

LONNIE BUNCH
SNCC Legacy Project (SLP)
September 9, 2026

The SNCC Legacy Project (SLP) wishes to express its profound gratitude to Lonnie Bunch for his consistent determination to tell the stories of all Americans during his tenure at the Smithsonian. As SNCC veterans who continue to work to make America a more democratic society, we salute his insistence on inclusive storytelling. Lonnie Bunch oversaw and, with his dedicated staff, brought into existence the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). This is of singular importance. The NMAAHC brings to the fore the magnificent, historically-grounded stories of African Americans, beginning with their roots in African kingdoms to their enslavement, to the Movement for Black Lives.

At a time when there is a concerted effort to ban books and the teaching of the full history of this country, a visitor to the Museum can learn about the Reconstruction Period, the period of democratic promise that followed the Civil War; the 1960s Freedom Movement that has grounded all of us in the SNCC Legacy Project; the brilliance of W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells; the music of James Brown, Aretha Franklin and Miles Davis; and the literary works of Sterling Brown, Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison and Langston Hughes. Visitors can see the grassroots voting rights campaigns that led to the election of numerous Black elected officials throughout this country, as well as the election of over 60 African American Congresspeople... and Barack Obama.

Even before the NMAAHC was constructed, Lonnie Bunch created the Treasurer's Project. The Project travelled across America, showing various communities – including some in which we had organized -- how to collect and curate their archival materials. These materials have helped correct the historical record and have unearthed often untold stories that continue to strengthen those communities. Most importantly, those materials remain in the communities which collected them.

We civil rights organizers, now in our 80's and grounded in the 1960's civil rights movement, are particularly grateful to Lonnie Bunch. From the beginning, he understood the importance of telling the bottom-up history and stories of regular people in that Movement, the narratives that would lift the human spirit as well as tell the real story. In addition to community archiving and other local programs, he also hosted a 2-day event for *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, the anthology of 51 SNCC women's writings. The event was organized by SNCC's Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, who, with Dr. Bunche's strong support, had directed the Smithsonian's Black American Culture Program and was later its Curator Emerita of African American Songs of Protest.

We cannot overstate the enduring contribution Lonnie Bunch has made to the historically accurate telling of *all* our important histories. We must all work to ensure that his work continues to educate and sustain us.