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Civil Rights Movement: What was the 1964 MFDP challenge to the Democratic Convention all about? Cite sources.

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The 1964 MFDP Challenge to the Democratic National Convention

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenge at the August 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City was one of the pivotal confrontations of the Civil Rights Movement — a formal, rules-based effort to strip the seats of Mississippi's all-white "regular" Democratic delegation and replace them with an integrated, grassroots delegation elected by the disenfranchised Black majority the regulars refused to represent.

Why the challenge was launched

In 1964, roughly 45% of Mississippi's population was Black, but fewer than 5% of Black Mississippians were registered to vote statewide — the result of literacy tests, poll taxes, economic retaliation by the White Citizens' Councils, and Klan violence ([CRMVet — 1964 Freedom Summer Timeline](#)). Because Black Mississippians were locked out of the "regular" Democratic Party's precinct and county meetings, they had no voice in choosing the state's delegates to the national convention ([COFO Handbook for Political Programs, 1964](#)).

Early in 1964, COFO and SNCC adopted a three-part political strategy: keep pushing official voter registration, run "Freedom Candidates" in the June Democratic primary, and build the MFDP as a fully structured party — organized in strict compliance with national Democratic Party rules — to challenge the legitimacy of the all-white regular delegation at Atlantic City ([MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention](#)).

The MFDP was officially founded April 26, 1964 in Jackson, and by convention time had enrolled roughly 80,000 members through "Freedom Registration" — a parallel, non-discriminatory registration process done in homes, barbershops, and churches ([Brief Submitted by the MFDP](#); [CRMVet — 1964 Timeline](#)). On August 6, 1964, a state convention in Jackson elected 68 delegates (64 Black, 4 white) to travel to Atlantic City ([Julian Bond, Freedom Summer 50th statement](#)).

The four arguments the MFDP brought to Atlantic City

The MFDP's challenge to the Credentials Committee rested on four points ([MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention](#)):

- Mississippi's systematic denial of Black voting rights was unconstitutional and violated federal law and the national Democratic Party's own principles.
- The regulars' top-down "good ol' boy" delegate selection process violated national party rules.
- The regular Mississippi delegation was in open rebellion against the national party — refusing to pledge support for Lyndon Johnson and instead campaigning for Republican Barry Goldwater.
- The MFDP was "Double-D Democratic" — open to all races and run by the rules, and loyal to the national Democratic ticket.

Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony

On August 22, 1964, the Credentials Committee held televised hearings. MFDP co-founder Fannie Lou Hamer testified about being fired from the plantation where she'd sharecropped for 18 years for trying to register, and about being beaten nearly to death in a Winona, Mississippi jail cell after a voter-registration workshop. She closed by asking, "Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily,

because we want to live as decent human beings?" ([Fannie Lou Hamer testimony — American Yawp](#); [American RadioWorks transcript](#)).

President Johnson, fearing the testimony would rally support and split the party, called an impromptu press conference to knock Hamer off live television — but the networks ran her testimony in full that evening ([American Yawp](#)).

The "compromise" and its rejection

MFDP lawyer Joe Rauh and Congresswoman Edith Green initially pushed a well-established convention precedent: seat both delegations and split the Mississippi votes between them. Johnson refused ([Mike Miller — MFDP 50 Years Later](#); [Walter Mondale, Atlantic City Revisited](#)).

Instead, the Johnson–Humphrey–Reuther–Mondale team offered:

- The all-white regulars would be seated as the Mississippi delegation (conditional on a loyalty oath most refused to sign anyway).
- **Two** at-large seats, not as Mississippi delegates, would go to MFDP chair Aaron Henry and Rev. Ed King — **hand-picked by the administration**, not the MFDP.
- The other 66 MFDP delegates could attend as non-voting "honored guests."
- A rule barring discriminatory state delegations at future (1968) conventions ([MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention](#); [Walter Mondale, Atlantic City Revisited](#)).

