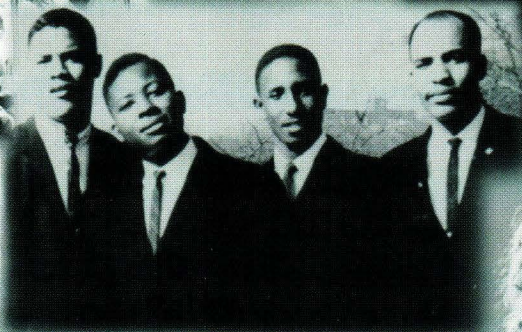
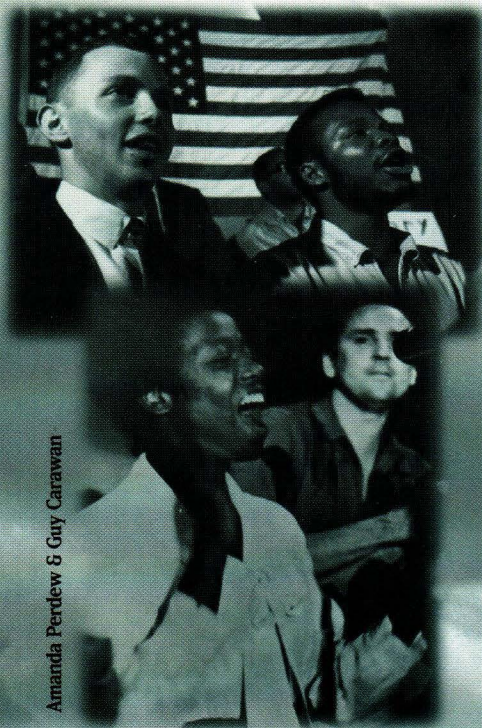




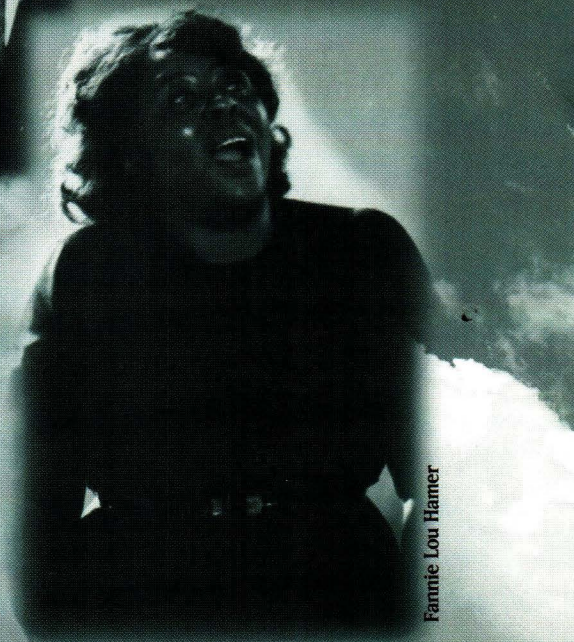
The Montgomery Trio



The Nashville Quartet

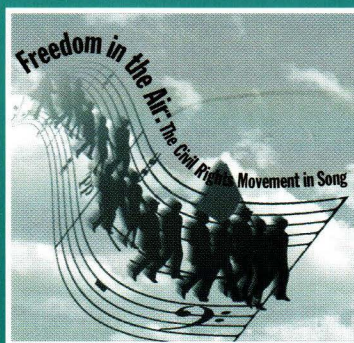


Amanda Perdue & Guy Carawan



Fannie Lou Hamer

# Program Guide



## Program One Spiritual Roots

Introduction • *Oh Freedom* • Spirituals • Song Leaders • *This Little Light Of Mine* • Mass Meetings • *If You Miss Me From The Back Of The Bus*

## Program Two We Shall Overcome

Labor songs • *We Shall Not Be Moved* • *Which Side Are You On?* • *We Shall Overcome* • Popular Songs • *Movin' On* • *Hit the Road, Jack* • *Dayo*

## Program Three The Singing Begins

Montgomery Bus Boycott • *We Are Soldiers In The Army* • Montgomery Trio • *Hold On* • Nashville Sit-Ins • *They Go Wild Over Me* • Nashville Quartet • *You Better Leave Segregation Alone* • Carnegie Hall Concert 1961 • *Dog, Dog*

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## Program Four The Message in Music

Albany • *Oh Pritchett, Oh Kelly* • *Roll Freedom, Roll* • *Nothing But A Soldier* • The Freedom Singers • Danville • *Demonstrating G.I.* • Birmingham • *It Isn't Nice* • *Ninety-Nine And A Half Won't Do* • *I Love Everybody*

