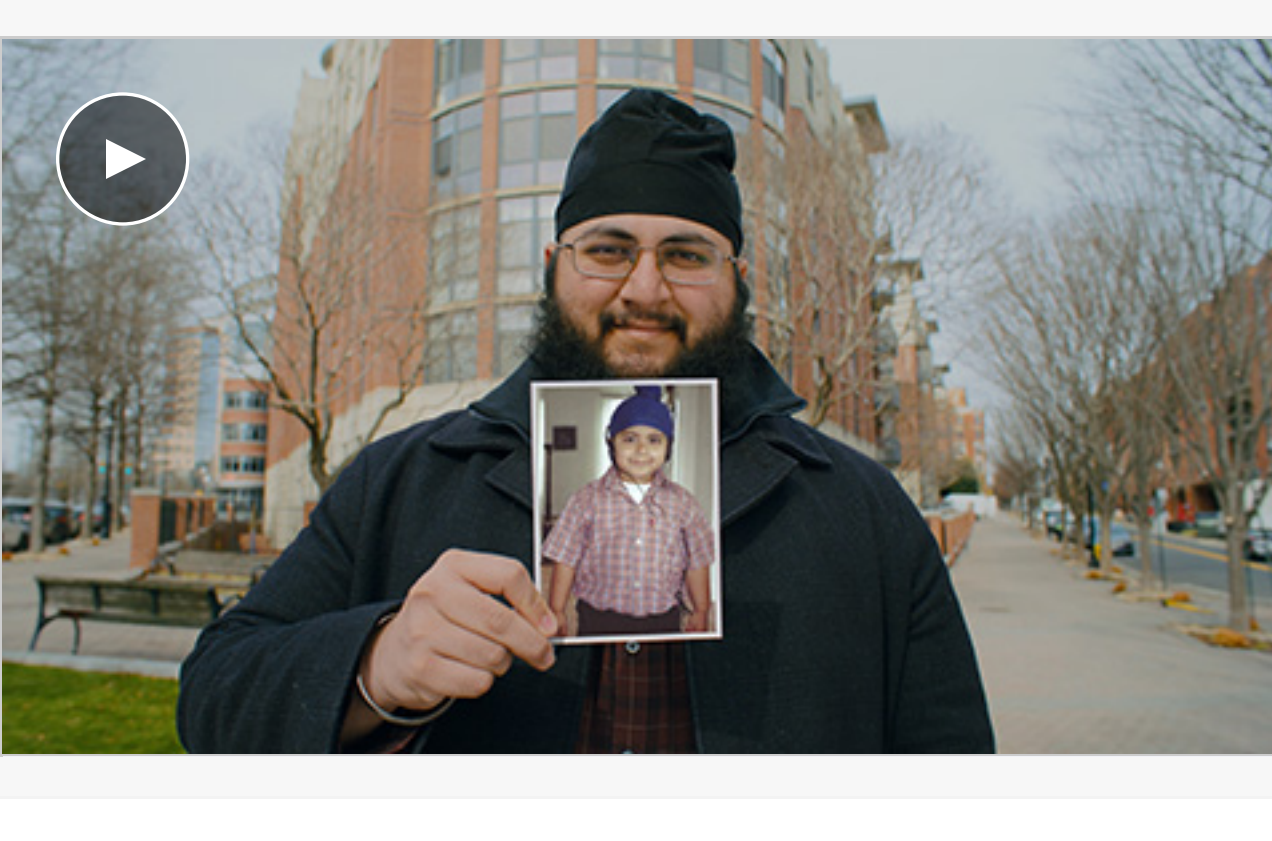


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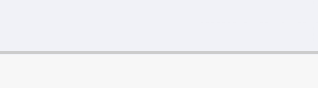


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Black Rule Begins in Alabama County



By Thomas A. Johnson Special to The New York Times

Jan. 19, 1971



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EUTAW, Ala., Jan. 18—Amid repeated calls for black and white cooperation — some speakers used the qualifier “if it's possible” — six black elected county officials were installed today in a holiday atmosphere here in rural Green County.