Vice-presidential hopeful Hubert Humphrey was told his nomination depended on brokering the deal; MFDP delegates were subjected to intense arm-twisting — one credentials committee member was reportedly threatened with the loss of a judgeship, another with bankruptcy ([The MFDP: A New Declaration of Independence](#)). Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and CORE's James Farmer urged the MFDP to accept ([Mike Miller — MFDP 50 Years Later](#)).

All 68 MFDP delegates voted unanimously to reject it. As Fannie Lou Hamer put it: **"We didn't come all this way for no two seats"** ([MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention](#); [Joyner — Hamer & the Democratic Party](#)).

The MFDP's own contemporaneous position paper laid out seven reasons for the rejection, including that the deal recognized the regulars as Mississippi's legitimate Democratic representatives; that the two seats were "at-large" and thus not Mississippi votes at all; that no delegates were chosen by the MFDP itself; that the Credentials Committee refused to guarantee a single additional Black registered voter over the next four years; and that the 1968 reform commission had no binding power ([Reasons for the Rejection of the Compromise at Atlantic City, 9/20/64](#)).

Significance and aftermath

Atlantic City was, in the short term, a bitter defeat and a turning point in the movement's relationship with white liberalism. Many SNCC and MFDP activists

concluded that even sympathetic national Democrats would sacrifice Black political rights for electoral convenience, accelerating the drift toward Black Power and away from coalition politics ([The MFDP: A New Declaration of Independence](#); [Mike Miller — MFDP 50 Years Later](#)).

But the challenge also produced lasting change. The rule barring discriminatory delegations was in fact adopted for 1968, ending all-white Southern delegations at Democratic conventions ([Joyner — Hamer & the Democratic Party](#)). Hamer's televised testimony put Mississippi's racial terrorism into millions of American living rooms and helped build the political momentum that produced the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And the MFDP went directly from Atlantic City into the **Congressional Challenge** of January 1965, contesting the seating of Mississippi's five white congressmen on the same grounds ([The MFDP: A New Declaration of Independence](#); [MFDP home page](#)).

Additional primary-source collections

For deeper research, the Civil Rights Movement Archive holds extensive primary documents:

- [MFDP Documents index](#) — including the original Proposal for MFDP Convention Challenge, precinct/county convention instructions, freedom registration reports, and the MFDP's post-convention analysis
- [MFDP home / overview page](#)
- [Freedom Summer & Freedom Schools documents](#)
- [MFDP Challenge photographs](#)
- [Mississippi Movement & MFDP oral-history discussion](#)

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Civil Rights Movement: What was the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama in the mid-1960s? Cite Sources.

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The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO)

The Lowndes County Freedom Organization was an independent, all-Black political party founded in Lowndes County, Alabama, in early 1966. It grew directly out of the local voter-registration movement, was organized in partnership with SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), used a snarling black panther as its ballot symbol, and became the practical blueprint for what Stokely Carmichael would soon call "Black Power" — and the direct namesake of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale's Black Panther Party in Oakland.

The Lowndes County setting

Lowndes County sits on Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery — the road that the 1965 voting-rights march traveled, and the road where Klansmen murdered Detroit civil-rights worker Viola Liuzzo on the night the march ended ([CRMVet — John Jackson oral history](#)). At the start of 1965, roughly 80–81% of the county's population was Black, but not a single Black person was on the voter rolls, while white registration stood at 118% of the eligible white population — a plain statistical sign of massive voter-roll fraud ([LCFO Political Education Primer](#); [SNCC 60th Conference discussion](#)). White retaliation against Black political activity was so severe that the county was nicknamed "Bloody Lowndes" ([Bloody Lowndes — Zinn Education Project](#)).

