

SNCC 28th Anniversary Conference: The New Abolitionists and the Modern South

The conference "We Shall Not Be Moved: The Life and Times of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 1960-1966" highlighted the significant contributions of SNCC to the Civil Rights Movement. Key speakers included Joanne Grant, Howard Zinn, Mary King, and June Johnson, who shared their experiences and reflections on SNCC's impact. The conference emphasized SNCC's innovative, democratic approach, its role in catalyzing other movements, and its lasting influence on social change. The discussion also touched on the ongoing struggle for equality, the importance of grassroots leadership, and the need for continued activism.

We Shall Not Be Moved: The Life and Times of SNCC 1960 - 1966 Conference

Date: April 14, 1988

Location: Trinity College - Hartford, CT

Host:

Jack Chatfield, Professor of American History, Trinity College

Panelists:

Howard Zinn, Professor of Political Science, Boston University

Author, *A People's History of the United States*; *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*

Joanne Grant, Journalist

Director, *Fundi: The Story of Ella Baker*

Author, *Black Protest: History, Documents, and Analyses; 1619 to the Present*

Mary King, SNCC communications staff, 1963-1966

Author, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement*

June Johnson, Organizer and Voter Education Director, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1963-1966

Jack Chatfield: ... about the conference, which is about to begin, the conference we have called "We Shall Not Be Moved: The Life and Times of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1960-1966." Since I've already discovered today that it's almost too difficult to talk about big things, I'm going to occupy you for a few moments by talking about some small things.

The first item, actually, is far from small. We owe many people a great deal of thanks for making this conference a possibility. We have had generous financial support from Trinity College, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and a history department slush fund that would make the [Richard] Nixon fund of 1952 look pale by comparison—that joke was intended for those over 40.

We've had especially generous and widespread support from a variety of student organizations on campus. The Trinity Women's Center, among others, was especially enthusiastic in supporting this event. A variety of student associations and organizations, all of which are listed on the front of what we are now calling, at least orally, the revised schedule of events. I direct your attention to that revised schedule.

We have received indispensable help from student assistants, who are now being nominated for the presidency of the United States. Marissa Boyers deserves special praise, along with Otis Bryant. Without their assistance, this program could not have moved forward. Marissa and Otis have informed me that, like Mario Cuomo, they will not accept the nomination for President of the United States.

Some events of the conference have been slightly altered. There is one change in time on Thursday—that tonight's event will begin at 8:00 PM rather than 7:30 PM, meaning the brochure contains an incorrect time. We have plenty of brochures in the lobby and plenty of revised schedules, but the revised schedule of events is the more accurate document, containing a few additions to panels and at least one change in time.

It also includes information about where SNCC people, friends of SNCC, journalists, scholars, and invited guests will gather for luncheons and dinners. These things did not appear in the original brochures. That's more reason for paying attention to the revised schedule.

In the Trinity College Bookstore downstairs, we have books on sale, all of them written by participants in this conference, some of whom are here today. We have also ordered the three-record set from the Smithsonian Institution, "The Songs of the Movement," which Bernice Johnson Reagon put together. It has yet to arrive, but we expect it momentarily. For the sake of simplicity and efficiency, all of these things will be on sale downstairs at the bookstore rather than up here. So, simply the way it has to be.

We'd like to remind all scholars and journalists and friends of SNCC especially to register. We are eager to know who has come to this conference. The general public is also urged to register, but we are especially eager to compile [a list of former Civil Rights Movement people](#), and this is one of the most important tasks I think which we face.

An addition to the schedule of events: Tom Hayden, whose name will be familiar to most, is coming to the conference tonight. When I found out he was coming, I wrote to him a note asking if he could spend an informal 45 minutes or an hour with students and interested people prior to one of the scheduled events. He has notified us that he can appear tomorrow morning at approximately 9:15 in the morning to carry on an informal discussion or talk with all who would care to hear. And this will take place before the 10:30 [AM] panel.

It is not my task, nor do I wish to assume it, to make a long introductory statement about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I should, however, say a couple of words. When the idea for this conference began to move about the only sometimes fertile brain of our small planning committee, it had

not occurred to me to devote a conference entirely to SNCC. Perhaps the memory of SNCC, for me, was too powerful. Perhaps I thought that this would be improper. I can't even explain why I would have hesitated, but it never occurred to me to devote an entire retrospective historical conference to SNCC. The idea was to gather a few people from the Civil Rights Movement, among them former SNCC workers, who could be contacted in various parts of the country.

It was in a conversation on the telephone with Mary King, who was one of our first panelists, that Mary made the recommendation that we actually focus on SNCC and on SNCC alone. Almost before the words were out of her mouth, I accepted the logic of this proposition, and the conference materialized from that rather short conversation conducted sometime in late August of 1987.

Certain people, as you will notice, are missing from the participants. Among them, of course, are people who have died in the past few years—not least [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), not least [Ella Baker](#), the film about whom will be shown at the SNCC banquet on Saturday night. Joanne Grant made that film. [Ruby Doris Robinson](#), of course, who died in the mid-1960s of cancer, and a number of people who were slain during the course of the struggle—too many to name. Mr. Johnny Jackson of Whitehall, Alabama, has suggested that we attempt to commemorate the people who have died, either by violent means or other means, during the course of the Civil Rights Movement, and we will do this during the course of this conference.

There are others who are not here, whom we wish were here. [John Lewis](#), newly elected to Congress from Atlanta, was simply too busy with legislative work to come. [Bob Moses](#), who was burdened with, it would seem, five or six jobs and as many kids in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and whose wife is now finishing up her medical training, so that their life is incomparably complicated. Bob Moses was unable to make a commitment to come to the conference. We hope that he will arrive sometime in the next two or three days.