## Program Five Singing for Freedom

Selma • *Why Was The Darkie Born?* • Selma March To Montgomery • *Right! Right!* • *Oh, Wallace* • *Murder On The Road* • Mississippi • Greenwood • *Ain't Scared Of Your Jails*

## Program Six The Chords that Bind

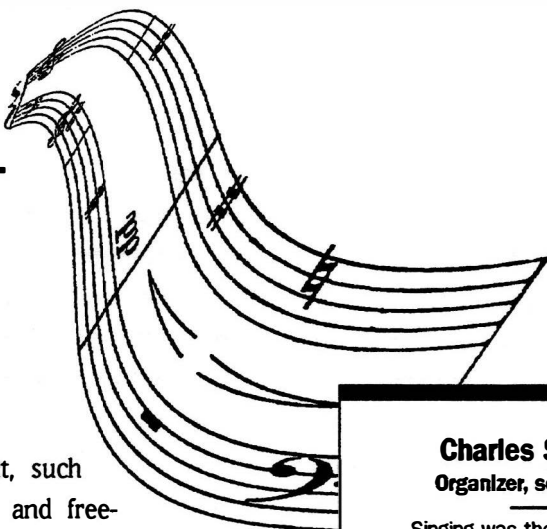
Fannie Lou Hamer • *Go Tell it On The Mountain* • *Color of Water* • Greenwood, cont. • *Wade In The Water* • *Freedom Train A' Comin'* • Mississippi Freedom Summer • *Father's Grave* • *When I Was Young*



# Freedom in the Air: The Civil Rights Movement in Song

**A movement  
without music  
would crumble.**

**C.T. Vivian**



America has never known a protest movement so rich in song as the civil rights movement. Or a movement in which songs were as important. Freedom songs bonded the shock troops of the movement into a unified force. They mustered courage, articulated goals, soothed grief and tempered bitterness.

In February 1997, the Philip Morris Companies Inc. sponsored the production and distribution of a six-part radio documentary; **Freedom in the Air: The Civil Rights Movement in Song** highlighted the importance of this music by bringing together performers, songwriters and organizers of the freedom struggle.

The songs in the series, many performed exclusively for this broadcast by a variety of artists, served as touchstones in examining the main events of the civil rights

movement, such as sit-ins and freedom rides, the Albany Movement, Birmingham and Mississippi. The performers included members of the Freedom Singers, the Nashville Quartet, the Montgomery Trio, Len Chandler, Dorothy Cotton, Bernard LaFayette, Pete Seeger, Guy and Candie Carawan and many others.

The unique contribution of the music was how it kept spirits strong, gave people courage and a sense of unity and kept the movement *moving*. Songs exploded spontaneously during the heat of demonstrations, marches and church meetings as ordinary people worked for change. Old songs that had their roots in the black church were altered to fit the needs of the current situation, and new songs emerged. Mass action created the body of the movement, and the singing gave it life.

## **Charles Sherrod** Organizer, song leader

Singing was the blood of the movement. It was the heart. Music was our life and the light that showed us the way to go. It was the light when it was dark in the jails and dark on the road, and riding from county to county and being afraid every day. It was the music that kept us going, that kept us together. Song after song led us miles and miles down the way.

The African-American quest for freedom is chronicled through song. Long before there was such a thing as a civil rights movement, spirituals helped Biblical references ring true for current conditions. During slavery, the double meaning of the words to the spiritual "Go Down Moses," for example, made it appropriate as an expression of freedom in the spiritual and physical sense. For two hundred years, the great churches

created a body of African-American religious music. Drawing on centuries of tradition, the movement throughout the South was mobilized and set into motion through black sacred music. "Woke Up This Morning With My Mind on Jesus" became "Woke Up This Morning With My Mind on Freedom." "Oh Mary Don't You Weep" became the tune for "If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus."

Spirituals and gospel songs went through numerous rebirths, first with the onset of the labor movement and then with the arrival of the freedom struggle. These new songs could take on many meanings. They could be jubilant or they could be a lament. They could help people gather their determination or they could be funny and satirical. The music became a part of everything—you couldn't tell who was a singer and who was an organizer because the organizers sang and the singers organized.

### Charles Neblett

#### Freedom Singer

We were in Cairo, Illinois, demonstrating at a swimming pool. They wouldn't desegregate the swimming pool and a lot of black children would drown every year in the Mississippi River. My brother, Seku Neblett, he wrote a song "If You Miss Me From the Mississippi River." So later on it came to be "If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus":

If you miss me from the back of the bus, and you  
can't find me nowhere,  
Come on up to the front of the bus, I'll be sittin' up there.  
I'll be sittin' up there, I'll be sittin' up there,  
Come on up to the front of the bus, I'll be sittin' up there.  
And, if you miss me from the Mississippi River,  
and you can't find me nowhere,  
Come on down to the city pool, I'll be swimming in there,  
I'll be swimming in there, I'll be swimming in there,  
Come on down to the city pool, I'll be swimming in there.

