



ALL ABOUT  
**CORE**

*"Throw them in the river. Kill 'em. Kill 'em."*

A woman at the Alabama border watching Freedom Marchers.

*"God is in my heart and freedom is on my lips."*

A 13-year-old girl at a mass meeting in Birmingham.

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## CORE

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**T**WENTY-SEVEN CORE Freedom Riders, many of them fresh from beatings with fists, boots and iron bars, stood in their cells in the Hinds County, Mississippi, jail and sang. They sang new versions of old folk and gospel songs such as "We Shall Overcome Someday." "For the first time in history," wrote James Farmer, CORE's national director and one of the jailed Freedom Riders, "the Hinds County jail rocked with unrestrained singing of songs about freedom and brotherhood."

For the first time, too, the words of "We Shall Overcome" began to acquire reality for opponents of segregation in the Deep South. The Freedom Rides eventually desegregated 120 interstate bus terminals. But more important, they showed that non-violent action worked in the fight against racial discrimination even in the deepest part of the South. The Rides, like the sit-ins before them, demonstrated that anyone who opposed segregation—student, housewife or laborer—could drive a nail into the coffin of Jim Crow. They spurred the rapid spread of civil rights activity throughout the South and the entire country.

By the spring and summer of 1963, thousands of Americans, tired of waiting for their

*James Farmer leads New York picket demonstration.*



fellow-citizens to honor the Bill of Rights, had carried their protest into the streets. In the South, they braved fire hoses and police dogs, filled the jails, and kept coming. Clergymen and young children joined the marchers and the imprisoned. Jail became a mark of honor. America was learning what Thoreau meant 120 years before when Emerson asked him why he was in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax and he replied, "Why are you *not* here?"

The demonstrations made headlines across the United States. And cracks began to appear in the color barrier. Public officials in many areas, discovering that they could not stop the demonstrations, began to cooperate in desegregation. Many businesses and public facilities were affected.

In the North, demonstrators protested against de facto segregation in housing, education and employment, and filled government offices in patient but determined sit-ins to gain more than campaign promises from liberal politicians. Here, too, many went to jail. And here, too, the progress made was a hint of the progress to come. A dramatic change in American society was plainly in the making, and it was the result of a dramatic change in anti-discrimination tactics.

For too long, and for too many people, "segregation," "civil rights" and "racial equality" had been abstractions. They had inspired meetings, speeches and, sometimes, violent emotions, but very little constructive action.

The first CORE group was organized in 1942 by Farmer and a group of students at the University of Chicago who believed that it was time, in his words, "to substitute bodies for exhortations." The bodies went into service immediately in sit-ins and on picket lines. CORE spread across the country as its local chapters pioneered in non-violent techniques.



*CORE stand-in at a theatre in Tallahassee, Florida.*

Its early victories included desegregation of dime store lunch counters in St. Louis and Baltimore, theatres in Denver and Washington, a swimming pool at the Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey. The list has kept growing.

There were sit-ins at Miami lunch counters, a Pilgrimage of Prayer in Richmond to protest the closing of Virginia's public schools, a campaign for voter registration in four counties of South Carolina. During the first year of that campaign, new Negro voters in one precinct elected 16 of 17 representatives to the Democratic county convention. In Columbia, the Negro vote was decisive in defeating a segregationist candidate for mayor. In recent years, CORE chapters have been operating extensively in the Deep South, concentrating on the fundamental problems of voter registration, Negro employment and integration of public accommodations.

CORE's non-violent methods have also been increasingly effective in desegregating employment, schools and housing in the North. CORE is content with neither promises nor tokenism, and its aggressiveness has sometimes provoked criticism. At one point, *The New York Times* complained editorially that CORE's tactics were inconveniencing "innocent bystanders."



*CORE voter registration campaign in South Carolina.*



*Sit-in by CORE Freedom Riders on Route 40.*

CORE replied that, on the issue of civil rights, there can be no innocent bystanders. Those who stand by while others are made targets for discrimination and bigotry must share in the guilt.

By the time sit-ins attracted national attention in 1960, direct action had been enabling CORE members to fight discrimination in their own communities for 18 years. CORE's action

projects have been carried out by local people whenever appropriate, and they have always been non-violent. Why non-violent? CORE seeks understanding, not physical victory. It seeks to win the friendship, respect and even support of those whose racial policies it opposes. People cannot be bludgeoned into a feeling of equality. Integration, if it is not to be tense and artificial, must, in CORE's view, be more than an armed truce. Real racial equality can be attained only through co-operation; not the grudging co-operation one exacts from a beaten opponent, but the voluntary interaction of two parties working toward a solution of a mutual problem.

CORE sees discrimination as a problem for all Americans. Not just Negroes suffer from it and not just Negroes will profit when it is eliminated. Furthermore, Negroes alone cannot eliminate it. Equality cannot be seized any more than it can be given. It must be a shared experience.