When I got back to my house last night, after a captivating evening with [Gloria House](#) and Larry Guyot, a phone message was awaiting from an acquaintance of ours in Detroit, saying that [Kwame Ture](#), formerly Stokely Carmichael, was back in the country and was now deeply interested in attending the conference.

After a brief financial negotiation carried out without the aid of tape recording devices, so that no one will ever know what was said, Mr. Kwame Ture is evidently arriving tomorrow afternoon and will be a participant in the Black Power panel. We're wondering whether he should be in the Lowndes County panel also.

It was a Machiavellian decision of mine to place his photograph on the front page of the brochure. I thought this was one of the most appropriate photographs to place on the front page of the brochure, as it captured the essence of SNCC and a phase of one person's life that is now overshadowed by a later phase. In any event, whatever moved him—and I'm sure this played a smaller or trivial role—he is set to arrive tomorrow and will be participating on Saturday.

I have already continued too long. The idea for this conference was primarily to allow the former participants in the Civil Rights Movement to speak. We have, of course, invited a small and significant body of historians and journalists, but primarily this is devoted to a retrospective appraisal and reflection on the events of the early and mid-1960s. The first panel is now set to begin. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Jack. A special thank you goes to Jack for pulling the laboring oar for this panel, along with his and my colleague in the history department, Cheryl Greenberg. Let me just mention briefly what we're going to do, and then I want to turn the podium, as it were, over to the panelists.

The idea today, as Jack has said, is for people who were participants in SNCC, closely involved with it, to provide some of their retrospective impressions and accounts of the significance of that remarkable movement. What we plan to do in this opening panel is for each of the panelists, in turn, to make relatively brief remarks. After all four have had their say, we hope very soon thereafter to open it up to questions from the audience. Since we're all off to a bit of a late start, I will, without further ado, introduce the first of the four speakers.

Joanne Grant, [seated] to my extreme left, is an author and filmmaker. She is the author of the book *Black Protest*. She is also the maker of the documentary film *Fundi: The Life of Ella Baker*, who played such a crucial role in the creation and perpetuation of SNCC. And without further ado, I introduce Joanne Grant.

Joanne Grant: Thank you very much. I'm often on the left, but not often on the extreme left.

We are gathered together at a historic time. I am sure that during this weekend, we will do a lot of reminiscing, a lot of singing, and have a lot of fun. We will remember the 1960s—its excitement, its sense that we were building something new, its dangers, its fear, and its sorrow. I was reminded of Mendy Samstein's injunction sometime in the early 1960s from reading Mary King's book *Freedom Song*. He said that if you were in a Freedom House and you woke up in the middle of the night with a feeling of foreboding, you should quickly wake up everybody in the house.¹

One night when I was in [Greenwood](#), I woke up with that kind of feeling. The feeling had been creeping up on me all day long, I think, because I had driven from Jackson with Victor Rabinowitz and Barbara Dane. Victor, in a typical New York white man's fashion, had pulled into a gas station in Greenwood [MS] and asked for directions to the SNCC headquarters. Consequently, we were tailed to the headquarters, and he was arrested later in the day for passing a stop sign. There were a lot of other incidents during that day.

But anyway, that night, I woke up in the wee hours of the dawn with a very funny feeling. Something bad was going on. I woke up Sally Belfrage, whose bed I was sharing and I said, "You know, we're going to be killed." She crawled to the window, looked out, and said, "That's the newspaper [boy]. The kid in the house is being picked up to go on his newspaper route." So, I felt like an idiot.

But when I stayed in Meridian [MS] a couple of weeks later, the lady of the house did stay up all night on guard, and they took turns every night staying up. So, it wasn't really a false injunction, but I did feel like an utter fool that one night in Greenwood.

To say that I was frightened most of the time that I was in Mississippi is an understatement. Yet, as with all of us, it was the best time of my life. I felt that we were building something new. I thought we were

¹ In this context, *foreboding* means a deep, instinctive feeling that something bad is about to happen, often triggered by real threats in a dangerous environment.

changing the world, and we really were. I'm terribly impressed by the changes that we all helped to bring about, and I don't want any of us—or any of them—to forget about it.

When I went to Jackson [MS] for the 20th anniversary of the sit-ins, I attended a conference sponsored by Tougaloo [College] and Millsaps [College]. We were all picked up by our hosts. One of my hosts was a Black student, and one was a white student. As we stood around reminiscing, Barbara Dane and I were talking about the fact that when we had driven around Mississippi in the 1960s, if there were a larger number of Black people in the car, then the white people rode on the floor. And if there were a larger number of white people in the car, then the Black people rode on the floor. These students just opened their mouths and gaped in utter astonishment. They said, "Not in Mississippi."

So, changes did take place. We know that some of them were just visible changes. You could see Black people working in banks. You had integrated public accommodations. But there are still a lot of changes that haven't taken place. We have a long way to go in education, in housing, in employment. One-third of the Black population of the United States lives in poverty. 42.7% of all Black children under the age of 18 are officially classified as poor.

Looking around, we can see plenty to be discouraged about, and I'm not going to list all of our ills. But what I do want to talk about is an enormously bright spot, and that is the fact that a Black [man] is running for president. Not only is Jesse Jackson running for president, but he's a front-runner, and finally, he's being acknowledged as such by a reluctant establishment and a reluctant press.²

I think that Jesse's candidacy is the most significant thing that has happened in this country. You will notice that I will probably continue to call him Jesse. In 1968, after the Democratic Convention, I called up Julian [Bond] and said, "Julian, when you get elected president, do I have to call you Mr. President?" People in Washington always refer to Marion [Bary] as Mr. Mayor, but there is a feeling about Jesse among people that makes us call him Jesse—like Fidel [Castro].