### Bettie Mae Fikes

#### Song leader

"If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus" is another example of how we changed lyrics in songs of the freedom movement. The school that I attended was Hudson High, and Parrish High was the school that the whites attended. So when I heard the song, I added the verse:

If you miss me  
from Hudson High,  
and you can't find me nowhere,  
Come on over to Parrish High,  
I'll be a student over there.

The most famous civil rights song of all traces its lineage to both spiritual and labor roots. This powerful song originally came out of the black church in the south, was adapted and used in union organizing, and rose to international prominence as the theme song of the civil rights movement. Originally it went,

**I'll be all right,  
well, I'll be all right,  
well, I'll be all right some day,  
All of my troubles will be over  
And I'll be free at last.  
Well, I'll be all right some day.**

### **Pete Seeger**

Keep in mind that African-American people have an ancient tradition of continually changing old songs to fit new situations. "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" got to be "We Have Worked in Dark and Danger." This was sung by black coal miners in West Virginia. Another example is a song which was a Baptist hymn. In 1932 a coal miner's wife had been outraged when some company gun thugs came to her house to assassinate her husband. He was a union man, a union leader. She tore an old calendar off the wall and found a pencil and scribbled the verses of "Which Side Are You On?," one of the most famous union songs of this country.

The history of "We Shall Overcome" is a beautiful example of the interchange between black and white songwriters in creating American music. This particular interchange took place in the rolling mountains of Tennessee, where Myles Horton founded the Highlander Folk School over 65 years ago.

Myles Horton had a vision of songs working for the civil rights movement as they had for labor. From 1935 to 1956, Zilphia Horton

was the singing heart of the folk school. During these years, Mrs. Horton collected and compiled more than 1,300 songs, one of which was "We Shall Overcome," which she learned in 1945 from black workers on strike in Charleston, South Carolina. She introduced it to union gatherings all over the south and taught it to Pete Seeger, who spread it up north. In 1959, Guy Carawan joined Highlander and passed on the song to the students who were beginning the sit-in demonstrations.

### **Charles Neblett**

**Freedom Singer**

The union version said, "My father is a miner and I'm a miner's son." We sang, "My daddy fought for freedom and I'm a freedom's son. I'll stick with this struggle until the battle is won. Which side are you on? Which side are you on?" Now these songs would put people on the spot. And it's all about organizing. Which side are you on? And you start singing songs like that and when everyone sings them together, something starts happening to you. Songs played a powerful part in terms of pulling people into the movement. And as freedom singers, we used songs as an organizing tool. It wasn't something to get out there and be popular with, it was a tool that we used.

### **Len Chandler**

**Song writer**

When I sang "Which Side Are You On?" up north to raise money for the movement, I added these verses,

Come all you northern liberals with all your excess fat,  
A few days on the picket line will sure get rid of that.  
Come all you high-tone college girls, pronounce your final "g's"  
But don't forget your grandma, she's still scrubbing on her knees.

**Candie Carawan**  
**Highlander Director**

Myles and Highlander believed in modeling what they were striving for. So black and white people would come to Highlander, sleep in the same dormitories and eat together, even though it was totally breaking custom and actually against the law in those days.

**Charles Sherrod**

We were in this wooden church, filled to the brim. People were getting up and testifying as to why we ought to continue and why we can't stop now, despite the fact that each one of us is afraid and our knees are knocking. But despite all of that, I never will forget when we stood up together like one man and threw our heads back and sang that song, "We Shall Overcome"—"we shall overcome, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome someday." I saw old people with tears in their eyes and gray hair who never stood up before a white man in their whole lives. I saw them with the strength of arm in arm all around that church, everybody to the top of their voice, "we shall overcome, we shall overcome." I just couldn't imagine what could keep the roof on top of us.

**We shall overcome,  
 We shall overcome,  
 We shall overcome someday  
 Oh, deep in my heart (I know that) I do believe (oh)  
 We shall overcome someday.**

**We'll walk hand in hand,  
 We'll walk hand in hand,  
 We'll walk hand in hand someday,  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,  
 We'll walk hand in hand someday.**

**We are not afraid,  
 We are not afraid,  
 We are not afraid today.  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,  
 We shall overcome someday.**

One organizer remembered, "When you get through singing that song you could walk over a bed of hot coals and you wouldn't notice." Without a recording, "We Shall Overcome" traveled orally across the south. By 1961, the theme song of the civil rights movement had evolved into a ritual, where the audience stood and swayed, crossing hands. And now, there is hardly a corner of the globe which does not know this song.