From LCCMHR to LCFO

On March 17, 1965 — just days after the Selma Bloody Sunday attack — about 30 local Black residents met secretly at Mt. Gilead Baptist Church in Trickam (now White Hall) with SCLC's James Bevel and Andrew Young. They founded the **Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCMHR)**, named after Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's Birmingham organization ([CRMVet — 1965 Timeline](#); [Lillian McGill oral history](#)). John Hulett was elected president. Two days later, 30 members went to the courthouse in Hayneville to try to register; two weeks later, only two of them were placed on the rolls ([John Hulett — How the Black Panther Party Was Organized](#)).

Through the spring and summer of 1965, SNCC field secretaries — including Stokely Carmichael, Bob Mants, John Jackson, and later Ruby Sales and Jonathan Daniels — moved into the county to work alongside the LCCMHR. Daniels, a young white Episcopal seminarian, was shotgunned to death by Lowndes deputy Tom Coleman in Hayneville on August 20, 1965; Coleman was acquitted by an all-white jury ([Ruby Sales oral history](#); [Bonner — Killing of Jonathan Daniels](#)).

By the time the Voting Rights Act was signed on August 6, 1965, the LCCMHR had already registered more than 200 Black voters in a county that had begun the year with zero; a federal examiner arrived under the new Act (Lowndes was among the first nine Southern counties designated), and within roughly 10 months more than 2,000 Black voters had been added to the rolls ([CRMVet — 1966 Timeline Jan–June](#); [SNCC press release on Tent City, 12/29/1965](#)). White landlords retaliated by evicting sharecropper families that had registered; SNCC and the LCCMHR erected "Tent City" on Black-owned land off Route 80 to shelter the evicted families through the winter of 1965–66 ([SNCC Tent City release](#); [SNCC Organizing Presence in Alabama](#)).

Why a new political party — and why independent

Local activists quickly concluded that voter registration by itself wasn't enough — that "the powers-that-be" would still control the courthouse, and that participating in the existing Alabama Democratic Party (whose ballot symbol was, notoriously, a white rooster over the slogan "White Supremacy") was not a real option ([Lillian McGill oral](#)

[history](#); [Bonner — Killing of Jonathan Daniels](#)). As John Hulett put it: "So the people decided to form their own political organization. They would elect their own public officials. If they could take over the County government, they'd no longer have to ask for what they needed. They could then do it" ([LCFO 1967 pamphlet by Jack Minnis](#)).

Because the LCCMHR was a non-partisan, tax-exempt organization that could not legally run or endorse candidates, a separate political vehicle was needed ([Lillian McGill oral history](#)).

SNCC researchers dug through the 12-volume Alabama Code of Laws and discovered a little-used provision: **any group that polled at least 20% of the vote in a county general election automatically became a recognized political party in that county**, with an automatic ballot line and its own ballot symbol ([LCFO 1967 pamphlet](#); [We Intend to Take Over Lowndes County](#)). Beginning in December 1965 and running every two weeks through the spring of 1966, SNCC held workshops for local activists on election law, the structure and powers of Alabama county government (sheriff, tax assessor, tax collector, coroner, board of education), and how those offices affected Black people's daily lives ([CRMVet — 1966 Timeline](#); [LCFO 1967 pamphlet](#)).

Formal founding and the Black Panther symbol

On **Saturday, April 2, 1966**, roughly 60 local activists met at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, formally adopted bylaws, elected officers, and chose the black panther as the party's ballot symbol. John Hulett was elected LCFO president; Robert Strickland vice president; Sidney Logan treasurer; Ruthie Mae Jones financial secretary; Alice Moore recording secretary; and Frank Miles chaplain. Most LCFO officers came from the ranks of the LCCMHR ([CRMVet — 1966 Timeline](#)).

The panther drawing was executed by SNCC field secretary Ruth Howard, based on the mascot of Atlanta's Clark College football team; local resident Lillian McGill also recalled that the emblem was originally called a "black cat" ([CRMVet — 1966 Timeline](#); [Lillian McGill oral history](#)). The symbol had a practical function too: under Alabama election law each party needed a distinct emblem, and given the low literacy rates the "separate-but-equal" schools had produced, a strong visual symbol let voters identify their party on the ballot ([LCFO Political Education Primer](#)).

