spring demonstrations created throughout the white community. If not many whites will take the step of sending their children to private school, neither will many agree to Negro demands.

Small businessmen who have been hurt by the Negro boycott are caught in a particularly tight position. One employer, who would like to get back the Negro business by hiring a Negro, says:

"I ask myself, 'Why don't you stand up and be counted?' But I can't be the vanguard, if I hired a Negro, Lord knows what would happen."

Because of their fear of white disapproval, moderates remain very quiet in Selma, perhaps even more so than before the march. Then, concerned white moderates occasionally met in private to search for ways to improve racial relations.

Now, no such meetings occur. The racial situation has not improved since the demonstrations, one moderate declares, "and the atmosphere has deteriorated."

Very little constructive communication goes on between the races, because there is no one in Selma who will listen to Negro demands with a sympathetic ear.

Negroes, on the one hand, cannot understand the whites' resistance to granting them full equality. "We want everything the other citizens have," Reese said last week, "but we have to spell them out specifically for white folks."

Whites, on the other hand, resent Negroes' demanding everything at once. "A boycott is ridiculous," says one white merchant. "Of all the times I can't hire anybody, this is it. The boycott has ruined business."

Take, for example, a series of Wednesday afternoon meetings between white and Negro leaders which Selma mayor Joe Smitherman sponsored for two months after the march.

The Negroes presented seven demands: the formation of a bi-racial committee, the right to vote, an end to police brutality, more and better jobs, the use of public facilities, representatives in the city government, and the courtesy of being addressed as "Mr." or "Mrs."

By the end of May, the meetings broke down. The segregationists thought that Negro demands were too militant. The Negroes felt that the whites were not sincere.

Because the moderates remained silent, there was no one to act as a go-between to bring concessions from both sides. As a result, the Negroes got nothing.

With the collapse of the meetings, there is now no way for Negroes and whites in Selma to come together to clear the atmosphere of mutual hatred which the demonstrations left behind.

Vocal whites will continue publishing their scandal sheets about sin, sex, and communism in the civil rights movement. Negroes will continue their boycott of downtown stores, waiting for things to get better.

And registrar Atkins will continue using his deodorant, hoping somehow that the changes in Selma will be hidden by the spray.



POLICEMAN AT BROWN'S CHAPEL DURING SPRING DEMONSTRATIONS