I know that many of us had serious doubts about Jesse, but my doubts were totally and absolutely swept away the other morning when I heard him speak in New York. I had already jumped on the Jesse bandwagon, but I still had my doubts. But he not only has charisma—which the press refers to in his case disparagingly, whereas in other cases they refer to it as an asset—but Jesse has a program. He's not only an inspiration to Black people, he's an inspiration to white people as well, to farmers, to laborers, to gays, to the poor, to all of us who have been dispirited, discouraged, and disenfranchised.

I hope there will be time during the weekend for a serious assessment of Jesse's candidacy, and maybe at this afternoon's session during the discussion, we'll do some of that. I see the Jesse Jackson for President campaign as the only sign of hope for America. Jesse is talking about the drug problem globally. He's talking about the homeless. He's talking about AIDS. He's talking about welfare rights and child care. He's talking about taxes, about defense spending. He's talking about peace. All of the issues that affect us, and he's talking about them in a new way.

² This passage refers to Rev. Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign. In that year, Jackson ran as a Democratic candidate and became a significant contender, even winning several primaries and caucuses. By spring 1988, he was considered a front-runner, making history as the first African American to mount a nationally viable campaign for a major party nomination.

It's true that he's taken the lead in injecting these issues into this campaign. He's forced the other candidates to address them. He's forced them to the left. Whatever happens, I think that the impact of his campaign will reverberate throughout the country. I think that he's forcing a change—a change for the better. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. The second person to introduce is Professor [Howard Zinn](#) of Boston University, someone who, in the early [19]60s at the time of SNCC's founding, was, I believe, teaching at Spelman College. He was an advisor to SNCC for much of its history. In addition to being the author of *A People's History of the United States*, he is also the author of the first serious study of SNCC, a book published in 1964 called *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*. Howard Zinn.

Howard Zinn: Thank you. I was trying to figure out what I could say in a short time about such a rich subject, filled with all of our memories and experiences. I'm thinking about the problem of historical perspective. I'm thinking about the fact that we are talking about SNCC, an organization founded about 28 years ago, and that a quarter of a century ago, it was carrying on its activities. And I thought, well, this is a good thing to do, because if there's anything we need today, it is the kind of historical perspective that takes us away from the six o'clock news and the eleven o'clock news, away from the daily newspapers and all the attempts to crush our hopes by giving us the most limited possible picture of present-day reality.

It takes going back. It takes looking at the changes that have occurred over the years in order to build up our sense of what is possible for people to do. I just realized it was a little over 30 years ago that my wife and I, with our two little kids, piled into our old Chevy and headed south to Atlanta [GA] for me to take up a job teaching at Spelman College, a Black Southern college for young women. This was in 1956.

Things looked very quiet. The campus was quiet. The city looked quiet. My students were quiet. You could easily get the impression, as so many people did, that nothing was ever going to happen there. Yes, there was racial segregation. Yes, people were being humiliated. Yes, terrible things were going on behind the scenes, behind closed doors, or out in the streets. But nobody was talking about it, and there didn't seem to be much being done about it.

My students, you might say, fitting the description that they often give of students today. People talk about students today and say, "Oh, how apathetic they are. Look how quiet they are. They're not doing anything. They're just not interested in promoting their careers." You might have said the same thing about Spelman students in 1956 and 1957.

Of course, it's no wonder that young people need to promote their careers, given the kind of society they face, the odds they face—whether they're white or Black, but especially if they're Black, especially if they're women. And so, yes, they were going about their duties, trying to move up in the ranks of society, and it seemed as if that was all, on the surface, that they were interested in.

And then, in a few years, this quiet campus exploded. The adjacent campuses exploded. These students, who had just been studying and walking quietly along the campus, were suddenly outside the walls, outside the barbed wire, outside that little enclave that had been set up for them. They were out in the city.

They were demonstrating. They were sitting in. They were marching. They were going to jail. They were sacrificing. And they were beginning to make a tumultuous change in the South and in this country.

I mention that because I have to remind myself every once in a while, and I try to remind other people when they say, "Nothing is going to happen. We really don't have a chance. Look at all the power that they have." You know who I mean by "they." There is a "they." There is a "they," and there is a "we." And people always say, "Look at all the power they have, and look at us. What can we do?"

Well, what happened in the South during that period of history showed what ordinary people could do once they were aroused, once they woke up, once they got together, once they talked together, once they joined. They created a power that was heard and seen all over the world.

And it seems to me that we ought to remember that. We ought to remember that power—the power to change things, as well as the power to keep things the way they are. That power doesn't depend simply on having the uniforms, on having military power, on having the police and the army on your side, on having the money on your side. As strong and ferocious as [that power] is, it can be overcome by people who struggle together.

That's what happened in the South. We saw young people from all over the South—Black college students, a few white friends—joining together, forming SNCC, and then going out into the small towns of the South. They talked to the ministers. They talked to the local people. They found places to live in local homes. And then they created the kind of commotion necessary to create in order to bring about change.

That kind of remarkable time is not unique. It has happened again and again in American history. But just after it's over, people forget. And they want us to forget. The reason for having a conference like this is so that we won't forget—so that we'll recognize what is possible for us to do. And, I think, so that we'll go out of a conference like this ready to start again. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you very much, Howard. The third person to speak this afternoon is [Mary King](#). Mary was on the SNCC communications staff, first in Atlanta and then subsequently in Jackson, Mississippi, from 1963 through the end of 1965. She later served in the federal government, particularly in the Carter administration. Most recently, and perhaps for the purposes of today's conference most importantly, she is the author of a splendid recent book, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*, which was published just last year. Mary King.