CORE is an inter-racial group. Membership involves no religious affiliation. It is open to anybody who opposes racial discrimination, who wants to fight it and who will adhere to CORE's rules. The only people not welcome in CORE are "those Americans whose loyalty is primarily to a foreign power and those whose tactics and beliefs are contrary to democracy and human values." CORE has only one enemy: discrimination, and only one function: to fight that enemy. It has no desire to complicate its task by acquiring a subversive taint, and it avoids partisan politics of any kind.

CORE is inter-racial at all levels. National action projects usually involve more-or-less equal numbers of Negroes and whites. Local chapters try to maintain inter-racial memberships, but segregated housing and the nature

of the community sometimes make this difficult.

Much of CORE's work is carried on by its chapters. These vary in structure according to their locations and the specific problems they face. They support themselves through membership dues and contributions from local supporters.

Every active member of CORE belongs to a chapter. He must agree to abide by CORE's national constitution as well as the rules of his local group. Often, he is asked to serve a period of trial membership.

National CORE performs a variety of functions. Over the years, it has expanded to meet the growing demands on it. Until 1956, the national office was manned entirely by volunteers. It has since acquired a paid, full-time staff, although many jobs are still done by volunteers. Many field representatives in the South perform their difficult and hazardous work for \$25 a week.

The national office co-ordinates the work of its local chapters. It organizes training conferences and workshops which teach the theory and practice of non-violent action and give chapters an opportunity to exchange ideas and information. Its field staff encour-

*Sit-in at Mayor Wagner's office in New York City.*



ages the formation of new groups and assists existing ones.

Information is a major function of the national office. The CORElator, its bimonthly newspaper, publicizes action projects carried on by both national and local organizations. CORE also issues booklets and other material describing its fight against discrimination.

National CORE plans and carries out action projects which are designed to focus attention on problems of national significance. The Freedom Rides, in 1961, are the best-known example of this.

National policy is set by CORE's annual convention. A national action council carries out planning and decides questions of policy that arise between conventions with assistance from a national advisory committee. Policy and planning are based on CORE's constitution and its Rules For Action.

**T**HE Rules For Action are intended as a guide for all CORE members, and especially for participants in action projects. There are thirteen rules:

- *A CORE member will investigate the facts carefully before deciding whether or not racial injustice exists in a given situation.*

Investigation is the first step in any CORE action project. The CORE member must ascertain, first of all, whether there is discrimination and, if so, the details of it. Investigation is necessary to keep CORE chapters from taking unjustified action. In one case of reported discrimination, Negroes who were refused service in a restaurant turned out to have been improperly dressed; in another case, the would-be customers were children, too young to have been served even if they had been white. Investigation proved



*Scene in Birmingham, Alabama, when fire hoses were turned on civil rights demonstrators.*

that neither restaurant had any racial bias. Obviously, these are the exceptions.

• *A CORE member will seek at all times to understand the attitude of the person responsible for a policy of racial discrimination, and the social situation which engendered the attitude. The CORE member will be flexible and creative, showing a willingness to participate in experiments which seem constructive, while being careful not to compromise CORE's principles.*

CORE believes in being practical. Once segregation has been shown to exist, CORE does not immediately stage a sit-in or a stand-in, form a picket line or pass out leaflets. It first tries to meet with someone in authority, if possible the manager or owner of the establishment, to discuss the problem with

him. Discussion is sometimes all that is needed. If segregation conflicts with a state or federal civil rights law, a readiness to press charges may suffice.

A manager may refuse to desegregate because he fears that white customers will object, that Negro customers will be rowdy or that their presence will touch off a disturbance; in short, that something will happen to disrupt his business. Actually, as the Southern Regional Council reported in the aftermath of the 1960 sit-ins, "No store in the South which has opened its lunch counters to Negroes has reported a loss in business. . . . White customers have observed the change calmly for the most part and without a break in their shopping routine." A reluctant manager sometimes can be persuaded that his fears are groundless by sending in small inter-racial or Negro groups as tests. The acceptance of



*Asleep during dwell-in in Brooklyn apartment.*

test groups can be an important first step to total desegregation, but it is not the same thing and should not be accepted as a substitute.

- *A CORE member will make a sincere effort to avoid malice and hatred toward any group or individual.*

Non-violence means more than refraining from physical aggression. It is a positive approach to the problems of racial discrimination for people who believe that racial brotherhood must be more than a slogan and that there is already more than enough hatred in race relations.

- *A CORE member will never use malicious slogans or labels to discredit any opponent.*

Vindictiveness and personal attacks have no place in CORE's program. They do not win friends, respect or support for the group or its cause and, anyway, verbal abuse reflects most unfavorably on the speaker. This does not mean that CORE members should not criticize loudly and persistently. But they should direct their criticism to the action—not the person.

Publicizing discrimination has a big place in CORE's action program. Any group engaged in an action project should first enlist community support. Sympathetic individuals, the more prominent the better, church groups, labor unions and other civil rights organizations should be approached. Newspaper support should be obtained where possible. The CORE group should also inform the general public by picketing, passing out leaflets and issuing public statements.

- *A CORE member will be willing to admit mistakes.*

CORE is dogmatic about only one thing: racial equality. A hardened attitude does not serve its purposes.

