

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE MARCH 15, 1960 SIT-IN AT SPRAYBERRY CAFETERIA IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

The Atlanta student was a well-executed movement that included detailed planning, reconnaissance of each of the nine targeted sites, meetings with representatives of the mayor's office, the chief of police, representatives of community organizations, citizens groups, members of the Black business establishment, leaders from within the Atlanta University academic community, and select members of the clergy.

The meeting with the police chief provided a unique opportunity to establish our independence in the minds of many from within the city who counseled "gradualism." The police chief asked us to let him know details of our plans, because "Many of my officers are not like me. They believe in segregation and some may be members of the Klan." We politely reminded the chief of his duty to protect all citizens of Atlanta, and it was his responsibility to weed out members of the Klan.

His agreement was that, should an officer from the Atlanta Police Dept. appear at the scene of a student demonstration, that officer would be prohibited from taking any action, without the direct presence of a lieutenant or captain.

The target was the Sprayberry Cafeteria, located in a federal building that housed the Selective Service Board and other federal agencies.

There were approximately 17 of us. Our objective was to desegregate the cafeteria located in a federal building. Student participants included representatives from the Atlanta University Center. Schools within the center include Atlanta University, Morehouse, Spelman, Morris Brown and Clark colleges, and the Interdenominational Theological Seminary. The AU Center is recognized as the finest African American center of higher education in the world.

Upon entering the Sprayberry Cafeteria, located in the P'tree Seventh Bldg., some of us joined the line for service at the hot tables, and 7 went to the deli counter. As spokesperson for the group, I was approached by a person who introduced himself as Mid Allen. He explained that he

did not work at cafeteria, but was a friend of Mr. & Mrs. Sprayberry. He stated that he realized the demonstration was "some kind of" test case, but offered that Mr. Sprayberry was not in at the time, and Mrs. Sprayberry was "very nervous." "She asked me to ask you to leave." I explained that it was not a test case. I continued, we are here because we are hungry. Therefore, we would remain, because food is served at the cafeteria.

I was the second Negro in the serving line. A white man was two persons ahead of me. The employees were ordered to remove the food from the hot tables, but we were able to place entrees, pie and the inevitable glass of iced tea on our trays.

The white man who was directly in front of us was permitted to pay the cashier, and when we reached her, she refused to accept our money. I overheard someone refer to the cashier as Mrs. Sprayberry. She refused our payment by stating, "We're giving it away today." I replied that we preferred to pay, and response was an announcement that the cafeteria was closed.

Mid Allen, the Sprayberry spokesperson, again approached me and stated in a patronizing voice, that we should eat the food on our trays since we were hungry. We were standing alongside the hot tables and we knew not to consume anything without paying for it. To do so would risk a frivolous charge of thief by taking. I did offer him the food on our trays, since he was a friend of the owners, but he refused.

In the midst of the obvious standoff, several reporters from the daily papers had entered the cafeteria, They were seeking statements from us, but we refused their overtures. Finally, a patrolman from the Atlanta Police Dept. approached the door. He looked in and did an about face. At 12:55 PM, one hour and five minutes after entering the cafeteria, a Captain Mailer of the police dept. entered, along with three patrolmen and one lieutenant. It was apparent that Capt. Mailer was the police chief's assigned spokesperson.

He asked the cashier whether she had asked us to leave, to which she answered a resounding Yes. He asked her to do so again in his presence and she complied. He then explained that if we refused to leave, we

would be arrested and placed under \$1000. bond. Bond for our arrests had been previously arranged by the president of the nation's second largest insurance company.

My response was that we would opt for the arrest, because our intent was to be served at the cafeteria housed in a building that is operated with federal funds. He announced that we were under arrest and ordered a patrolman to line us up outside in the front of the cafeteria, to await arrival of the paddy wagon.

While outside, I overheard an onlooker inquire about the charge for our arrest. He replied, "A misdemeanor."

The captain then approached me and announced that we would not be arrested if we left right away. He continued, to remain, we would be arrested for loitering. I explained that if whites were continuing to enter the cafeteria, we would re-enter to be also served. Throughout the time we were lined up outside, whites were entering and leaving the cafeteria. It was then that he proceeded to stop a person by announcing, "You needn't go in there, because they're closed."

It soon became apparent that he was not going to order an arrest and we departed to our assigned post to file reports on the sit-in at Sprayberry's Cafeteria.

A by-product of the actions of the Atlanta Students' actions on March 15, 1960, was the governor of Ga. suffered a heart attack. However, he did not die. Based upon the panic of the Ga. Legislature, the Atlanta Board of Aldermen, and the law enforcement community, we surely would have been charged with 2nd degree murder.

Eventually, the state prosecutor uncovered a statute that had never been enforced, that was intended for the Ku Klux Klan. In effect, the statute forbade the wearing of masks to conceal the identity and purpose for demonstrations. A wanted notice was issued for our arrest as violators of the Anti-Mask Statute. We surrendered and were released on our own recognizance. We were never brought to trial.