



the
SNCC Legacy Project

SNCC LEGACY PROJECT STATEMENT ON THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

“Black people did not vote to save American democracy. They voted to save their lives and the lives of their children.”

*– Junebug Jabbo Jones
November 4, 2020*

November 12, 2020

The Black community voted in record numbers in the 2020 Presidential Election. It can be reasonably argued that their votes made the critical difference in the battleground states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. It may even be argued that the votes of the Black community will make the difference in the state of Georgia. Many of the votes in the Black community came from today’s activists who became involved because of the murders of Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and . . . far too many others.

It is perplexing to us, therefore, to hear prominent voices accusing today’s young activists of using terms that harm the Movement and democratic political advancement. Most recently, some have pointed to the phrase “defund the police” to make this attack. This is both wrong-headed and ahistorical. It is as if the lyrics of “We shall overcome”—the anthem of the 1960s Movement we were part of -- were being blamed for white supremacist opposition to civil rights legislation.

Today’s activists should be praised and thanked for their extraordinary participation in this election. These young people not only voted, but they organized others to vote -- some for the first time -- through voter registration campaigns, texts, non-contact canvassing, voter mobilization and education through social media, and peer-to-peer discussions. Their organizations include the Dream Defenders, BYP 100, Woke Vote, New Georgia Project, Southerners on New Ground (SONG), and many other organizations in the Movement 4 Black Lives. Members of these organizations will continue on a life-long journey to ensure that the political and economic interests of the Black community are realized.

As veterans of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) we began what must be recognized as a marathon, starting with the formation of SNCC at Shaw University in April 1960. Many of us were still teenagers and in our early twenties, and we were confronted with a white supremacist American society that had built a political consensus that excluded the Black community. Our only option for achieving change was to disrupt the status quo. As the late Congressman John Lewis—a SNCC veteran and SNCC chair —used to say, “get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Let’s remember: SNCC conducted its “disruptive” activities with the support of only a minority of people in the white community, who were often viewed by the larger white community as communists and hatefully called n****r lovers. With its sit-ins; voter registration drives that focused on sharecroppers not formally educated to assume leadership positions; opposition to literacy tests; and insistence on one person, one vote, we sought to upend the established political order. Both Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson thought our “trouble-making” interfered with their political agendas and they used the instruments of government to sabotage us. What was in motion, however, stayed in motion.



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Indeed, the political minority of the 1960s has proven to be the political majority in 2020. This multi-racial, multi-ethnic majority represents a bright future for America. This majority, which received over 77 million votes, is now opposed by the *former* majority, which received approximated 72 million votes. The question going forward is: whose interest will prevail?

The road ahead will be long and difficult for all of us. We will need to have many discussions as to the way forward. We will undertake many successful campaigns that will be necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, and we will have to endure undeserved hostility, even, at times, from those inside the Black community. Nevertheless, fueled by the strength and creativity of today's activists, we're moving forward on a path to make lives better for the Black community and this will consequentially benefit the majority of people in the United States. We applaud and praise this rising generation of leaders, activists and this movement.