

Non-Violence versus Armed Self Defense, 1965-1966

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The unsympathetic local white community and police force, augmented by the State of Alabama troopers and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), brutalized the marchers.

Questions

Our project focused on three central questions:

1. How did the clash of philosophies between the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee affect the Selma and the Meredith marches (February 1965 to June 1966)?
2. What if any were the differences between the marches?
3. How did the clash of philosophies affect the civil rights movement in the long term following the Selma and the Meredith marches?

Literature Cited

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All of a sudden, a man started shouting, "I just want James Meredith!" Shotgun blasts rang out across the highway, striking Meredith in the head, neck, back and legs.

Introduction

The march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 was the opening battle to determine if the message of the civil rights movement would be non-violence or self-defense. The message of non-violence preached by Reverend Martin Luther King came under attack before 1965 by members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who believed that King's nonviolent approach was not sustainable and their ultimate goals were endangered. SNCC also saw non-violence as unnecessary in some situations, and totally ineffective in other situations. In addition, they viewed non-violence as unmanly. While many admired King's non-violence principals they did not feel that those ideas were compatible with their own beliefs. After the beatings of the marchers in 1965 at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the activists grew frustrated and the desire for protection and self defense had started to over shadow the message of non violence.

Research Project

Our project focused on the change in the philosophies of the civil rights movement examining whether there was in fact a shift in philosophies between the Selma march in 1965 and the Meredith march in 1966. This was done by focusing on oral and written documentation as our primary sources of evidence to determine if there was a change and its significance.

Conclusion

There was significant data originating from the march at Selma in 1965 and from the Meredith march in 1966. The non-violence philosophy started to unravel earlier but the unraveling became openly visible in Selma between January and February of 1965. The unraveling was most evident when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee boycotted the march and complained about how King handled turnout Tuesday. The fracturing of the movement evolved even further when the leaders met to plan and set-up the Meredith March. The leaders that supported the non violence philosophy wanted the marches to be configured like the previous marches while the leaders that believed in the self defense philosophy saw the Meredith March as an opportunity to attempt something distinctly different. The fracturing was complete by the end of the Meredith march. Although King initially resisted publicly opposing Carmichael and Black Power, he admitted a break between those still committed to nonviolence and those willing to use any means necessary to achieve freedom

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Reverend Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta lead the March to Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on turn around Tuesday.

Timelines

| Selma | Meredith |
|--|--|
| February 18 James Jackson Shot by Alabama Trooper | June 5 James Meredith Starts His March |
| February 25 James Jackson Died | June 6 Meredith Shot |
| March 03 James Jackson Funeral | June 7 Dr. King, Floyd McKissick, and Stokely Carmichael resume the "March Against Fear" |
| March 07 Bloody Sunday, Marchers | From Memphis TN to Jackson, Mississippi |
| March 09 Turnaround Tuesday, March-Pray-Return | June 26 March finishes in Jackson MS |
| March 21-25 March Proceeds with Federal Protection | June 27 Stokely Carmichael coins term Black Power |
| March 25 March Finishes in Montgomery | |



Reverend Martin Luther King leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Stokely Carmichael leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at the end of the Meredith march.