To teach new voters what each county office actually did, LCFO organizers produced illustrated **Political Education Primers** in comic-book format — one for each contested office ([LCFO Political Education Primer](#)).

The May 1966 primary and the November 1966 election

Alabama's May 1966 primary was the first election under the Voting Rights Act. In November 1966, the LCFO fielded seven candidates for county offices under the black panther symbol ([SNCC 60th Conference discussion](#); [SNCC Special Report on Elections, Nov. 1966](#)):

Office	LCFO candidate	Votes	Dem. candidate	Votes
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Sheriff	Sidney Logan	1,426	Frank Ryals	1,943
Coroner	Emory Ross	1,391	Jack Golson	1,901
Tax Assessor	Alice Moore	1,557	Charlie Sullivan	2,234
Tax Collector	Frank Miles	1,556	Iva Sullivan	2,227
Bd. of Education	Robert Logan	1,620	David Lyons	1,894
Bd. of Education	John Hinson	1,620	Tommie Coleman	1,933
Bd. of Education	Willie Strickland	1,552	C.B. Haigler	2,139

All seven LCFO candidates lost, defeated in large part by white voter fraud — the Southern Regional Council counted 2,823 registered whites in a county whose white population was only about 1,900, evidence of "graveyard voters" and whites imported from other counties to inflate the rolls. Combined with intimidation, evictions, and vote-buying, this was enough to defeat the LCFO slate, and the party filed suit challenging the results ([SNCC Special Report on Elections](#)).

But the LCFO cleared the 20% threshold and became a legally recognized political party — the **Lowndes County Freedom Party (LCFP)**. Within a few years, Black candidates began winning: John Hulett was later elected Lowndes County sheriff, and other LCFO veterans (including Robert Mants and John Jackson) went on to hold county offices ([SNCC 28th anniversary — Alabama panel](#); [SNCC 60th Conference discussion](#)).

The LCFO's national impact

As blueprint for Black Power. For Stokely Carmichael, the Lowndes strategy — an independent Black political party rooted in a Black-majority community, organized outside the Democratic Party, aimed at concrete control of local government — was the model he began preaching nationally in May–June 1966. Carmichael was elected SNCC chairman in May 1966 at the Kingston Springs meeting, in significant part on the strength of his Lowndes work, and issued the "Black Power" call publicly in June during the Meredith March in Mississippi ([SNCC Charts a Course, National Guardian, May 1966](#); [Bloody Lowndes — Zinn Education Project](#)).

As namesake for the Black Panther Party. In October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California, founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense; they took their name and their panther logo directly from the LCFO, with permission ([CRMVet — 1966 Timeline](#); [Bloody Lowndes — Zinn Education Project](#)). The LCFO is therefore properly described as the first Black Panther Party ([SNCC Organizing Presence in Alabama](#); [SNCC 60th Conference discussion](#)).

As a model for other counties. SNCC organizers, including H. Rap Brown, worked to replicate the Lowndes model — independent county Freedom Organizations — in other Black Belt counties across Alabama, rather than joining the SCLC- and NAACP-backed Alabama Democratic Conference, which was a coalition of moderate whites and

middle-class Blacks working inside the state Democratic Party ([SNCC News of the Field #3, March 1966](#); [The Movement newspaper, June 1967](#)).