Mary King: Thank you. When Jack Chatfield called me and talked to me about his idea for doing a conference on the movement and read me the list of people that he wanted to invite, I said, "Jack, that's not the movement you're talking about. That's SNCC." And I urged him to do a conference solely on SNCC for a very important reason.

The past 20 years have seen the most extraordinary, whether you call it historical revisionism, rewriting, or distortion of history. The movement was an enormous phenomenon that swept across the South in the 1960s, but it was not simply Dr. Martin Luther King. What concerns me so much is that young people today, even those who are interested in the movement, see it revolving around the focus of Dr. King. I believe he is the last person who would have wanted it that way. He was actually one of the few people in

other Civil Rights organizations who was willing to acknowledge what an extraordinary entity SNCC was.

I think it is very important to stop and focus and say: What was this organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee? What made it unique in a unique struggle that flourished in the South between 1955 and, to my mind, 1965? One of the things that made SNCC so distinctive is that it grew out of a phenomenon that was completely unplanned.

At the start of the decade of the 1960s, on February 1, four students in North Carolina, following a bull session, fed up with the laws of segregation, decided to go downtown to Woolworth's and sit in. They didn't call it a sit-in. They just decided to order a Coca-Cola and not leave when they were refused. That sparked other students across the South, who similarly went to lunch counters, sat down, ordered a Coca-Cola or whatever, and refused to leave. Within three months there were 35,000 students who had sat in. By then, it had a name. By the end of the year, 70,000 students had sat in, and 3,600 had gone to jail.

For most of those students who were sitting in, who were the first in their generation to go to college, going to jail was about the worst possible thing that could happen. Yet they were willing to put everything on the line. They were willing to sacrifice not only their future but their family's investment in them.

What was it that made that happen at that point in time that launched this brushfire reaction? Within hours, the students in Nashville [TN], who had already been preparing themselves in biweekly seminars on nonviolence, had moved downtown. Shortly thereafter, students in Orangeburg [SC] had moved to sit in. In Texas—the movement spread like lightning across Texas and the South. What made that happen at that time?

I believe that one of the most significant, if not the most significant, global phenomena since World War II was the sweep of anti-colonialism throughout the world. When television came, Black families began to see leaders from Africa. They heard about the Algerian War, which was still raging at the time of the sit-ins. The Algerian War had another two years to go—one million Algerians had been killed in their struggle against the French for control of their own country. The British Raj had ended in 1947. At the time of the sit-ins, Fidel Castro was in the news almost every night. It was absolutely inevitable that, at some point in time, American Blacks would launch an anti-colonial struggle within the United States.

The significance of the sit-ins, I believe, is partly attributable to the studying that was going on. I mentioned the Nashville group. This group of students, led by some of the people you will hear from during this conference, had been studying the works of [Mahatma] Gandhi and [Henry David] Thoreau. They had studied the nonviolent civil disobedience and resistance of the Indian struggle. They had studied the basic philosophy of Christianity. Also, there was the influence of the existentialists at work. At that point in the 1960s, there was a belief among many people who became involved that you are what you believe. It was part of the times.

Following the sit-in in February 1960, a remarkable woman named Ella Baker—about whom you'll hear a great deal—called a conference together in April of that year. That was the start of this organization. I was to encounter it two years later. I was 22 years old when I went to work for SNCC. There were 41 staff members at the time, spread across about 10 Southern states, and it was the most extraordinary group of

young people I had ever met. The moment I met the staff in the SNCC headquarters in Atlanta, I knew that my place was with the movement. There was no turning back.

I was part of a campus group that traveled from Ohio Wesleyan to Nashville, Atlanta, and Tuskegee during my senior year. I met [Bernard Lafayette](#), [Jim Forman](#), [Julian Bond](#), and others. That was it—I knew that's where I belonged. Even in my own response, I had something of that self-sacrifice, that willingness to throw everything to the winds for this force that was in effect. It's hard for me to fully impart to you the strength of that commitment. But there is no one, no matter how jaded or worldly among my peers, who would disagree with me when I say that we were willing to die for each other. We believed in something bigger than ourselves, and we were willing to sacrifice everything for it.

We believed that ideas should come from action, not from ideology. We had a stern insistence that our conceptualization, our thinking, our framework should grow from engagement with the people we were working with rather than from any doctrine or ready-made philosophy. We were not ready to accept anyone's "ism." We wanted to do it ourselves. The sit-ins were profound in their insistence that belief and action are one. What those students were saying was that nothing else counts except the willingness to act out your beliefs.

SNCC also had the most pure vision of democracy I have ever encountered. We never doubted the feasibility of democracy. We had no doubts about that at all. We struggled for consensus. It was never easy—it was always a struggle—but we believed that everyone had a right to speak and that everyone's opinion was important.

One of the most vital distinctions between this extraordinary organization and the one headed by Dr. King—the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC]—was its view of leadership. We believed that leadership was something inherent in every individual. To be biblical about it, "even the least of these." We believed that our role was that of organizers. We talked about ourselves frankly as an organization of organizers and that we had to move on. We saw ourselves as working ourselves out of a job.

The first time I met Julian Bond, he said to me, "I think SNCC is going to be gone in another five years. There won't be a need for us, and we'll be moving on to other things." We never had any sense of institutionalizing ourselves. We thought of leadership as a matter of development, as a process, as a matter of becoming and that our role was to help its emergence and its flourishing.