**Pete Seeger**

When I was in Calcutta, I visited a little village of mud huts. A man looked at me, he couldn't speak English but he had seen my picture in the Bengali newspapers. He said, "Pete Seeger!" and ran off to get his daughter, and with her in his arms he sang to me "We Shall Overcome" in Bengali.

The waters of segregation were first stirred by the Montgomery Bus Boycott. And then, on February 1, 1960, four black college freshmen staged a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter. Greensboro, North Carolina, was where the pebble entered the pond, and the resulting ripples became an unstoppable tidal wave of change. Nowhere did the sit-ins create as much electricity as in Nashville. It was in "the music city" that freedom singing came to fruition in the fertile fields of traditional African-American church and popular music.

### Jamila Jones

The Montgomery Trio started, three girls in elementary school around the age of eight or nine. Each week we'd have a talent show and we started to sing spirituals. About the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the spirituals lent themselves to the movement. We just formed ourselves as girls interested in singing and we would go around to functions where we were invited and we would carry these movement songs. We would go out into the rural areas where they didn't understand what was happening and we would carry the word through song to them. We went throughout the south singing, but we had urine thrown on us, guns shot our windows and cars. There were a number of things. And a lot of times we traveled by night. This is something that we had to do because it was a dangerous situation, it wasn't just singing songs, it was carrying a message that most of the white people didn't want their community to receive.

### Bernard LaFayette

Organizer, song leader

We were crowded in the Nashville jails. In fact, they had people coming down asking to be put in jail. Other students would come by and we were singing and clapping and having a ball. They had a sit-in in the lobby of the city jail and were turned away. Jail is supposedly a deterrent to sitting in and here people were sitting in the lobby of the jail trying to get in. It changed the whole concept of jail as a deterrent.

### Matthew Jones

Freedom Singer

Oh yeah, singing was in the jail. We found that in singing you lost your fear. You could sing about what you wanted to do or be. We'd say "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around," "Oh freedom, oh freedom over me, before I'd be a slave I'd be buried in my grave" - if you keep saying those things to yourself over and over again it gives you a kind of strength. You have a strength and you are perceived by the opposition as also having strength. One person would start singing in one cell and then you could hear it all over the jail.

Four students from the American Baptist Theological Seminary formed the Nashville Quartet: Bernard LaFayette, Samuel Collier, James Bevel and Joseph Carter. They were leaders in the Nashville civil rights movement as well as song creators and singers. Drawing from the gospel tradition and popular rhythms and blues, they created new songs for the movement. They sang at mass rallies and, with well-known tunes and harmonies, soon had the students of Nashville singing with them. A favorite song of theirs was "You'd Better Leave Segregation Alone."

You'd better leave segregation alone  
because they love segregation like a hound dog loves a bone,  
a bone.  
Well, I went down to the dime store to get myself a coke,  
the waitress looked at me and she thought it was a joke,  
you'd better leave segregation alone,  
because they love segregation like a hound dog loves a bone,  
a bone, a bone, a bone.

It was in Albany, Georgia, that the civil rights movement saw the adult community participate in equal strength with students in marches and demonstrations. The singing grew richer as people of all ages added their voices and experiences to the songs. The Albany Movement officially began on November 22, 1961, with a sit-in at a Trailways lunch counter. By the middle of December, almost 500 demonstrators were in prison. Soon, that number swelled to the thousands.

Singing came naturally to a community strongly influenced by the older church traditions. When several thousand people have sung well all their lives and are vitally caught up in an emotionally charged movement, there is nothing comparable to the songs they spontaneously create or their singing.

Out of the Albany Movement came the first group of freedom singers to travel nationally: Cordell Reagon, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rutha Harris and Charles Neblett. A second group was established the next year. All the freedom singers were SNCC field secretaries. They used the same basic equipment—hands, feet and strong voices—that they had used while leading mass meetings in the south to spread the message of the movement north.

It was the singing in the mass meetings and marches that sustained the spirit of Albany during the long months of arrests, which were carefully orchestrated by Police Chief Laurie Pritchett not to shock the nation but to smother the movement.

As far as public accommodations were concerned, the chief's tactics were successful; it was not until the 1964 Civil Rights Act that the color bar was finally brought down. Albany was a stalemate. The frustration and gloom movement activity could generate was expressed in a song written by Charles Sherrod. "Nothing But a Soldier" was the first ballad to be written by a SNCC field secretary who had previously sung in the church tradition.

When I was a baby, black as I could be,  
Mama held me closely, firmly on her knee.  
One day Mister Charley needed him a maid  
No more could my mother stay and rock me as her babe.  
Nothing but a soldier, nothing but a soldier,  
Nothing but a soldier can make make it in.

