

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

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The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, often pronounced /snɪk/ SNIK) was one of the major American Civil Rights Movement organizations of the 1960s. It emerged from the first wave of student sit-ins and formed at a May 1960 meeting organized by Ella Baker at Shaw University. After its involvement in the Voter Education Project, SNCC grew into a large organization with many supporters in the North who helped raise funds to support its work in the South, allowing full-time organizers to have a small salary. Many unpaid grassroots organizers and activists also worked with SNCC on projects in the Deep South, often becoming targets of racial violence and police brutality. SNCC played a seminal role in the freedom rides, the 1963 March on Washington, Mississippi Freedom Summer, the Selma campaigns, the March Against Fear and other historic events. SNCC may be best known for its community organizing, including voter registration, freedom schools, and localized direct action all over the country, but especially in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

In the later 1960s, inspired by fiery leaders such as Stokely Carmichael, SNCC focused on black power, and draft resistance to the Vietnam War. As early as 1965, executive secretary James Forman said he "did not know how much longer we can stay nonviolent" and in 1969, SNCC officially changed its name to the Student National Coordinating Committee to reflect the broadening of its strategy. It passed out of existence in the 1970s following heavy infiltration and suppression by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), spearheaded as part of COINTELPRO operations during the 1960s and 70s led by J. Edgar Hoover.

Founding and early years

- *Out of this conference the SNCC was formed.*
- *Instead of being closely tied to SCLC or the NAACP as a "youth division", SNCC sought to stand on its own.*
- *But SNCC was not a branch of SCLC.*
- *SNCC's first chairman was Marion Barry, who later became the mayor of Washington DC.*
- *SNCC's executive secretary, James Forman, played a major role in running the organization.*

Founded in 1960 and inspired by the Greensboro sit-ins and Nashville sit-ins, independent student-led groups began direct-action protests against segregation in dozens of southern communities. SNCC focused on mobilizing local communities, a policy in which African American communities would push for change, impelling the federal government to act once the injustice had become apparent. The most common action of these groups was organizing sit-ins at racially segregated lunch counters to protest the pervasiveness of Jim Crow and other forms of racism. While in the Civil Rights Cases (109 U.S. 3 [1883]), the Court ruled that the equal protection clause "did not cover private individuals, organizations, or establishments," the trials of arrested sit-in protesters created an opening for the Court to reevaluate its earlier ruling and expand the clause to cover acts of private discrimination. The sit-in movement was a turning point in using the courts and jail to exert moral and economic pressure on southern communities. In addition to sitting in at lunch counters, the groups also organized and carried out protests at segregated White public libraries, public parks, public swimming pools, and movie theaters. At that time, all those facilities financed by taxes were closed to blacks. The white response was often to close the facility, rather than integrate it.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as an organization, began with an \$800.00 grant from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) for a conference attended by 126 student delegates from 58 sit-in centers in 12 states, along with delegates from 19 northern colleges, the SCLC, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), National Student Association (NSA), and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Out of this conference the SNCC was formed.

Ella Baker, who organized the Shaw conference, was the SCLC director at the time she helped form SNCC. But SNCC was not a branch of SCLC. Instead of being closely tied to SCLC or the NAACP as a "youth division", SNCC sought to stand on its own. Ms. Baker later lost her job with SCLC, which she had helped found.

Among important SNCC leaders attending the conference were Stokely Carmichael from Howard University; Charles F. McDew, who led student protests at South Carolina State University; J. Charles Jones, who organized 200 students to participate in sit-ins at department stores throughout Charlotte, North Carolina; Julian Bond from Atlanta, Diane Nash from Fisk University; James Lawson; and John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, James Bevel, and Marion Barry from the Nashville Student Movement.

SNCC's first chairman was Marion Barry, who later became the mayor of Washington DC. Barry served as chairman for one year. The second chairman was Charles F. McDew, who served as the chairman from 1961 to 1963, when he was succeeded by John Lewis. Stokely Carmichael and H. "Rap" Brown were chairmen in the late 1960s. SNCC's executive secretary, James Forman, played a major role in running the organization.