We were also an incredibly diverse group of young people. I won't go into details on that now—I've tried to do so in my book. But I want to quote from Howard Zinn's book a few very salient facts. I think he did a survey in 1962 on 41 SNCC workers, and at that time, 35 of them were Black. Twenty-five came from the Deep South. All of the Southern Blacks were from homes where their mothers worked as domestic servants, and their fathers were farmers, truck drivers, factory workers, bricklayers, or carpenters. So the organization had that cadre at its core, but there were also many others from a variety of different homes and ethnic backgrounds who were part of the organization.

When I arrived in Mississippi, half of the counties in the Mississippi Delta had not one single Black [person] registered to vote. The protocols at work were essentially those passed in the 1890s, when

lynchings of Blacks by white mobs occurred on average once every two and a half days. Lynching still took place.

I remember clearly that after the death of President [John. F.] Kennedy, I spent five days trying to find one reporter who would report the fact that Bob Moses had told me that the bodies of five Black men had turned up in the Homochitto River near Natchez [MS]. I could not find one reporter for five days who would report that these bodies had been found. Finally, after five days, Claude Sitton of *The New York Times*, who unfortunately could not be with us but very much wanted to, was willing to include that in his account. The situation had been like that since the 1890s.

Today, we have a situation in which there are over 6,000 Black elected officials. Three hundred and three American cities have Black mayors. Twenty-six Black mayors in Mississippi comprise the largest number in the country. Black voter turnout in 1986 was responsible for bringing the Senate back to the Democrats. In Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina, the incumbents were dumped because of a Black voter turnout in excess of 85%. We are beginning to see the full flowering of the political muscle that began to break out at the time of the early 1960s.

For myself, I have to say that one of the most important things that influenced me when I went to work for SNCC was my study of a theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was involved in a bomb plot to kill Hitler. He was a German theologian who believed that being Christian meant taking sides. He was incarcerated, locked up in Buchenwald, and was hanged by the Nazis. But he believed two things that profoundly influenced me then and, frankly, influence me now. He believed that freedom is expressed in the willingness to assume responsibility, and he believed that freedom without responsible action is not freedom.

One of the other things I would like to highlight about this extraordinary organization is the fact that there was nothing we were afraid to discuss. We asked astounding questions of each other. Nothing was too cosmic, too enormous for us to consider. In fact, the debates in our organization straddled some of the great philosophical questions of this century, and I think it contributed to that debate on a global basis.

I mentioned the question of leadership—our position that leadership had to come from the bottom up, in contrast to the more conventional perception of leadership in SCLC, which was centered around a singular leader, centered in the historical leadership of the Black church, that highly esteemed institution of the Black church.

We debated questions of reform versus revolution. We debated nonviolence as opposed to armed struggle. We debated whether a centralized method of organizing was better than a decentralized one—in other words, should we have a strong central organization to serve as the catalyst, or should we attempt to decentralize as much as possible to local communities?

We also debated whether there were virtues in authoritarianism or whether we should be as manifestly democratic as possible. And finally, we debated the question of the power and psychology of men and women. I think I'll stop right there.

Moderator: Indicated in Mary's wonderfully concise overview of a big piece of SNCC's history is one of the most important activities—arguably the most important—that SNCC engaged in was going into small

communities and seeking to nurture the local leadership that was implicit in those communities, to release energies that had long been suppressed by the existing caste system. I mention that because the final panelist I wish to introduce, [June Johnson](#), sitting here to my immediate right, was born and reared in Greenwood, Mississippi—one of the most important communities where SNCC established a new project focused on voter registration and the general mobilization of the Black community.

June tells me that she actually joined the movement at age 14 as president of the local NAACP Youth Chapter. She later organized, while still a teenager, the Greenwood Voters League, and in the mid-1960s, she was involved with the [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party](#), one of SNCC's most important offshoots, as well as the Council of Federated Organizations.

At any event, June, who now works for the Department of Human Services in Washington, D.C., was someone who was present at the creation of the movement in Greenwood, Mississippi. And it is with particular pleasure that I ask June to make her statement, June Johnson.

June Johnson: Thank you. In 1833, at the founding convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society, William Lloyd Garrison demanded that the abolitionist purpose was to secure the colored population all the rights and privileges that belonged to them as men and as Americans. But, by the spring of 1865, after the Emancipation Proclamation, it was also Garrison who proposed that the society be disbanded because, as he saw it, its work was already done. Slavery had been legally abolished, and even though the hope of freedmen enjoying the rights and privileges that belong to them as men and Americans was still distant, Garrison came to believe that Black people no longer needed any special help to secure those rights.

Garrison's position was opposed by Black abolitionists, especially Frederick Douglass, who staunchly opposed the self-destruction of the best-known abolitionist organization. Obviously, Douglass knew what many Black and white people today are still discovering—breaking down legal barriers is only the first step in the struggle for freedom.

The new abolitionists today are those men and women who are [persevering] in that struggle, who continue to strive for the inclusion of Black Americans in the mainstream of our society—politically, socially, and economically. They are those who realize, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X did, that it makes no difference if one has the right to eat at any lunch counter if I cannot afford to buy food and eat it.

The South today seems vastly different from what it was 25 years ago. Then we were murdered, beaten, and frightened simply for the rights to vote. I will never forget being with the late Fannie Lou Hamer on June 9, 1963, in the Winona jail after she was brutally beaten for trying to eat at a Trailways bus terminal lunch counter.

Amazingly, on Super Tuesday, the Reverend Jesse Jackson finished first in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Virginia. The significance of that accomplishment cannot be overstated, for it shows that the modern abolitionist movement is still alive and well.

In many ways, the legend of the Civil Rights Movement—when legal discrimination was declared illegal in the South—has much in common with the rest of the nation. Blacks can now sit at any lunch counter,

but the vast majority are still too poor to buy food. Perhaps a sign of changing times is the different migration pattern that characterizes the South today.