### **Charles Neblett** **Freedom Singer**

We had many song leaders and SNCC decided to put together a group to take the music on the road. One reason was because in 1961 the information was not getting out and it seemed the best way of getting news to the north was the music. We didn't look at ourselves as entertainers because we weren't. We were organizers. We used music as a motivator and as a way of bringing people into the movement. So we continued to do that when we took it north. We sang everywhere, at schools, Carnegie Hall, the folk festivals. We sang everywhere we could get the message out. We were doing 15 concerts a week. Sometimes we just lost our voices.

### **Matthew Jones** **Freedom Singer**

The purpose of the Freedom Singers was to raise money for SNCC and to explain what was going on in the movement. We had friends of SNCC groups in the north and they would set up concerts for us at college campuses. Our singing at these schools set the stage for the summer of 1964 when hundreds of college students went south to help register voters in Mississippi. We knew most of the kids who came down.

Birmingham, Alabama, the south's largest and worst city in terms of race relations, presented the biggest challenge yet to movement organizers. If segregation could be confronted in its stronghold, it could be confronted anywhere. Plan "C"—for "confrontation"—called for mass demonstrations and mass arrests. The tactic of filling Birmingham's jails incorporated young people in the protests. A thousand students were arrested in one day. Soon Police Commissioner Bull Connor's jail was full of children. A police captain remarked, "We'll look back on this and say, 'How stupid could we have been!'"

On September 15, 1963, came the most horrible act in opposition to the Birmingham Movement. At the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, four young girls were putting on their choir robes when a stick of dynamite exploded. The expectation of violence hung like an unfulfilled prophecy over the whites in Birmingham. But there was no violent retribution from the black community. The doctrine of non-violence held, even then. The Reverend Edwin King said, "If it hadn't been for nonviolence, if we had fought them as they fought us, the hate would have never died."

The songs, in a sense, performed the role of a battle anthem by helping to deal with fear, develop unity and express the goals of the freedom movement. Through singing, demonstrators were also able to project a "wall" of protection that encapsulated them in a kind of psychological armor. It was very difficult for counter-protesters to break through this wall of song. When police clubs, snarling dogs and hoses started to attack the line of march, praying to one's self gave some courage. But when hundreds sang their hopes together the songs provided the shield and identification necessary to withstand even the fury of a hostile mob.

I ain't scared of your jail because I want my freedom,  
 I want my freedom, I want my freedom,  
 I ain't scared of your jail because I want my freedom,  
 I want my freedom now.  
 I don't mind dying because I want my freedom,  
 I want my freedom, I want my freedom,  
 I don't mind dying because I want my freedom,  
 I want my freedom now.

### Dorothy Cotton

SCLC organizer, song leader

Looking at non-violence, we used to sing "I Love Everybody," affirming the teaching that love is the essence:

I love everybody, I love everybody,  
 I love everybody in my heart,  
 I love everybody, I love everybody,  
 I love everybody in my heart.

I can get all choked about it. I remember sitting in a little wooden church with a big pot-bellied stove in the middle. The only place I had got beat a little bit in the movement was in St. Augustine trying to integrate the beaches. I had taken some children to the beach and a bunch of men attacked us. That night at the mass meeting at the church there were people with bandages on. I looked behind me and there was an old lady, she must have been ninety years old. We would think that somebody like her would be at home but she's at the church, at the rally, and the floor boards in this wooden church are just jumping. People who had just gotten beaten up that day were stomping and singing "I love everybody." It's about love, it's about non-violence, it's about the power and the energy that we are going to use to free ourselves and to change this society.



A hallmark of freedom songs was their adaptation by the song leader to address people or events of immediate concern. Take, for example, what occurred one night in Selma, Alabama, in 1963. At a large church, about 300 people are led in song by a young high school girl. The words she sings to localize the song mean a great deal to Selma residents. Al Lingo is the head of the Alabama State Highway Patrol. Jim Clark is the sheriff, whose posse now stands outside the church. The week before, as people were leaving a similar mass meeting, the posse, swinging their clubs, chased people off the streets. There have been many demonstrations and many arrests.

### **Bettie Mae Fikes**

That night is a night I will never forget. The church was packed, you could see the tears flowing. I was the one who didn't like a lot of sad songs. I liked up-tempo songs, and so I sang "This Little Light of Mine."

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, Oh  
this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,  
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Tell Al Lingo.....

Tell Jim Clark.....

I still can't fully explain that night. It's something I think you had to have been there to see, to fully understand. It was the night that people really started to stand up, even in their fear. I don't know whether it was the songs that turned them around or the prayer. But I know from that night I was so amazed to see our adults stand up and take over their community.

