



SESSION 3

The Intersections of Redistricting

Rock Mount, NC: A Case-Study in Issue-based Organizing

During the third session of Code Red, we heard from community leaders Angela Bryant and Sue Perry Cole about the ways the Black community in Rocky Mount organized in support of local sanitation workers. That work helped to strengthen Black political power in the area, and became a catalyst for fairer districts in the city. The following provides key details from that history, as well as resources for you to learn more:

- From July 10 to August 30, 1978, Rocky Mount sanitation workers led a successful strike and boycott of downtown businesses to protest racial injustice.
- Inspired by the sanitation workers, Rocky Mount's black citizens soon sought to address what they considered the underlying reason behind Mr. Evan's unjust treatment: the lack of black representation on the city council and at city hall.
- The strike became a catalyst for the voting rights lawsuit a group of African-Americans filed in 1983 that eventually led to a fairer and racially balanced ward system for African-Americans to win election to positions on the city council.
- Naomi Green, a legendary civil rights activist in Rocky Mount, provided support to the sanitation workers during the strike and became the plaintiff in a lawsuit based around the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Susan Perry Cole was one of the lead counsel in this lawsuit.
- A new empowered Rocky Mount city council, created by the political power of the people, In October 2018, unanimously approved a resolution recognizing the 40th anniversary of the strike. The resolution included an apology from the municipal government to the family of Evans and to the former sanitation workers for the actions taken by the municipal government in 1978.
- In November of 2019, the Rocky Mount City Council passed a resolution to provide compensation to the fired sanitation workers. It was an honorary restitution.
- Members of the Phoenix Historical Society, the Rocky Mount Racial Justice Group, the Rocky Mount Black Action Committee and the Black Workers for Justice met on April 7 by the Rocky Mount Mills historical marker. They gathered to bring attention to the moving of the Nash-Edgecombe county line from this location on Falls Road to the railroad tracks on March 29, 1871. The 1871 white-controlled

General Assembly moved the county line to the railroad tracks over the objections of the citizens and county commissioners of Edgecombe, a black-majority county. This transfer of land and people from Edgecombe to Nash undermined the voting rights and economic power that freed African Americans in Edgecombe County had gained through Reconstruction from 1868-70, according to the black state legislators of 1871.

References: <https://southernlaborstudies.org/Southern-Labor-in-the-News>,

<https://southernlaborstudies.org/Southern-Labor-in-the-News>,

https://www.rockymounttelegram.com/news/local/city-to-compensate-workers-fired-during-strike/article_eb454f20-7db5-55c3-9e9f-91addc3d81bd.html,

https://www.rockymounttelegram.com/features/local/activist-groups-mark-county-line-relocation/article_987a6d20-5caf-5b89-beb7-62b42220fa5a.html



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