Today, as opposed to before the Civil Rights Movement, when thousands of Blacks left the rural [areas] fleeing racial violence and poverty for destinations like Chicago [IL] and other northern cities today. They are much more likely to leave rural Georgia and head north to Atlanta, leave the Mississippi Delta and travel south to Jackson, Mississippi, or leave rural Alabama and move to Birmingham.

But similarities to the result when they travel North, far too many Black people in the modern South, get to the city and discover that the only opportunity available to them is to get on welfare—which is no opportunity at all. Handicapped by the visting of an educational system which remains, in many localities, separate but unequal. All too often, many turn to drugs, crime, and prostitution in turn to survive. As a result, where other Black refugees from the South once teemed into northern ghettos, today they flock into the ghettos of Southern cities closer to home.

On one hand, Blacks who could not vote 25 years ago have now elected mayors in Atlanta, Birmingham, and other segregated cities. There is even a Black congressman from Mississippi, Michael [Mike] Espy, the first in over 100 years. But one, on the other hand, Blacks are forced to migrate into too many big, large ghettos, seeking to escape grinding rural poverty—progress alongside extreme stagnation.

Atlanta, with its prosperous Black middle class and well-known Black government officials, has a higher poverty rate than any major American city except Newark, New Jersey. From 1970 to 1980, the portion of Atlanta's population living in poverty rose from 20.4% to 27.5%.

Yet people still migrate to southern cities in today's South because life in rural areas is harder still. Even where Blacks, by sheer force of numbers and court orders, have attained a measure of political power, the lack of economic power has left the rural South an isolated place where thousands of descendants of slaves are no longer needed to work on plantations.

Even where Blacks have control of municipalities and county governments, the white men who own the banks, farms, and businesses are still in control. In Mississippi, where over 35% of the population, there are over 400 Black elected officials. But most are mayors and officials in small towns with very few resources available to improve the life of the population. At the same time, at large elections, second primaries, and other schemes to dilute the voting strength remain, falling but slowly as the same lawsuits are heard in courts throughout the southern region.

Thus, while the number of Black elected officials represents a quorum over 20 years ago, it remains minor in comparison to the Black proportion of the population. In Mississippi, Blacks are still less than 10% of all elected officials, and no Black has been elected to a statewide office since Reconstruction. Nearly 40% of all Blacks in the state live in poverty. So, in many ways, the new South is different from the old, but there are still far too many similarities.

Today, abolitionists are still fighting for economic and political power to make the South's transformation complete and even though the movement today is not always in the national headlines and takes different forms from years ago, it is still pressing forward. For example, in Mississippi alone, there have been about ten boycotts in the last few months in Indianola, Senatobia, Natchez, Brookhaven, and Raymond—from

the northern to the southern end of the state. In most cases, local Blacks have come together to protest injustices in the local school system, where Black-majority districts are still controlled by white administrators, or the separate and unequal system of justice, which still prevails and makes it less of a crime—or no crime at all—to attack a Black person.

Modern abolitionists are using the court system to knock down discriminatory election laws which still curtail Black voting power. In a case which will have national implications, a federal judge ruled last year that Mississippi's system of electing circuit and chancery court judges discriminates against Blacks. When relief is granted, Blacks should be able to elect Black attorneys as judges—perhaps the most crucial of all our branches of government.

We are all familiar with the demonstrations against racism in Forsyth County, Georgia, and with the struggles of Blacks in Alabama's Black Belt to control their own destinies against racism and the intervention of the Reagan Justice Department. Victories are still being won, but there is still a long way to go.

In reality, the destiny of the South is intertwined with that of the rest of the nation. Today's abolitionists are not just fighting a problem confined to one region. Too many people, Black and white, are unable to eat. They are at the table, but the struggle today is to ensure that everyone at the table eats food.

Moderator: I'd like to thank all four panelists, each with a different but equally valuable perspective. As someone who has chaired many panels, I have never seen a panel of four people adhere so strictly to the notion of being brief. Really, it's quite wonderful, and I feel they have had such a short say that I'm going to exercise the moderator's prerogative to ask the first question.

It will be 28 years ago tomorrow that the founding conference that led to SNCC was held. Here we are now, looking [back] and trying to make sense of it in retrospect. To ask a very broad question—one that will surely echo over the next several days in one form or another—would each of you like to say briefly, as you look back, what you think the single greatest achievement of SNCC was during its days of success in the early to mid-1960s?

Too big a question?

Joanne Grant: It's hard to say what the single greatest achievement was, it seems to me. I suppose just the creation of SNCC as an entity was its single greatest achievement because of what Mary was saying about the way it functioned. It was so innovative, so imaginative, so creative, and basically so democratic.

Howard Zinn: I was gonna say exactly the same thing in exactly the same words—well, something like that. I wasn't—but I was thinking along the same lines. And maybe it's because all of us who were involved with SNCC had the same feeling about it. It wasn't a specific accomplishment. It wasn't about putting pressure on the government to get a law passed, or to get signs removed, or to get the [Voting Rights Act](#) finally passed. Or do this, or do that.

It was a remarkable and unique example of how social change can be achieved, of how people who were blocked by the channels that be—who had been rebuffed and ignored by the Supreme Court, the

President, Congress, and all the organs of American society that they tell us in elementary school are going to solve our problems for us.

It was the perfect example of how seeing their neglect, very ordinary people got together, banded together, organized, sacrificed, put their energy and their lives on the line, and I think created a model for what social movements can do and for how social movements should be. One of the things that struck me is that people often think—maybe especially if they haven't been involved in a social movement and are looking at it from afar—one thinks, "Well, it's too serious, it's too hard, it's too grim, it's too sacrificial, it's too martyr-like. It's no fun."