***I don't know that we could have  
had this movement without  
the singing together.***

**Dorothy Cotton**

**Bernard LaFayette**

When I arrived in Selma, there was a song some young girls started singing:

Freedom is a comin'  
and it won't be long,  
Freedom is a comin',  
help me sing this song,  
Freedom is a comin',  
and it won't be long,  
If you want to be free,  
Come and sing with me.

Their voices were so beautiful. And when I became the program administrator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, one of my jobs was to determine where the resources for SCLC would be put. In addition to looking at the local leadership, one of the things I always looked at was the music. And one of the ways we determined if a community was ripe for a movement was whether the people in the community were singing their own songs. When people began to sing songs of their own movement and the issues and experiences they were having, we knew that the movement had been internalized; the music was a clear signal the people were committed. And we said they are ready, they are singing. They are ready to make sacrifices and they are not going to turn back.

Selma's blatant disregard for the rights of African-Americans brought Dr. Martin Luther King there in 1965. When he got arrested, five hundred children marched. They went to jail. Sheriff Jim Clark responded brutally to any demonstration, and in nearby Marion, Alabama, Jimmie Lee Jackson was killed by police. As a way of focusing the nation's attention on this world of a hundred years ago, a 50-mile march was organized from Selma to Montgomery.

**Len Chandler**

While we were marching some army guys started calling out "Left, Left." And I thought we'd been left out and left back and left behind for so long, why not put the emphasis on the other foot?

Pick 'em up and lay 'em down (Right! Right!)

Pick 'em up and lay 'em down (Right! Right!)

Pick 'em up and lay 'em down (Right! Right!)

All the way from Selma town (Right! Right!)

I've been walking so long (Right! Right!)

I've put blisters on the street (Right! Right!)

Well I caught the freedom fever (Right! Right!)

And it settled in my feet (Right! Right!)

There was this guy named Jim Letherer who walked all the way on one leg and crutches. He asked me to make up a verse.

Jim Letherer's leg got left (Right! Right!)

But he's still in the fight (Right! Right!)

Been walking day and night (Right! Right!)

Jim's left leg is all right (Right! Right!)

***The songs were the mustard that allowed  
us to eat the sandwich just right.***

**Charles Sherrod**

I'm back in Ruleville, Mississippi,  
and I have a few things to go  
through but it's nothing that will  
keep me down because now I'm  
in the fight for freedom. I'm just  
really tired of what I've been  
going through. And we've been  
apart but something has got to  
bring peace to this earth.

**Fannie Lou Hamer**

**T**he civil rights movement that so changed this country succeeded because of people like Fannie Lou Hamer. She epitomized the simple, hardworking folk who came from situations of real struggle and challenge and yet were able to set their sights on the lofty goal of redeeming the soul of America.

### **Dorothy Cotton**

Oh, Fannie Lou Hamer, a powerful personality. Fannie Lou Hamer had what we call charisma, I suppose. One was just really conscious of her presence, as we were when we visited her home in Ruleville, when she came to workshops and when she was campaigning, in later years, for public office. But most people will remember Fannie Lou Hamer leading people everywhere in song, and a song that I most attribute to her is "Go Tell It On The Mountain." I loved to hear her sing that.

Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere,  
Go tell it on the mountain,  
to let my people go.  
Paul and Silas bound in jail,  
Let my people go,  
Had no money to go their bail,  
Let my people go.

***We had to create  
ways of getting  
people involved,  
and the music  
was our best, best  
medicine.***

### **Sam Block**

In the beginning, there were no more than twelve civil rights workers in the whole state of Mississippi. But if you asked Governor Barnett how many there were, he would have said there was an army. The south's most entrenched stronghold of segregation and oppression was under attack.

**Willie Peacock****SNCC Organizer, song leader**

During the day, Sam Block and I would go door to door, to the pool halls and barber shops, just to let the people know that we weren't going anywhere. The theme of the local paper in Greenwood, Mississippi, was that you shouldn't get involved because these are outside agitators and they're going to be gone in a few days and you are still going to be here, having to suffer the consequences. We had to be visible, we couldn't think of our safety. The people would see us coming and they would cross over to the other side of the street because they didn't want to be identified with us at all. They were afraid if they came head on and met us that we would stop them and talk to them, and we would. It was slow and painstaking for a while but that was the work that had to be done, stay there and go door to door and talk to people who would talk to us.

**Sam Block****SNCC organizer, song leader**

The singing was awesome, it was beautiful. It was something that you don't hear today. People demonstrated their spirit by clapping their hands, singing to the top of their voice and with meaning and spirit. You could tell they were serious.

Everybody shared. You don't find that nowadays. It was a feeling that you never wanted to stop singing. People were dealing with emotions and at the same time with issues that they wanted to confront in their community.