- *A member will meet the anger of any individual or group in the spirit of good will and creative reconciliation: he will submit to assault and will not retaliate in kind either by act or word.*

If negotiation over a reasonable length of time fails to desegregate an establishment, the CORE group resorts to the direct challenge. The form of the challenge depends on the type of establishment to be desegregated. Sit-ins can be employed in restaurants and lunch counters, standing lines at theatres, wade-ins at beaches. Boycotts can be extremely effective. The businessman who refuses to desegregate for fear he will lose business learns that he will lose much more business by persisting in his discriminatory policy.

In any action project, the CORE demonstrator exposes himself to the possibility of physical attack. CORE members have had to walk through crowds wielding clubs knowing full well that there would be no police protection. This requires not only courage but preparation.



*Florida A & M students head for a demonstration.*



*Freedom Walkers meet the law at Alabama border.*

Every CORE chapter gives its members training in non-violent techniques before embarking on an action project. Every demonstrator must know how to comport himself properly and be sure that he can do so under the greatest stress. Training sessions can teach him what to do and place him in hypothetical situations, but the strength to meet attack without retaliating or retreating must come from

within. Gandhi, a major source of CORE's philosophy, once wrote that "nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice; it is the supreme virtue of the brave."

- *A member will never engage in any action in the name of the group except when authorized by the group or one of its action units.*

CORE's reputation for principled and responsible action is its most important asset. It asks members not to jeopardize this reputation by irresponsible behavior.

- *When in an action project, a CORE member will obey the orders issued by the authorized leader or spokesman of the project, whether these orders please him or not. If he does not approve of such orders, he shall later refer the criticism back to the group or to the committee which was the source of the project plan.*

Under the great personal stress and close public scrutiny which attend an action project, group discipline is essential. No CORE member is asked for blind obedience, but, in an action project, the group's success must be given precedence.

- *No member, after once accepting the discipline of the group for a particular project, shall have the right to withdraw. However, should a participant feel that, under further pressure, he will no longer be able to adhere to the Rules For Action, he shall then withdraw from the project and leave the scene immediately after notifying the project leader.*

No one should volunteer for a CORE action project unless he knows what it may entail



and is willing to endure the worst. But a member who remains in a project when he senses that he can no longer uphold CORE's standards is doing a disservice to his group and to CORE groups throughout the country.

- *Only a person who is a recognized member of the group or a participant accepted by the group leader shall be permitted to take part in that group action.*

Once again, CORE should not accept the responsibility for persons not committed to its principles and rules. Participants in action projects must understand CORE's non-violent approach and be sure that they can follow it.

- *Each member has the right to dissent from any group decision and, if dissenting, need not participate in the specific action planned.*

Participation in a CORE project must be a matter of individual choice. Non-violence is very largely an act of faith. A member who does not believe in what he is doing is being unfair to himself and to the group. Also, the participant in a CORE project places himself in real physical danger. He must be prepared to accept the consequences.

*CORE protests bias at Maryland restaurant.*



*CORE group in Columbus prepares for project.*

- *Each member shall understand that all decisions on general policy shall be arrived at only through democratic group discussion.*

CORE was formed to give individuals a chance to act effectively. Initiative remains with the individual members.

- *A CORE member shall receive the uncompromising support of his CORE group as he faces any difficulties resulting from his authorized CORE activities.*

The CORE member assumes great responsibility toward the group. The group has a corresponding obligation to him. This may involve court action to free members arrested in demonstrations, helping members who have chosen to be "jailed in" and paying hospital and medical bills.

A great deal has been achieved for civil rights through the courts, and legal action has an important place in the civil rights movement. But legal action is necessarily limited to lawyers. CORE's techniques enable large numbers of ordinary people to participate in campaigns to end discrimination.

Direct action has a value that goes beyond its visible accomplishments. To those who are the target of discrimination, it provides an alternative to bitterness or resignation and, to others, an alternative to mere expressions of sentiment. In the past, Negroes often found themselves in positions of disadvantage which they had no power to escape from or even to oppose. This inability to challenge second-class citizenship, with all of its humiliations, tended to undermine self-respect. CORE's methods now provide a meaningful and socially useful outlet.

The predicament of those people who oppose discrimination without themselves being victims of it has also arisen from an inability to act constructively. A person may feel strongly about the problems of discrimination, but think that there is nothing worthwhile that he, personally, can do about them. He frequently finds himself protesting against segregation 1,000 miles away while he continues to eat in segregated restaurants, have his hair cut in segregated barbershops and go home every night to an all-white neighborhood. It is difficult for him to avoid acquiescing in and giving aid, however unwittingly, to discriminatory practices. CORE believes that no instance of racial discrimination is insignificant; that even the subtlest forms of segregation violate CORE's basic premise: that every person should be judged solely on the basis of his personality and achievements. CORE teaches that the least any one can do is refuse to cooperate in a discriminatory situation. It offers as a credo Thoreau's words: "What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."



*CORE demonstrator at Attorney General's office in Washington.*