My wife and I saw *School Daze* the other night. You know, it's about Black college kids having fun, just having fun. And at the end of it—the fraternities and sororities— but there's one guy, one student, one Black student, who's trying to get the others interested in apartheid in South Africa and social issues. At the end of the movie, everybody assembles and he comes out in the midst of them and cries, "Wake up! Wake up!" And I thought there's one thing that needs to be said to those people who wanted to have fun—and to anybody who wants to have fun.

And this is what I saw again and again in SNCC, and what I felt in SNCC was that it was the most beautiful, most fascinating, most alive time for the people who were in it. It was something—fun is too trivial a word to describe the kind of feeling that people had when they were doing what they were doing, doing not just for themselves, but doing for others. It seems to me, that sense of coming alive—of feeling more human than you ever had before—is what SNCC people felt, what they showed to others, and what I think they show to those people who look at it to coming generations.

Moderator: Mary, would you or June like to add or amplify?

Mary King: Well, it's a difficult question that you ask. Certainly, there was a two-century-old, if not longer, tradition of grassroots resistance. From the earliest days of slavery, there were all sorts of efforts to overturn and end slavery, including petitions, which didn't work, work stoppages, and all sorts of devices [of] buying one's way into freedom, and finally, armed resistance. There was a long tradition of resistance, faith, and endurance. But what was remarkable about SNCC was that it came together and, despite its almost anti-ideological position—particularly in the early years—it developed a framework for social change that spark-plugged and catalyzed a whole series of other movements.

There was no guidebook for how to organize. A lot of the very basic principles of organizing, subsequently used by Saul Alinsky, in the grape strike in California, and any number of other movements and endeavors.³ We took some from the labor movement, it's true. We took some from experiences here. We took some from study. But primarily, the tactics that were developed grew out of the experience and engagement with the people in the Black Belt counties where we were working.

That movement went on to catalyze the emergence of the modern women's movement, which we will talk about more. It was certainly the spark plug for the resistance to the Vietnam War. Those two movements

³ The Delano Grape Strike of 1965–1970, led by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, was deeply influenced by the grassroots organizing principles of Saul Alinsky, whose teachings—transmitted through the Community Service Organization—shaped the strike's strategies of protest, empowerment, and direct action.

profoundly influenced the techniques used by the environmental conservation and preservation movements. One of our volunteers launched the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley. If you look at where people are now, you see the tentacles extending from SNCC throughout the intervening almost three decades. And if you go now to places like Poland and South Africa, even Lebanon—there was a demonstration in Lebanon by people who had been disabled by the war in Lebanon, and they were singing “We Shall Overcome.”

While that is not distinctively SNCC, it is the movement as a whole—the freedom songs we sang, which were an expression of belief, psychology, yearning, hope, assuaging of anxiety, declaration of intention, fomentation, and everything else. Those freedom songs are all over the world. “We Shall Overcome” has been sung in Shona, Hindi, and many, many languages.

Curiously enough, I have had many requests for my book recently from the West Bank and Gaza Strip from people there who say we have suddenly begun to realize that armed struggle may not be the best model for their movement. The American Civil Rights Movement is a better model because it is based on an appeal for dignity and rights and based on the premise of coexistence. So if we are getting requests for my book from the West Bank and Gaza, I would say that the impact of SNCC is still alive.

Moderator: June, how does it look from where you sit? What is SNCC’s greatest achievement?

June Johnson: I would say, growing up in Mississippi as a child, I never had the opportunity to have an outside summer vacation. My vacation was either cleaning some white person’s house or chopping cotton in the Mississippi Delta. That was the gist of my summer activities before getting involved with SNCC. There was a sense of frustration growing up after hearing about the [Emmett Till](#) situation and not understanding a lot in that situation—other than the fact that a Black boy had been castrated, murdered, and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. [There was] not a lot of conversation based on our parents’ understanding and their fear and wanting to continue to live and survive within that community.

Seeing additional things happen, not just outside my family but directly to my family. My mother, in particular, was very actively involved in SNCC and kept everybody very healthy. I think [Guyot](#) and Julian and [Judy Richardson](#) and [Dorie] and many others ate many pieces of her cornbread because she was the cook of SNCC. She passed in [19]66, and I think, as a result of my going to jail in 1963 in Winona [MS] and coming out to learn that [Medgar \[Evers\] had been killed](#), it was a decision that I made. After being beaten very badly in the Winona jail and to see the suffering of Mrs. Hamer, I made a commitment to myself from that day. I didn’t care what happened to me. I was going to be free or continue to be part of a struggle to fight for the freedom of people of this country.

When I walked out of jail in [19]63, I knew nothing else. And I have done nothing else. I have lived my life struggling from the time I got involved in the movement in Mississippi. One of the biggest enjoyment that I’ve ever had in my life is to have met those persons that came to my hometown and taught me to become a first-class citizen. I take this opportunity to say to each of you, I am appreciative of that. I am glad that you taught me how to fight for the rights of those who cannot fight for themselves. So that’s how I see SNCC—it is the greatest institution that has ever existed.

Moderator: Questions. Let's turn to that. Jack, we go until six o'clock? Is that the idea? If you have a question to ask, we'll try to see if there's a clear place to try to answer your question, certainly in a loud voice over the benefit of the panelists and the benefit of others in the audience.

Audience Question [Bob Zellner]: I can't talk very loud, but I'll try. I have a question, and as we would usually do, if we had something to say, we would put it in the form of a question. I have a small thing to say on that last question, and I'd like to put it in the form of a question.