Hear that Freedom train a'comin', comin', comin',

Hear that Freedom train a'comin', comin', comin',

Hear that Freedom train a'comin', comin', comin',

Get on board, get on board.

It'll be carryin' nothing but freedom, freedom, freedom (3x)

Get on board, get on board

They'll be comin' by the thousand, thousand, thousand (3x)

Get on board, get on board.

The civil rights movement that transformed this nation was a singing movement. Out of the creativity of southern black communities flowered hundreds of powerful freedom songs. These became an integral part of the struggle as the movement and its music matured together, step-by-step.

*In music is*

*America's greatest*

*proof and*

*demonstration of*

*democracy.*

**Bob Cohen**

**Bob Reiser****Author, *Everybody Says Freedom***

Well, there was the south and then there was Mississippi. Mississippi was like the hardest, meanest, rock-core center of segregation. The rest of the south could be pressured by legislation, by marches, by economic pressure and people reluctantly changed their ways. But in Mississippi, it was life and death. The white dirt farmers would kill rather than give up the tiny bit of privilege they had by being white.

Segregation was a religion down there.



### Willie Peacock

If somebody asked me what was the key glue or the key binding force that brought people together, I would say that it was the music. The unity was always there but you couldn't get to it unless you had some kind of vehicle, and that vehicle was the singing and the music. And sometimes that singing would just go on and last for hours. We'd get to the point where we became one soul and people didn't want to stop. That spirit would carry us over till the next morning. And if we had planned a project where we were going to take people down to register to vote, they would be there knocking on the office door. There were no empty promises. I remember the big breakthrough in Greenwood, Mississippi, was in February 1963. We had had a mass meeting at the Elks Hall and we had all this singing and we spoke to the fact that we know there is fear, but our spirit is greater than any enemy force. We had more than 128 people go down to register to vote the next day. That was the breakthrough. That had never happened before.

**C**ordell Reagon, who founded the Freedom Singers, believed that the music was what held the movement together:

**"There was music in everything we did, at a staff meeting or just around the office. If there was tension or a painful discussion, someone would open up with a line of a song and somebody else would take it over and somebody else would add a verse and by the end everybody would be hugging each other. You can't have a movement without that. The music doesn't change governments. A bureaucrat or a politician isn't going to be changed by some music he hears. But we can change people—individual people. The people can change governments."**

Thank you, Cordell. And thanks to all those who raised a song and gave the movement its soul.

## Participants

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**Sam Block** was one of the first organizers for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi. Much of his work centered around Greenville, where he wrote the song "Get On Board, Little Children."

**Candie Carawan** was an exchange student at Fisk University when she participated in the Nashville sit-ins and wrote new lyrics to the song "They Go Wild Over Me." She and her husband, Guy, have been based at the Highlander Research and Education Center since the mid-1960s.

**Guy Carawan** became music director of the Highlander Folk School in 1959. He helped spread freedom songs all across the country, including "We Shall Overcome," which he modified to its present form. Guy and Candie Carawan edited and compiled the book, *Sing For Freedom*.

**Len Chandler** is an extremely prolific songwriter who wrote many songs for the civil rights movement. A number of these were performed by Len for this series, including "Right! Right!," "Murder On the Road In Alabama," and "Father's Grave."

**Bob Cohen** was performing with the New World Singers in Greenwich Village when he joined the Mississippi Caravan of Music. Bob Cohen, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Judy Collins and other folk singers taught songs and performed throughout Mississippi during the 1964 Freedom Summer Project.

**Dorothy Cotton** conducted citizen training workshops for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and was active in civil rights activity in many places.

**Virginia Davis** took part in demonstrations in Americus, Georgia, where she was jailed for two months and wrote the Song "Roll, Freedom, Roll" with Amanda Perdew.

**Bettie Mae Fikes** was only 15 years old when her powerful singing energized mass meetings. She has been called the voice of Selma, Alabama. Her rendition of "This Little Light of Mine" was captured on tape in 1963 and is included in this series.

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**Emory Harris** joined the Freedom Singers in 1962. Rather than seek a commercial recording contract, Emory devoted his professional-level tenor voice to the movement and was (and still is) widely known for his singing style.

**Bruce Hartford** was an organizer for SCLC and worked throughout the South, including participation in the Selma to Montgomery march. Though twice voted "worst singer on the SCLC staff," Bruce could be counted on to be an enthusiastic song leader, often in the most dangerous situations.

**Minnie Hendrick** was a member of the Montgomery Trio, founded in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1956. The Trio worked in the earliest days of the modern civil rights era to spread the message of the movement.