Freedom Riders

- *SNCC took on greater risks in 1961, after a mob of Ku Klux Klan members and other whites attacked integrated groups of bus passengers who defied local segregation laws as part of the Freedom Rides organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).*
- *In the years that followed, SNCC members were referred to as "shock troops of the revolution."*

In the years that followed, SNCC members were referred to as "shock troops of the revolution." SNCC took on greater risks in 1961, after a mob of Ku Klux Klan members and other whites attacked integrated groups of bus passengers who defied local segregation laws as part of the Freedom Rides organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Rather than allowing mob violence to stop them, New Orleans CORE and Nashville SNCC Freedom Riders, including Dave Dennis, Oretha Castle Haley, Jean C. Thompson, Rudy Lombard, Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Barry, Angeline Butler, and John Lewis, put themselves at great personal risk by traveling in racially integrated groups into Mississippi as they continued the Ride. Other bus riders followed, traveling through the deep South to test Southern compliance with Federal Law. At least 436 people took part in these Freedom Rides during the spring and summer of 1961.

Voter registration

- *The voter registration project he initiated in McComb, Mississippi in 1961 became the seed for much of SNCC's activities from 1962 to 1966.*
- *SNCC workers lived with local families: often the homes providing such hospitality were firebombed.*
- *After the Freedom Rides, SNCC worked primarily on voter registration, and with local protests over segregated public facilities.*

Bob Moses played a central role in transforming SNCC from a coordinating committee of student protest groups to an organization of activists dedicated to building community-based political organizations of the rural poor. The voter registration project he initiated in McComb, Mississippi in 1961 became the seed for much of SNCC's activities from 1962 to 1966.

After the Freedom Rides, SNCC worked primarily on voter registration, and with local protests over segregated public facilities. Registering Black voters was extremely difficult and dangerous. People of Color who attempted to register often lost their jobs and their

homes, and sometimes their lives. SNCC workers lived with local families: often the homes providing such hospitality were firebombed.

The actions of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC forced the Kennedy Administration to briefly provide federal protection to temporarily abate mob violence. Local FBI offices were usually staffed by Southern whites (there were no Black FBI agents at that time) who refused to intervene to protect civil rights workers or local Blacks who were attempting to register to vote.

Participatory democracy (group centered leadership)

- *SNCC was unusual among civil rights groups in the way in which decisions were made.*
- *Because activities were often very dangerous and could lead to prison or death, SNCC wanted all participants to support each activity.*
- *Instead of "top down" control, as was the case with most organizations at that time, decisions in SNCC were made by consensus, called participatory democracy.*

SNCC was unusual among civil rights groups in the way in which decisions were made. Instead of "top down" control, as was the case with most organizations at that time, decisions in SNCC were made by consensus, called participatory democracy. Ms. Ella Baker was extremely influential in establishing that model, as was Rev. James Lawson. Group meetings would be convened in which every participant could speak for as long as they wanted and the meeting would continue until everyone who was left was in agreement with the decision. Because activities were often very dangerous and could lead to prison or death, SNCC wanted all participants to support each activity.

March on Washington

- *Forman's and SNCC's anger came in part from the failure of the federal government, FBI, and Justice Department to protect SNCC civil rights workers in the South at this time.*
- *SNCC played a significant role in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.*
- *Indeed, the federal government at that time was instrumental in indicting SNCC workers and other civil rights activists.*

SNCC played a significant role in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. While many speakers applauded the Kennedy Administration for the efforts it had made toward obtaining new, more effective civil rights legislation protecting the right to vote and outlawing segregation, John Lewis took the administration to task for how little it had done to protect Southern blacks and civil rights workers under attack in the Deep South. Although he was forced to tone down his speech under pressure from the representatives of other civil rights organizations on the march organization committee, his words still stung. The version of the speech leaked to the press went as follows:

However, under pressure from the representatives of other groups many changes were made to the speech as it was delivered that day. According to James Forman, the most

important of these was the change of "we cannot support" the Kennedy Civil Rights Bill to "we support with reservations". Forman wrote of the following explanation of this:

Forman's and SNCC's anger came in part from the failure of the federal government, FBI, and Justice Department to protect SNCC civil rights workers in the South at this time. Indeed, the federal government at that time was instrumental in indicting SNCC workers and other civil rights activists.