On the name confusion

Local participants have repeatedly stressed that the party's real name was the **Lowndes County Freedom Organization** (and, after Nov. 1966, the **Lowndes County Freedom Party**) — "Black Panther Party" was a press nickname derived from the ballot symbol, not the party's chosen name ([Lillian McGill oral history](#); [SNCC 28th anniversary — Alabama panel](#)). The three overlapping Lowndes organizations were:

- **LCCMHR** — Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (March 1965): the non-partisan civil rights organization that led voter registration and community organizing.
- **LCFO** — Lowndes County Freedom Organization (April 1966): the independent political party running candidates under the black panther ballot symbol.
- **LCFP** — Lowndes County Freedom Party: the name the LCFO officially assumed after clearing the 20% threshold at the November 1966 election ([We Intend to Take Over Lowndes County](#); [Lillian McGill oral history](#)).

Primary-source collections for deeper research

- [Civil Rights Movement Archive — LCFO documents index](#) (multiple documents 1965–68)
- [LCFO 1967 pamphlet by Jack Minnis](#) — the standard contemporary account of how the party was built
- [John Hulett — "How the Black Panther Party Was Organized"](#) — 1966 speech by the LCFO's first president
- [LCFO Political Education Primer](#) — the illustrated county-office primers
- [SNCC press release on Lowndes Tent City, Dec. 29, 1965](#)
- [SNCC Special Report on Elections, November 1966](#)
- [LCFO photographs in the CRMVet image archive](#)
- Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (NYU Press, 2009) — the definitive scholarly history ([Zinn Education Project entry](#))

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| *How was nonviolence used in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s? Cite Sources.*

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How Nonviolence Was Used in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement

Nonviolence in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement was not a single thing. It was simultaneously a philosophy, a religious commitment, a carefully trained tactic, a mass strategy, and — for most rank-and-file participants — a pragmatic discipline adopted for the duration of a demonstration, alongside quiet acceptance of armed self-defense at home. Understanding how it was actually used means separating those layers.

Nonviolence as philosophy vs. nonviolence as tactic

From the beginning, movement participants themselves drew a sharp distinction between two very different things: "**nonviolence as a way of life**" (a spiritual and moral commitment, mainly associated with Dr. King and with James Lawson's Nashville workshops) and "**tactical nonviolence**" (a disciplined method of protest adopted for strategic reasons by people who were not necessarily pacifists).

Dr. King's own philosophy, laid out in *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), rested on six principles: nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people; it seeks reconciliation and the Beloved Community; it seeks to defeat injustice, not people; it accepts unearned suffering as redemptive; it chooses love over hate; and it trusts that the universe bends toward justice ([Dr. King's Six Principles for Non-Violent Direct Action](#); [MLK Westchester — Six Steps](#)).

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's founding statement at Shaw University in April 1960 embraced this philosophical vision explicitly: "We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our belief, and the manner of our action... Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear. Love transcends hate... The redemptive community supersedes immoral social systems" ([SNCC Founding Statement, April 15–17, 1960](#)).

But most of the tens of thousands of people who actually marched, sat in, and went to jail did not adopt nonviolence as a religion. They adopted it as a **tactic that worked**, precisely because it exposed white violence to national television cameras while denying segregationists the pretext they needed to arrest, imprison, or shoot Black people "in self-defense." As a CORE summer volunteer put it in 1964: "For many, [nonviolence] stops at the end of a demonstration or when the day's work is thru. Most accept self-defense at night for granted" ([CRMVet — 1964 July–December Timeline](#)).

The training that made it work: the Nashville workshops

Nonviolent direct action was not spontaneous. Beginning in the fall of 1959, Vanderbilt divinity student **James Lawson** — who had studied Gandhian methods in India — ran weekly workshops in Nashville for students from American Baptist Theological Seminary, Fisk, Meharry, and Tennessee A&I. The workshops mixed philosophy, history (Gandhi, biblical resistance, the anti-Nazi resistance in occupied Europe), and role-

playing. Participants included **Diane Nash, John Lewis, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, Marion Barry, and C.T. Vivian** — a roster that would soon lead sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and the Selma campaign ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

Lawson later described the method: "We planned a series of workshops on nonviolence to begin to start that process... We tried to give people a fairly good view of nonviolence, and we mixed that with role-playing of various kinds" ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)). Role-playing meant one group of trainees pretending to be white racists — screaming slurs, blowing smoke, pouring hot coffee, yanking hair — while another group practiced absorbing the abuse without reacting.

