



from the Jackson
first sit-in in 1961.

n: McComb

ers, the new leaders felt
key to making life bet-
er workers, some from
oter-registration drives.
istration campaign in
ant:

y hall to begin praying.
and into the city court-
white participant, [was]
a mob outside, waiting,
ey brought the people
ens of the town, one by
y would come down and
Moses? Where's Moses?"

McComb Workers

Robert Parris Moses was Harlem-raised, 20 years old, with light brown skin and a few freckles near his nose. After earning a master's degree from Harvard University, he began teaching mathematics in a New York high school. On a trip to Virginia, Moses participated in some of the earliest sit-ins. Soon after, he began working during his spare time for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, one of the organizations working to get civil rights for all citizens.

For more than a year, Moses had been planning the McComb voter-registration campaign. He had come to live in the town in July 1961, as a staff member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization dedicated to securing equal rights for blacks as quickly as possible. Moses went around town getting families to supply room and board for ten students to come to McComb as volunteers.

One of the volunteers was Robert Zellner, the first white civil rights worker in the country. Zellner was the son of an Alabama Methodist minister and had attended Huntingdon College in Montgomery. In his senior year he was assigned to write a term paper on "The Racial Problem and Your Solution to It," and as part of his research he attended a federal trial of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders in Montgomery. He was greatly moved by Dr. King and later joined SNCC.

His job was to work among young white Southerners, convincing them that segregation was wrong, but in McComb his greatest impact was probably on the black community. As Moses wrote to him when they were both in separate jails:

Your presence has had an effect on the young Mississippians. They had never known a sympathetic white person before. The kids here had said, "We won't have anything to do with 'peckerwoods' (meaning white people). But now since Bob Zellner demonstrated with us and was beaten, we believe that maybe there are some good white people after all."

The voter-registration workers set up schools to instruct blacks how to fill out the 21-question registration application and how to interpret the 285 sections of the Mississippi Constitution.

Whites Oppose Black Registration

As blacks began to register, white resistance increased. Moses was arrested as he brought applicants to the courthouse at nearby Liberty. A few days later, again at Liberty,

How were blacks
prevented from
voting at the
end of
Reconstruction?