Voting rights

- *SNCC followed up on the Freedom Ballot with the Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer, which focused on voter registration and Freedom Schools.*
- *SNCC also established Freedom Schools to teach children to read and to educate them to stand up for their rights.*
- *It also estranged SNCC leaders from many of the mainstream leaders of the civil rights movement.*

In 1961 SNCC began expanding its activities from direct-action protests against segregation into other forms of organizing, most notably voter registration. Under the leadership of Bob Moses, SNCC's first voter-registration project was in McComb, Mississippi, an effort suppressed with arrests and savage white violence, resulting in the murder of local activist Herbert Lee.

With funding from the Voter Education Project, SNCC expanded its voter registration efforts into the Mississippi Delta around Greenwood, Southwest Georgia around Albany, and the Alabama Black Belt around Selma. All of these projects endured police harassment and arrests; KKK violence including shootings, bombings, and assassinations; and economic terrorism against those blacks who dared to try to register.

In 1962 Bob Moses worked to forge a coalition of national and regional organizations, including the NAACP and the National Council of Churches, that would fund and promote SNCC's voter registration work in Mississippi. This coalition was known as the Council of Federated Organizations. In the fall of 1963, SNCC conducted the Freedom Ballot, a parallel election in which black Mississippians came out to show their willingness to vote — a right they had been denied for decades, despite the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, due to a combination of state laws and constitutional provisions, economic reprisals and violence by white authorities and private citizens.

SNCC followed up on the Freedom Ballot with the Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer, which focused on voter registration and Freedom Schools. The Summer Project brought hundreds of white Northern students to the South, where they volunteered as teachers and organizers. Their presence brought national press attention to SNCC's work in the south. SNCC organized black Mississippians to register to vote, almost always without success. White authorities either rejected their applications on any pretexts available or, failing that, simply refused to accept their applications. Tensions grew gradually

and SNCC refused to recruit white people because they thought that they brought attention of the media only on white people.

Mississippi Summer received national attention when three civil rights workers involved in the project - James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner - were murdered after having been released from police custody. Their bodies were eventually found after a reluctant J. Edgar Hoover directed the FBI to search for them. Johnson only sent the FBI after series of pressure and demonstrations. He favored at first to be the leader outside of his country with the Vietnam War whereas there were many conflicts inside of it. In the process, the FBI also found corpses of several other missing black Mississippians, whose disappearances had not attracted public attention outside the Delta.

SNCC also established Freedom Schools to teach children to read and to educate them to stand up for their rights. As in the struggle to desegregate public accommodations led by Martin Luther King Jr. and James Bevel in Birmingham, Alabama the year before, the bolder attitudes of the children helped shake their parents out of the fear that had paralyzed many of them.

The goal of the Mississippi Summer Project was to organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an integrated party, to win seats at the 1964 Democratic National Convention for a slate of delegates elected by disfranchised black Mississippians and white sympathizers. The MFDP was, however, tremendously inconvenient for the Johnson Administration. It had wanted to minimize the inroads that Barry Goldwater's campaign was making into what had previously been the Democratic stronghold of the "Solid South" and the support that George Wallace received during the Democratic primaries in the North.

When the MFDP started to organize a fight over credentials, Johnson originally would not budge. When Fannie Lou Hamer, the leader of the MFDP, was in the midst of testifying about the police beatings of her and others for attempting to exercise their right to vote, Johnson preempted television coverage of the credentials fight. Even so, her testimony created enough uproar that Johnson offered the MFDP a "compromise": they would receive two non-voting seats, while the delegation sent by the official Democratic Party would take its seats.