The point of that discipline was operational, not just spiritual. As the CRMVet Archive puts it: "Most of the sit-ins are preceded by careful planning and training in the tactics of Nonviolent Resistance, and are characterized by strict discipline on the part of the protesters that reduces the effects of physical assaults and provides a clear, powerful message. Some sit-ins, however, are spontaneous and lack of training in nonviolent tactics sometimes results in demonstrators retaliating when attacked by racists. That gives the cops an opportunity to arrest the sit-ins (not the racist attackers) on violence-related charges" ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

The major tactics of nonviolent direct action

Sit-ins (1960). The Greensboro sit-in of February 1, 1960 — four NCA&T freshmen ordering coffee at Woolworth's — set off a wave that by year's end had drawn more than 70,000 participants across the South and led to over 3,000 arrests ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)). Diane Nash's recollection captures the disciplined stagecraft: "The students were dressed like they were on the way to church... We took our seats in a very orderly, peaceful fashion... We were sitting there trying not to laugh... at the same time we were scared to death" (Nashville, February 1960; [CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

Jail-No-Bail. Refusing to pay fines and instead serving jail time was a deliberate tactic — it converted arrests into a moral and economic burden on the state rather than on the movement. The Tallahassee Eight in March 1960 were the first sit-in group in the country to adopt it, serving 49 days in Leon County Jail ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)). At the Durham mass meeting on February 16, 1960, King made his first public call for filling the jails: "Let us not fear going to jail... Maybe it will take this willingness to stay in jail to arouse the dozing conscience of our nation" ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

Freedom Rides (1961). CORE and later SNCC riders deliberately violated segregation in interstate travel to force federal enforcement of Supreme Court rulings. Riders trained in nonviolent response before boarding buses that they knew would be attacked. When Klansmen firebombed a Greyhound outside Anniston, Alabama, and beat riders bloody in Birmingham and Montgomery, the discipline held — and the images did what the tactic was designed to do: force the Kennedy administration to intervene and the ICC to enforce desegregation.

Boycotts. Boycotts of downtown merchants during the Nashville, Montgomery,

Tallahassee, Rock Hill, and Birmingham campaigns applied economic pressure that segregation ordinances could not stop. In Nashville, an NCLC-organized downtown boycott running alongside the sit-ins was economically crippling enough that the mayor eventually broke ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

Mass marches and "creative tension." Birmingham 1963 (Project C) and Selma 1965 used mass marches specifically to provoke visible, televised white violence — Bull Connor's dogs and fire hoses, Jim Clark's posse on the Edmund Pettus Bridge — in order to force federal action. The Nashville march of April 19, 1960, after the bombing of attorney Z. Alexander Looby's home, was a template: 2,500 to 4,000 protesters walked silently to City Hall, and Mayor Ben West conceded on the spot that lunch-counter discrimination was wrong ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)).

Why the discipline mattered strategically

Nonviolent discipline served several concrete purposes at once:

- **It defeated the segregationists' legal weapon.** Southern prosecutors deliberately charged Black protesters with race-neutral crimes like "Disturbing the Peace" or "Disorderly Conduct" rather than violating segregation ordinances, so federal courts could not overturn segregation on appeal ([CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#)). If a protester struck back, that generic charge became easy to prove and easy to defend in court. Nonviolent discipline made those charges look ridiculous on the record.
- **It shifted moral authority through television.** With Northern viewers watching well-dressed students being beaten while praying, the political cost of segregation rose sharply. That was the entire strategic logic behind Birmingham and Selma.
- **It built coalitions.** Nonviolence let clergy, white liberals, Northern unions, and moderate politicians participate or support without endorsing "Black violence" — a category segregationists constantly tried to invoke.
- **It made mass participation possible.** A movement that required paramilitary training would have been small. A movement that required only the courage to sit at a lunch counter and not swing back could and did draw in tens of thousands of ordinary people, including high-school and college students, ministers, and grandmothers.

