

During research in area newspapers for the Harrodsburg & Mercer County Oral History Committee, Kandie Adkinson located the following article published March 6, 1964, in the "Danville Advocate Messenger." The article was copied in its entirety and in its original format.

IMPRESSIONS OF MARCH ON FRANKFORT TOLD BY PARTICIPATING CENTRE STUDENT

ED NOTE: Miss Sherry Whelan, a Centre College student, carried the press card of the Centre College "Cento" and the "Danville Advocate Messenger" in yesterday's "March on Frankfort." Her impressions of the event are told in the following account.

(By Sherry Whelan)

The Negro Frankfort Choral Group, behind the scenes at the Frankfort Capitol platform, sang freedom songs and spirituals which were carried by loudspeakers to the street. The crowd of 10,000 (10 per cent white) marched slowly down four and a half blocks toward the Capitol, some singing, as the freezing sleet oozed down on the demonstrators. There was a section of about 100 from Danville, with 30 students from Centre College. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led the March.

Under a wooden platform set up for camera men stood a slender bearded man, leaning against the stone wall, casually picking out chords by ear on his guitar to accompany the freedom singers. This man was Peter of the Peter, Paul, and Mary group. I asked him why he was in Kentucky supporting a negro freedom march. "This is a demonstration of humanity and dignity," Peter said, his earnest, quiet voice barely audible over the excited babbling of the reporters and A.O.C.R. officials. "Each person in daily life must recognize that he reflect values which he believes in. The fight can be won or lost, depending on whether human beings will fulfill the promise of dignity that is expected of them."

Peter, Paul, and Mary had with them a bass player, Dick Kniss, who has performed in freedom demonstrations in New York City. Said Dick: "In this struggle of civil rights, we must all stick together. It will, of course, take time."

As the marchers reached the platform, Peter, Paul, and Mary took the mike and sang, "Go Tell It on the Mountain." This version of the song contained the refrain "Let my People go." Next, John Hendrick, also a New Yorker, sang a blues number, "I Concentrate on You."

The official program started with the "Star Spangled Banner." Colored members of the A.O.C.R. (Allied Organization for Civil Rights), who were seated on the platform, sang out lustily.

Cheers for Stanley

Frank Stanley, Jr., presiding over the program, spoke to the crowd amid cheers and shouts. "Yesterday we had an idea, and today we are marching...." he said. "Listen Kentuckians, can you hear the bells of history tolling?.... We have marched in physical pain to make a dream come true...one

hundred and one years too late we ask for freedom...we want our freedom now--not next year--but now!" The crowd cheered wildly.

The Rev. W. J. Hodge of Louisville gave the statement of purpose, which was to pass House Bill 197, the public accommodations law introduced by Congressman (*sic: State Representative*) Blume of Jefferson county. (This bill proposes a strict order of opening public accommodations to all races. Governor Breathitt sent a statement out to the press during the program describing his support of Bill 194, introduced by (*State Senator*) Shelby Kinhead of Lexington, which allows considerable loopholes for the individual businessman.) Hodge also read a telegram of encouragement from Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the NAACP, who came to Louisville on January 20 to participate in the civil rights battle. Hodge concluded his address by saying, "If necessary, we will come back to Frankfort again and again and..." His voice was drowned out by cheering from the crowd.

Jackie Robinson Heard

Jackie Robinson, baseball star, spoke briefly, asking the marchers not to go home feeling satisfied, but to follow through with further pressure. The Rev. Ralph Abernathy of Atlanta, Ga., said that the colored people were asking for legislation now in this session. If they were to wait, he said, there would be great discontent throughout the land. "There is great urgency of this hour...We are going about the business of democracy and our nation....Kentucky should point the way for the other states of the South..." He said that his people have fought and defended their country as citizens on foreign fields, and they also want their rights as citizens here at home. Any communist can eat in an American restaurant if his skin is white, Abernathy pointed out, but a loyal Negro can't, because his skin is black.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., of Atlanta, Ga., stood up and uttered a plea for legislation. Someone held an umbrella over him to protect him from the freezing drizzle. "Morality can't be legislated, but behavior can be regulated," Dr. King cried out to the crowds. "Law can't change the hearts of man, but it can change their habits."

Dr. King on Scene

After the program, crowds of Negroes thronged around Dr. King asking for autographs. Numb with cold, Dr. King escaped the line into the Capitol Building where he and the Steering Committee presented their petition to Governor Breathitt. Police were everywhere, preventing curiosity-filled autograph hounds from over-running the buildings. As the guards, seeing my press badge, let me through into the reception room where the press was waiting to photograph Dr. King and Governor Breathitt, one Negro woman called to me, "Hey, Lady, if Jackie Robinson is handing out pictures, get me one."

Frank L. Stanley, Jr., mentioned previously, who was the president of the Freedom March, as well as general chairman of the Steering Committee of the A.O. R.C., editor of the "Louisville Defender," a colored newspaper, told me, "It is the privilege of all young people to provide leadership for the cause of human dignity. Without this leadership the colored people would not have progressed this far. We

have a need for people of all ages to respond to the challenge of human decency." Stanley commented that he had heard that Centre had a Negro student from Ghana on her campus. I told him about our plan for an exchange program with Morehouse and Spellman in Atlanta, and he nodded his approval.

The crowd came from all over the state for this historic event. A colored high school girl from Louisville told me, "I think marching is a good idea to let the people know we're ready now--now is the time!"

As I made my way through the cold and drizzle back to a car containing part of the Centre constituency, both white and black hurried in high spirits to the warmth of their homes and cars. One man shouted, "Freedom, brother," to someone across the street.