Johnson used all of his resources, mobilizing Walter Reuther, one of his key supporters within the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and his Vice-Presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey, to pressure King and other mainstream civil rights leaders to bring the MFDP around, while directing Hoover to put the delegation under surveillance. The MFDP rejected both the compromise and the pressure to accept it, and walked out.

That experience destroyed what little faith SNCC activists had in the federal government, even though Johnson had obtained a broad Civil Rights Act barring discrimination in public accommodations, employment and private education in 1964 and would go on to obtain an equally broad Voting Rights Act in 1965. It also estranged SNCC leaders from many of the mainstream leaders of the civil rights movement.

Those differences carried over into the voting rights struggle that centered on Selma, Alabama in 1965. SNCC had begun organizing black citizens to register to vote in Selma in 1963, but made little headway against the adamant resistance of Sheriff Jim Clark and the White Citizens' Council. In early 1965, local Selma activists asked the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for help, and the two organizations formed an uneasy alliance. They disagreed over tactical and strategic issues, including the SCLC's decision not to attempt to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge a second time after county sheriffs and state troopers attacked them on "Bloody Sunday" on March 7, 1965.

The civil rights activists crossed the bridge on the third attempt, with the aid of a federal court order barring authorities from interfering with the march. It was part of a five-day march to Montgomery, Alabama, that helped dramatize the need for a Voting Rights Act. During this period, SNCC activists became more and more disenchanted with nonviolence, integration as a strategic goal, and cooperation with white liberals or the Federal government.

Change in strategy and dissolution

- *SNCC was also deeply affected by the killing of Sammy Younge Jr. the first black college student to be killed as a result of his involvement in the civil rights movement.*
- *SNCC's experience with the COFO and Mississippi Freedom Summer solidified their estrangement from white liberals.*
- *SNCC took Younge's death as the occasion to denounce the war in Vietnam, the first statement of its kind by a major civil rights organization.*

SNCC's experience with the COFO and Mississippi Freedom Summer solidified their estrangement from white liberals. During several points in the Mississippi project, a team of Democratic Party operatives led by Allard Lowenstein and Barney Frank tried to take over its management. They sought to move decision-making power away from grassroots activists in the South, and purge Communist-linked organizations (such as the National Lawyers Guild) from SNCC's network, in spite of those organizations having made crucial contributions to the movement. Dorothy Zellner (a white radical SNCC staffer) remarked that, "What they [Lowenstein and Frank] want is to let the Negro into the existing society, not to change it."

SNCC was also deeply affected by the killing of Sammy Younge Jr. the first black college student to be killed as a result of his involvement in the civil rights movement. Younge was a Navy veteran who later enrolled in the Tuskegee Institute and participated in the Selma-to-Montgomery campaign, as well as other SNCC projects. His murder by a white supremacist in January 1966, and subsequent acquittal of the killer, furthered the group's disillusionment that the federal government would protect them. SNCC took Younge's death as the occasion to denounce the war in Vietnam, the first statement of its kind by a major civil rights organization. SNCC highlighted Younge's death as an example of the hypocrisy of

fighting for freedom abroad while rights were denied in the US and was used as a call for people to refuse the draft and work for freedom at home instead.

Many within SNCC had grown skeptical about the tactics of nonviolence and integration. After the Democratic convention of 1964, the group began to split into two factions – one favoring a continuation of nonviolent, integration-oriented redress of grievances within the existing political system, and the other moving towards Black Power and Marxism.