Nonviolence and self-defense: not opposites in practice

An important and often-missed fact: even at its height, "nonviolence" in the movement almost never meant unarmed households. Guns for defense of the home were commonplace, and organized armed self-defense existed alongside nonviolent protest.

Robert Williams and the Monroe, NC, NAACP branch (1957) were the first to publicly organize armed self-defense against the Klan. Similar armed community defense operated in St. Augustine, Florida, and in ad-hoc groups across Southwest Georgia,

Alabama, and Mississippi ([CRMVet — 1964 July–December Timeline](#)).

The Deacons for Defense and Justice, incorporated in Louisiana in 1964 (Jonesboro and Bogalusa), were the first formal, public self-defense organization in the movement. Their bylaws were explicit: they stood for defense, not provocation, and would not attack whites or white property, but would defend civil rights workers and Black communities against Klan night-riders and mob attacks — with guns if necessary. Working in partnership with CORE, the Deacons operated on a clear division of labor: "their role is defense and CORE's role is organizing and protesting. Both groups understand that protesters have to be nonviolent, but against Klan night-riders, ambush, or mob-attack the Deacons stand ready to meet fire with fire" ([CRMVet — 1964 July–December Timeline](#)). Historian Adam Fairclough later wrote that in Bogalusa "for the first time in the twentieth century, an armed black organization had successfully used weapons to defend a lawful protest against an attack by law enforcement" ([Race and Democracy, quoted in CRMVet](#)).

For most rank-and-file movement people in the rural South, this was not a contradiction. They understood nonviolence as a strategy to be used in demonstrations, at the courthouse, on the picket line — the arena where television cameras and national opinion could be reached. At night, at the farmhouse, when Klansmen drove past shooting, that same discipline did not require lying down. As the CORE volunteer's letter home put it, self-defense at home was simply "taken for granted."

The internal debate and the shift after 1965

By 1965–66, tactical nonviolence was beginning to fracture, especially inside SNCC and CORE, under the weight of the movement's cumulative losses — three Freedom Summer workers murdered in Mississippi, the beating of marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the shotgun murder of Jonathan Daniels in Lowndes County, the FBI's refusal to protect Black organizers, and the perceived betrayal of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at Atlantic City in 1964. Stokely Carmichael's June 1966 "Black Power" call during the Meredith March formalized a shift many organizers had already made internally: away from nonviolence as a philosophical commitment, and toward nonviolence as one tool among several — including armed self-defense and independent Black political organization on the LCFO model. But even in this later phase, movement organizations continued to use disciplined nonviolent tactics in demonstrations. The tactic did not disappear; its philosophical framing did.

Primary sources for deeper reading

- [SNCC Founding Statement, Shaw University, April 1960](#) — the movement's clearest philosophical embrace of nonviolence
- [Dr. King's Six Principles of Non-Violent Direct Action](#) — from Stride Toward Freedom
- [CRMVet — 1960 Timeline](#) — Nashville workshops, Greensboro, Jail-No-Bail

- [CRMVet — 1964 July–December Timeline](#) — the Deacons for Defense and Justice
- [The Founding of SNCC](#) — Ella Baker's role in shaping the student movement
- Movement participant memoirs cited in the CRMVet oral histories — including John Lewis, Diane Nash, James Lawson, C.T. Vivian, Bernard Lafayette (see [CRMVet oral histories index](#))

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What Was Black Power? Cite Sources

Black Power

Black Power was a broad Black liberation movement, political slogan, and cultural outlook that became nationally prominent in the United States in the mid-1960s. It called for Black people to exercise self-determination: organizing political power, building independent institutions and economic strength, protecting communities, and affirming Black identity, history, and culture.