**Matthew Jones** joined the Freedom Singers after participating in the Nashville sit-ins and the Danville, Virginia, campaign. It was in the Danville jail that Matthew met a soldier who had also been arrested. He became the inspiration for the song "Demonstrating G.I."

**Jamila Jones** was a member of the Montgomery Trio. Then known as Mary Ethel Dozier, she performed along with the Trio everywhere from rural towns to Carnegie Hall.

**Bernard LaFayette** helped form the Nashville Quartet in 1960 along with Samuel Collier, James Bevel and Joseph Carter. They were leaders in the Nashville civil rights movement as well as song creators and singers. They drew from the gospel tradition and popular rhythms and blues to create new songs. A favorite song of theirs was "Your Dog," a version of which is included in this series.

**John Lewis** participated in virtually every phase of the civil rights movement, from sit-ins and freedom rides to the Selma march and the March on Washington. He was elected to Congress from Georgia's Sixth District in 1986.

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**Charles Neblett** was one of the founders of the Freedom Singers along with Cordell Reagon, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Rutha Harris. Established by SNCC, the group toured the country helping to raise funds and to get the word out on what was happening in the movement.

**James Orange** was an organizer for SCLC. A song he wrote in the summer of 1964, "Oh, Wallace," was widely sung during the Selma to Montgomery march. Its lyrics "Oh Wallace, you never can jail us all, Oh Wallace, segregation's bound to fall" foretold a dream come true.

**Willie Peacock** was one of the first SNCC field secretaries to begin organizing activities in Mississippi, working with Sam Block in Greenwood. Peacock was a powerful song leader and archival tapings of him leading "Oh Freedom" and "Wade in the Water" are included in this series.

**Amanda Bowens Perdew** participated in civil rights activity in Georgia. She and Virginia Davis wrote the song "Roll, Freedom, Roll" and were featured at the 1964 Sing For Freedom workshop in Atlanta organized by Guy Carawan.

**John Perdew** was a SNCC worker in Southwest Georgia. His activities on behalf of civil rights led to his arrest and, as one of the Americus Four, to being charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government. The case was thrown out.

**Bob Reiser** is co-author of *Everybody Says Freedom: A History of the Civil Rights Movement in Songs and Pictures*. This excellent book was instrumental in the making of this series. It is listed on page 16 of this publication.

**Pete Seeger** adapted and spread the song "We Shall Overcome" in 1949. He became deeply involved in the cause of civil rights from the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He participated in the Mississippi Caravan of Music and many of his songs helped to inspire the movement. He is co-author of *Everybody Says Freedom*.

**Charles Sherrod** was 22 years old when he arrived in Albany, Georgia, to help organize at the grass roots level in 1961. Albany became a major campaign, though it ended in a stalemate. The frustration of the struggle is reflected in a song composed by Sherrod, "Nothing But A Soldier."



## Reading

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- Carawan, Guy and Candie, *Sing For Freedom, The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs*. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: Sing Out, 1992.
- Carawan, Guy and Candie. *We Shall Overcome*. New York: Oak Publications, 1963.
- King, Mary. *Freedom Song*. New York: William Morrow, 1986.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. *We'll Never Turn Back*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980.
- Seeger, Pete, and Bob Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom: A History of the Civil Rights Movement in Songs and Pictures*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989.

## Listening

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### Cultural Center for Social Change

*Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*. Produced by Susie Erenrich, 1991.

### Folkways Records

*Birmingham, Alabama—Mass Meeting*. Produced by Guy and Candie Carawan, 1963.

*Nashville Sit-In Story*. Produced by Guy and Candie Carawan, 1960.

*Sing for Freedom*. Produced by Guy and Candie Carawan, 1964.

*Story of Greenwood, Mississippi*. Produced by Guy and Candie Carawan, 1965.

*We Shall Overcome: Songs of the Freedom Movement*. Produced by Guy and Candie Carawan, 1963.

### Smithsonian

*Voices of the Civil Rights Movement*. 1980.

### Mercury

*Freedom Singers Sing of Freedom Now*. Produced by Chad Mitchell, 1964.



**Comments and  
singing from:**

**Sam Block**

**Candie Carawan**

**Guy Carawan**

**Len Chandler**

**Bob Cohen**

**Dorothy Cotton**

**Virginia Davis**

**Bettie Mae Fikes**

**Emory Harris**

**Bruce Hartford**

**Minnie Hendrick**

**Jamila Jones**

**Matthew Jones**

**Bernard LaFayette**

**John Lewis**

**Charles Neblett**

**James Orange**

**Willie Peacock**

**Amanda Bowens Perdew**

**John Perdew**

**Bob Reiser**

**Pete Seeger**

**Charles Sherrod**

**Narrated by:**

**Julian Bond  
and Gene Lyons**

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