Lowndes County Freedom Organization

- *White supremacists regularly killed blacks, and sometimes their allies like white SNCC volunteer Jonathan Daniels, with impunity.*
- *The first SNCC project to promote the slogan "black power" was the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) an African-American electoral organization which registered over 2,500 black voters between 1965 and 1969.*

The first SNCC project to promote the slogan "black power" was the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) an African-American electoral organization which registered over 2,500 black voters between 1965 and 1969. This was a historic achievement given that Lowndes was the most Klan-dominated area in Alabama and that, as a result, Lowndes had zero registered black voters. Although the Voting Rights Act had been passed, federal monitoring was sporadic and federal protection of black voters inconsistent. White supremacists regularly killed blacks, and sometimes their allies like white SNCC volunteer Jonathan Daniels, with impunity. As such, most LCFO members did their organizing openly armed. They had no confidence in appealing to the support of middle-class liberals (even Martin Luther King and SCLC distanced themselves from the group) or the national Democratic Party. LCFO co-founder John Hulett (later elected Sheriff of Lowndes County) warned that this was the state of Alabama's last chance to peacefully grant African Americans their rights: "We're out to take power legally, but if we're stopped by the government from doing it legally, we're going to take it the way everyone else took it, including the way the Americans took it in the American Revolution." Certain the federal government was not going to protect him and his fellow party members, Hulett told a federal registrar, "if one of our candidates gets touched, we're going to take care of the murderer ourselves." Choosing a black panther as their mascot, LCFO was the first of numerous local organizations to be known as "the black panther party". (LCFO had no direct relationship with the later Black Panther Party for Self-Defense founded by Huey Newton, however.)

While the LCFO candidates did not win their early campaigns, most historians and activists regard the group's mere survival under such hostile conditions to be a victory. In 1970 LCFO reconciled with the local Democratic Party, and various candidates, including John Hulett, went on to be Lowndes County officials.

Stokely Carmichael as chair

- *After a contentious debate over the meaning of "Black Power", issues of black nationalism and black separatism, and the organization's strategic direction, white SNCC members were asked to leave the organization in December 1966.*
- *The U.S. Department of Defense stated in 1967: "SNCC can no longer be considered a civil rights group."*

After the Watts riots in Los Angeles in 1965, more of SNCC's members sought to break their ties with the mainstream civil rights movement and the liberal organizations that supported it. They argued instead that blacks needed to build power of their own, rather than seeking accommodations from the power structure in place. SNCC migrated from a philosophy of nonviolence to one of greater militancy after the mid-1960s, as an advocate of the burgeoning Black Power movement, a facet of late 20th-century black nationalism. The shift was personified by Stokely Carmichael, who replaced John Lewis as SNCC chairman in 1966–67.

Carmichael raised the banner of Black Power nationally in a speech in Greenwood, Mississippi in June 1966, as part of SNCC's response to the attempted assassination of James Meredith. After a contentious debate over the meaning of "Black Power", issues of black nationalism and black separatism, and the organization's strategic direction, white SNCC members were asked to leave the organization in December 1966. The vote, characterized by some as "expelling" whites and by others as "asking whites to work against racism in white communities," was extremely close; 19 Aye, 18 Nay, and 24 abstentions.

SNCC continued to maintain coalition with several white radical organizations, most notably Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and inspired them to focus on militant anti-draft resistance. At an SDS-organized conference at UC Berkeley in October 1966, Carmichael challenged the white left to escalate their resistance to the military draft in a manner similar to the black movement. Some participants in ghetto rebellions of the era had already associated their actions with opposition to the Vietnam War, and SNCC had first disrupted an Atlanta draft board in August 1966. According to historians Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, SDS's first Stop the Draft Week of October 1967 was "inspired by Black Power [and] emboldened by the ghetto rebellions." SNCC appear to have originated the popular anti-draft slogan: "Hell no! We won't go!" For a time in 1967, SNCC seriously considered an alliance with Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, and generally supported IAF's work in Rochester and Buffalo's black communities.

Expressing SNCC's evolving policy on nonviolence/violence, Carmichael first argued that blacks should be free to use violence in self-defense; later he advocated revolutionary violence to overthrow oppression. Carmichael rejected the civil-rights legislation as mere palliatives. The U.S. Department of Defense stated in 1967: "SNCC can no longer be considered a civil rights group. It has become a racist organization with black supremacy ideals and an expressed hatred for whites." (Martin Luther King's Southern Christian

Leadership Conference was classified as a "hate-type" group by the federal government during the same period).