Origins

The phrase had earlier roots, including Richard Wright's 1954 book *Black Power* and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization's 1965 slogan, "Black Power for Black People." It entered national political vocabulary during the June 1966 Meredith March Against Fear in Mississippi, when SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) led marchers in the chant, "We want Black Power."

Black Power emerged from continuing racial violence and inequality in housing, employment, education, and political representation, even after major civil-rights victories such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many activists believed that legal integration alone had not sufficiently changed the economic and political conditions facing Black Americans.

Core ideas

The movement was not a single organization or uniform ideology. Its meanings varied among advocates, but central themes included:

- Political power: Black communities organizing independently, voting, running for office, and holding representatives accountable to Black constituents' needs.
- Economic empowerment: Supporting Black-owned businesses, cooperatives, employment, and redistribution of resources toward underserved communities.
- Community control: Greater local authority over schools, policing, housing, and other

institutions affecting Black neighborhoods.

- Cultural pride and self-definition: Embracing African and African American heritage, Black history, natural hairstyles, art, and the idea that Black identity should not be judged by white standards.
- Self-defense and resistance to racial oppression: Some currents stressed armed self-defense against racist violence, while others focused primarily on electoral organizing, community programs, or cultural nationalism.
- Internationalism and anti-imperialism: Many activists connected African Americans' struggle to anticolonial and liberation movements in Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and elsewhere.

Relationship to civil rights

Black Power was not simply the opposite of the civil-rights movement. It grew partly from within it: SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), for example, had been important civil-rights organizations before taking more Black Power-oriented positions.

A useful distinction is that integrationist civil-rights strategies often emphasized dismantling formal segregation and winning equal access within existing institutions. Black Power more often emphasized changing who controlled those institutions, or creating Black-led alternatives, and insisted that Black people should define their own goals and leadership.

Organizations and legacy

The Black Panther Party, founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966, became the best-known Black Power organization. It combined armed patrols and assertions of self-defense with community "survival programs," such as free breakfast programs for children and health initiatives. Malcolm X was an especially influential intellectual predecessor, while Carmichael/Ture helped popularize the phrase nationally.

Black Power left a durable legacy in Black Studies programs, Black electoral organizing, cultural expression, community-based social services, and later movements for racial justice. It also was frequently caricatured by opponents as inherently violent; historically, however, it encompassed a wide range of strategies and political commitments rather than one program or organization.

Sources

1. U.S. National Archives, "Black Power." <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power>
2. American Archive of Public Broadcasting, "The Black Power Movement."

https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/black-power

3. National Archives (United Kingdom), "Black power."

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/civil-rights-in-america/black-power/>

4. Khan Academy, "Black Power." <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-us-history/period-8/the-african-american-civil-rights-movement-1960s/a/black-power>

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USER • July 30, 2026 • 1:29 PM PDT

What AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc were used to generate the above answers?

A Note on the AI Tools Used to Generate These Answers

All four answers were generated by **Perplexity Computer**, an AI assistant made by Perplexity. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and other outside AI products were not used to write those responses.

The tools used to produce the answers were:

- **Web search** across the open web, with targeted searches restricted to [crmvet.org](https://www.crmvet.org) (the Civil Rights Movement Archive) to surface primary-source documents, oral histories, and timeline pages.
- **Result-reading tools** to pull the full text of specific pages so that direct quotes and citations were accurate.

The synthesis, structure, tone, and citation choices in the four answers were produced by Perplexity Computer directly — not routed through any other AI product.

One note of transparency about "under the hood": Perplexity Computer runs on a mix of large language models developed by various AI labs, and Perplexity also builds its own models (the Sonar family, which powers our search-grounded answering). For a given response, the system picks a model based on the task. But from the user's perspective, the interaction is with one product — Perplexity Computer — not with ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini as separate tools, and none of those consumer products were called on to write these answers.

[5619 words]