Nearly 2,000 black Alabamians and a few whites were on hand for a day of prayers, parades and speech-making to mark the takeover by Negroes of all but two of the county's elective offices.

Two years ago, blacks in this —the fifth poorest county in the nation—took over the five member Board of County Commissioners and won two seats on the School Board. Last November, blacks were elected to the offices of probate judge, sheriff, circuit clerk, coroner and the other two School Board seats. The county offices of tax collector and tax assessor are still held by whites; these will not be contested at the polls until next year.

Over the years, Greene County has been a center of black social activism, first with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, then with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and now with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the predominantly black National Democratic party of Alabama.

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'Liberated Zone'

Speeches at the installation ceremonies showed that the black officials and their out-of-town guests felt that the event was only the beginning of a long-range effort that could make this county in southeastern Alabama, where mostly poor black farmers make up 83 per cent of the population of 10,300, a “showplace for democracy and self-help.”

There also was a good deal of speaking out of pure jubilation.

“Welcome to the nation's black capital,” said the Rev. Thomas E. Gilmore, a 29-year-old former S.N.C.C. worker, who was installed today as the county's first black sheriff.

Standing with two black deputies and a white deputy, Mr. Gilmore told his black neighbors who packed the County Courthouse: “This is without question the liberated zone, freedomland. Greene County is the beginning of a new hope for America.”

The Rev. William M. Branch, a 52-year-old former school teacher who is the first black probate judge, warned that blacks could not yet relax in Greene County. “The battle is over only when we die,” he said. “Until then, we are going to have to fight like hell—hell heaven to keep making progress here.” He added:

“Black people and white people of goodwill, if we bind our forces together, we can make this county a place where the whole world will look to us as an example.”

Dr. John Cashin, a dentist from Huntsville who heads the National Democratic party of Alabama, said that blacks in Alabama were “entering the most important race in our lives” and recommended massive economic development programs to complement the political victories.

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Dr. Cashin suggested that progress would be made in Greene County “with black and white together, if possible, but with black only, if necessary.”

The new county officials were installed by a white circuit judge, Emmett Hildreth, who also touched on the theme, of racial unity.

Stating that “today marks another historical milestone in the history of Greene County,” Judge Hildreth added: “If we are to make progress, we must work together. Let no one divide us.”

The other black county officials installed today were Mrs. Waldine V. Williams, circuit clerk; Abner Milton, coroner, and Earsie Chambers and John Head, School Board members.

'JUST Cause for Hatred'

Although they expressed some uncertainty and apprehension about black officials' taking over, several white businessmen here had said earlier that there would be no open hostility from whites. One business man said: “We're lucky we've got no mean people around here. White and black — we are all Christians.”

One of the principal speakers at the ceremonies was Charles Morgan Jr., director of the Southern regional office of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Mr. Morgan, who is white, told the crowd that they had “just cause for hatred, recrimination and revenge.” But he added, “Great movements are not made by men and women whose souls are pockmarked by hatred, recrimination and revenge.”

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The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, urged county officials “not to mistreat anybody and make certain that we respect everybody.”

Some white county employees, including a deputy sheriff, are being retained but blacks will take over most county jobs.

Mr. Branch, the new probate judge, said the choice had been left up to the whites. But he rejected a suggestion by some whites that they would continue working if they were placed in a Separate office, several blocks away from the black officials.

Tour and Parade

Today's ceremonies began at 9 A.M. With a “person-to-person tour” of several Eutaw neighborhoods. A parade that included marching bands and decorated vehicles later marched about eight blocks from the Eutaw Middle Grade School to the courthouse.

A black businessman and philanthropist from Birmingham, A. G. Gaston, led the parade. When the marchers arrived at the courthouse, which is in the center of the town, scores of their black neighbors had already arrived during the chilly morning to claim the choice seats.

On the front row was F. C. Boyce, a retired cotton farmer of SO, who said: “We worked hard for it but I never really expected to see it.”

Next to him was Mrs. Amelia Struggs, 71, who remarked: “I didn't know it would happen but I was praying all the time for it to happen. I'm still praying.”

A businessman from Tuscaloosa remarked: This courthouse had been a place of fear for Negroes for many years and today it is a place of great joy.”

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