SNCC became a target of the Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in a concerted effort at all levels of government to crush black radicalism – both violent and nonviolent – through both overt and covert means ranging from propaganda to assassination.

Charles E. Cobb, formerly SNCC field secretary in Mississippi, has said that SNCC's grassroots and autonomous community work was undercut and co-opted by Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty: "After we got the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, a lot of groups that we had cultivated were absorbed into the Democratic Party...a lot more money came into the states we were working in. A lot of the people we were working with became a part of Head Start and various kinds of poverty programs. We were too young to really know how to respond effectively. How could we tell poor sharecroppers or maids making a few dollars a day to walk away from poverty program salaries or stipends?"

Post-1967

- *In 1968, SNCC lost numerous organizers, such as Kathleen Neal, Bob Brown, and Bobby Rush, to the Black Panther Party.*
- *The San Antonio SNCC chapter was part Black Panther Party and part SNCC.*
- *By then, SNCC was no longer an effective organization.*

By early 1967, SNCC was approaching bankruptcy as liberal funders refused to support its overt militancy. Carmichael voluntarily stepped down as chair in May 1967. H. Rap Brown, later known as Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, replaced him as the head of SNCC. Brown renamed the group the Student National Coordinating Committee and supported violence, which he described as "as American as cherry pie". He resigned as chair of SNCC in 1968, after being indicted for inciting to riot in Cambridge, Maryland, in 1967. In 1968, Carmichael was expelled from the group completely by the new program secretary, Phil Hutchings, when Carmichael refused to resign from the Black Panther Party. Carmichael, along with Rap Brown and James Forman, had tried to foster an alliance between SNCC and the Panthers, but it proved to be a failure.

By then, SNCC was no longer an effective organization. Much analysis at the time blamed Carmichael's departure from the group for the decline, though others would dispute this. In 1968, SNCC lost numerous organizers, such as Kathleen Neal, Bob Brown, and Bobby Rush, to the Black Panther Party. Ella Baker said that "SNCC came North at a time when the North was in a ferment that led to various interpretations on what was needed to be done. With its own frustrations, it could not take the pace-setter role it took in the South..."

The organization largely disappeared in the early 1970s, although chapters in some communities, such as San Antonio, Texas, continued for several more years. Mario Marcel

Salas, field secretary of the SNCC chapter in San Antonio, operated until 1976. The San Antonio SNCC chapter was part Black Panther Party and part SNCC. Dr. Charles Jones of Albany State University termed it a "hybrid organization" because it had Panther-style survival programs. Salas also worked closely with La Raza Unida Party, running for political office and organizing demonstrations to expose discrimination against Blacks and Latinos. Salas later helped the New Jewel Movement in the overthrow of Eric Gairy in 1979, the leader of the island of Grenada. He also became the chairman of the Free Nelson Mandela Movement in San Antonio, Texas.

Charles McDew, SNCC's second chairman, said that the organization was not designed to last beyond its mission of winning civil rights for blacks, and that at the founding meetings most participants expected it to last no more than five years:

First, we felt if we go more than five years without the understanding that the organization would be disbanded, we run the risk of becoming institutionalized or being more concerned with trying to perpetuate the organization and in doing so, giving up the freedom to act and to do...The other thing is that by the end of that time you'd either be dead or crazy..."[54]

By the time of its conclusion, many of the controversial ideas that once had defined SNCC's radicalism had become widely accepted among African Americans.

Geography

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Most of SNCC's early activity took place in Georgia and Mississippi.

- *The 1964 voter registration project called "Freedom Summer" focused on Mississippi and marked the beginning of SNCC's rejection of Northern white volunteers.*
- *SNCC was eventually overshadowed by the Black Panther Party, who had a broader national reach.*

Most of SNCC's early activity took place in Georgia and Mississippi. In the early 1960s, they mainly focused on voter registration projects in the South, and multiple chapters were established throughout the region. The Freedom Rides, in which interracial groups rode buses together and challenged segregated seating arrangements, brought them media attention and helped raise awareness in the North. In 1963, they played an important role in the March on Washington.

The 1964 voter registration project called "Freedom Summer" focused on Mississippi and marked the beginning of SNCC's rejection of Northern white volunteers. Under Stokely Carmichael's leadership, SNCC shifted its focus to the North, where it focused on alleviating

poverty in Northern urban areas. As SNCC became more radical in 1966 and 1967, Carmichael established ties with several foreign governments. SNCC was eventually overshadowed by the Black Panther Party, who had a broader national reach.

Feminism

- *When Stokely Carmichael was elected Chair of SNCC, he reoriented the path of the organization towards Black Power.*
- *The degree and significance of male-domination and women's subordination was hotly debated within SNCC; many of SNCC's black women disputed the premise that women were denied leadership roles.*
- *Many black women held prominent positions in the movement as a result of their participation in SNCC.*

SNCC activist Bernice Johnson Reagon described the Civil Rights Movement as the "'borning struggle' of the decade, in that it stimulated and informed those that followed it," including the modern feminist movement. The influence of the Civil Rights Movement inspired mass protests and awareness campaigns as the main methods to obtain sexual equality.

Many black women held prominent positions in the movement as a result of their participation in SNCC. Some of these women include Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Donna Richards, Fay Bellamy, Gwen Patton, Cynthia Washington, Jean Wiley, Muriel Tillinghast, Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Pearl Avery, Diane Nash, Ella Baker, Victoria Gray, Unita Blackwell, Bettie Mae Fikes, Joyce Ladner, Dorie Ladner, Gloria Richardson, Bernice Reagon, Prathia Hall, Gwendolyn Delores Robinson/Zoharah Simmons, Judy Richardson, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, Ruby Sales, Endesha Ida Mae Holland, Eleanor Holmes Norton and Anne Moody.

"Women who were active in the lunch counter sit-in movement of 1960 led the transformation of SNCC from a coordinating office into a cadre of militant activists dedicated to expanding the civil rights movement throughout the South. In February 1961, Diane Nash and Ruby Doris Smith were among four SNCC members who joined the Rock Hill, South Carolina, desegregation protests, which featured the jail-no-bail tactic-demonstrators serving their jail sentences rather than accepting bail." "In May 1961, Nash led a group of student activists to Alabama in order to sustain the Freedom Rides after the initial group of protesters organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) encountered mob violence in Birmingham. During May and June, Nash, Smith, and other student freedom riders traveled on buses from Montgomery to Jackson, Mississippi, where they were swiftly arrested and imprisoned. In August, when veterans of the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides met to discuss SNCC's future, Baker helped to avoid a damaging split by suggesting separate direct-action and voter-registration wings. Nash became the leader of the direct-action wing of SNCC."

Young black girls also played a significant part in the SNCC demonstrations. In July 1963, dozens of young black girls participated in a SNCC protest of a segregated movie theater in

Americus Georgia. Over 30 of them were arrested and eventually held against their will in the Leesburg Stockade. They were freed over a month later due to the help of a SNCC volunteer who photographed the girls and published the pictures in a SNCC newsletter. However, despite the multiple human rights violations that they endured in the stockade, many girls continued to fight for civil rights after they were freed.

Anne Moody published her autobiography, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, in 1970, detailing her decision to participate in SNCC and later CORE, and her experience as a woman in the movement. She described the widespread trend of black women to become involved with SNCC at their educational institutions. As young college students or teachers, these black women were often heavily involved in grassroots campaign by teaching Freedom Schools and promoting voter registration.

Young white women also became very involved with SNCC, particularly after the Freedom Summer of 1964. Many northern white women were inspired by the ideology of racial equality. The book *Deep in Our Hearts* details the experiences of nine white women in SNCC. Some white women, such as Mary King, Constance W. Curry, and Casey Hayden, and Latino women such as Mary Varela and Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez, were able to obtain status and leadership within SNCC.

Through organizations like SNCC, women of both races were becoming more politically active than at any time in American history since the Women's suffrage movement. A group of women in SNCC, later identified as Mary King and Casey Hayden, openly challenged the way women were treated when they issued the "SNCC Position Paper (Women in the Movement), or adapted an earlier paper submitted at Waveland Meeting by Elaine DeLott Baker." The paper was published anonymously, helping King and Hayden to avoid unwanted attention. The paper listed 11 events in which women were treated as subordinate to men. According to the paper, women in SNCC did not have a chance to become the face of the organization, the top leaders, because they were assigned to clerical and housekeeping duties, whereas men were involved in decision-making. The degree and significance of male-domination and women's subordination was hotly debated within SNCC; many of SNCC's black women disputed the premise that women were denied leadership roles. Ruby Doris Smith was often falsely attributed as author of paper, yet Smith was looking towards black nationalism at this time rather than interracial feminism. The following year, King and Hayden produced another document entitled "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo". The document was published in 1966 by *Liberation*, the magazine of the War Resisters League. "Sex and Caste" has since been credited as one of the generative documents that launched second-wave feminism.

When Stokely Carmichael was elected Chair of SNCC, he reoriented the path of the organization towards Black Power. He famously said in a speech, "it is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations." Thus, white women lost their influence and power in SNCC; Mary King and Casey Hayden left to become active in pursuing equality for women.

While it is often argued that the Black Power period led to a downgrading of women generally in the organization, historian Barbara Ransby notes that there is no real evidence of this. Carmichael appointed several women to posts as project directors during his tenure as chairman; by the latter half of the 1960s, more women were in charge of SNCC projects than during the first half. Former SNCC member Kathleen Cleaver played a key role in the central committee of the Black Panther Party as communications secretary (1968). Her position in this "male dominated" leadership was both effective and influential to Brown, Red and Yellow Power groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1968, the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) was originated in New York by Frances M. Beal as a caucus of SNCC, addressing the issue of sexism within the movement. By 1970 it had become independent from SNCC, but maintained close ties with it. TWWA came to focus less on specifically black power and more on Puerto Rican and Cuban liberation. It continued to operate until 1978, with chapters in several major cities.

See also

- *Mississippi Freedom Project - Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida*
- *Nonviolent action*

Amzie Moore

Faith Holsaert

Mississippi Freedom Project - Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida

Nonviolent action

References

Further reading

Archives

- *SNCC History and Geography from the Mapping American Social Movements Project at the University of Washington.*
- *FBI COINTELPRO Black Extremist Records, a series of archival documents from the FBI that explicitly target SNCC and Stokely Carmichael for suppression.*
- *The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections.*

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- *In Struggle, SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s.*
- *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC.*
- *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision.*
- *"Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement".*
- *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC.*
- *SNCC: The New Abolitionists.*

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Video

- *Eighth Annual Forum on Women in Leadership Then and Now: Women in the Civil Rights Leadership*, Joyce Ladner is one of the panelists and shares many stories about SNCC

SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference 38 DVD collection documenting the formal addresses, panel discussions and programs that took place at the 50th anniversary conference at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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Interviews

- *Interviews with civil rights workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).*
- *SNCC member and Freedom Summer participant.*

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- *Memorandum: on the SNCC Mississippi Summer Project Transcript.*

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External links

- *Civil Rights Movement Veterans*
- *SNCC 1960 - 1966: Six years of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.*
- *The SNCC Digital Gateway*
- *Americus Movement, Civil Rights Digital Library.*
- *SNCC Documents Online collection of original SNCC documents ~ Civil Rights Movement Veterans.*
- *SNCC Actions 1960-1970 (map)*

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The SNCC Project: A Year by Year History 1960-1970

SNCC Actions 1960-1970 (map)

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