One of the most important contributions I think SNCC made, and one of the most important things it did, was to give us in this country—in terms of political struggle—the concept of the mass struggle, or the community struggle as a whole. Because it was brought home to me, very importantly, a few years after the SNCC years, when I was involved with other political organizations and so forth.

I would hear about someone having a mass march and I would ask, "How many people did you have?" They'd say, "We had 40 people." And then I would remember what a mass march was really like, when SNCC mobilized entire communities, from the wino on the street, to the cab driver right up on through the preachers and the teachers and the general home directory. When we had a movement in a state or a town it involved everybody from the bottom to the top. So I just wanted to ask, do you think that was important?

Moderator: If you'll permit the moderator a word, I was reading through Mary's book and finished it last evening. Claiborne Parsons—who I don't know whether he's here now but will be coming later in the weekend if he's not—remarks in his afterword that he thought SNCC's greatest historical importance lay in its success in releasing the untapped energies of ordinary people who discovered their ability to do extraordinary things. And I think that's basically what you were talking about, and it seems to be a useful summary of certainly one of the most important achievements.

Audience Question [Lawrence Guyot]: Yes, wait—I want to go back to Joanne's statement because I want to respond to this question. Jesse Jackson is now told that he's unqualified. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in [19]64, it was unqualified at the time. That they should stick to civil rights and leave politics [indistinct].

Jesse Jackson is fighting about the problem and the need for inclusion, and having decisions move from the bottom up. We fought in [19]64 and beyond—Andy [Andrew] Young, the Democratic Party, the labor movement, and the entire civil rights organizations. Jesse Jackson is fighting the same enemies, those who he is not captivating by the [indistinct].

So my question really is, would you agree that the Jesse Jackson campaign is not as great as SNCC's political [indistinct], but a continuation of that?

Moderator: Before you respond, I should say that was Lawrence Guyot who was the head of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party for four or five years. May I also ask that if movement people ask questions, perhaps they identify themselves? Students and others don't have to, but that might be a good rule of thumb. Joanne, the question, I think, was directed to you.

Joanne Grant: Yes, I certainly would think it's an extension. I think that where we are now is an extension of everything—it comes from where we came from. I mean, starting way back, but particularly emphasizing the '60s movement. I think it had a tremendous influence on where we are today, and Jesse Jackson's campaign definitely stems out of it. There's no question in my mind.

The question of his being unqualified—he answers that very well. He says that in terms of experience in government, what the President needs is the ability to pick the right people for the right jobs. But the President also needs leadership qualities, which he has. And he names several other things that he thinks a President needs, things that he says he has. But in addition to that, he talks about his experience in foreign policy. He points out that he has talked with more heads of state than any of the other candidates, and that he's done a lot of negotiating. And you know, this business of being unqualified is just—well, I was going to say a bad word, but I'm not going to say.

Lawrence Guyot: In my opinion, you just brought up another similarity. When the Freedom Democratic Party was positioned against Vietnam, we were told like he was told today: you shouldn't be involved in foreign policy.

Moderator: Howard, did you—I know you have an announcement you want to make. Did you also want to respond?

Howard Zinn: Well, I just wanted to say, in response to Guyot, or along with Guyot, that the most qualified people—the most qualified people were people running the country when we got into Vietnam, and we stayed in Vietnam. They had terrific qualifications. They had all the degrees, right? They had all the experience. They were Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Chi Nu, and everything else.

And you know, it seems to me one of the great lessons we can learn from history is that this business of qualifications, and the criteria they give us to determine who is qualified, are things we should immediately discard and start using our own.

Audience Question: I'm from New York City and it seems like we're up South. There's racism going on in our city. Many people are killed by police—Black and Latino—and it seems like people were fighting for the right to vote in the [19]60s, the right to an education, but now people are fighting for the right to eat, the right to have homes.

Homelessness...[indistinct] more than practically six million Americans are homeless. And I just want to ask a question. The federal plan to, more or less, get rid of the homeless problems, to open up abandoned military camps around the country—600 of them to be exact. Do you think that opening up these abandoned military camps and driving poor people out of the inner cities into these camps is the answer to homelessness?

June Johnson: I remember in Washington County [MS], back in late 1965 or 1966, when problems arose there in reference to housing. If I recall, Frank Smith and Gene Smith were part of that project. People working as sharecroppers on plantations were living in old shanty houses. They decided they were not going to continue living in those conditions. Every person that lived in the Washington County area, in what is now called Freedom City, Mississippi, took a stand.

It's a historical event that takes place there every year. The Mississippi Delta Blues Festival takes place there. These people walked off the plantation and said, "We will not go back and live in that condition." Every person was placed under arrest on the Air Force Base. They stayed in jail that entire winter until they got national attention. As a result, today, that little community became a community of people with self-determination. These people built their own homes, they got money from private institutions or wherever.

But I think what needs to happen in this society, in terms of homelessness, is that we as a people need to have major demonstrations all over this country to let the government know that we are very serious about people not sleeping on the streets in the wealthiest country in this society. I think the plight is ours and we must make somebody listen to us.

Audience Question: First, I'd like to comment on [indistinct]. To June, I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, and I escaped in 1971 to come North where I thought things would be different. I've been living [indistinct].

And what I'd like to ask you, which plays off your [other audience member's] question: In this day and age, in the North, we are still having problems with segregated schools. We have a state commissioner who has proposed a program that is being miserably treated in the press and in politics. I would like to know if you four have any advice for us down South or in places like the Hartford area, as to how we can deal with the continuing problem of segregated education?

June Johnson: My response would be that you should pull together the parents and teachers that uphold that type of behavior and develop a very strong PTA association. I'm actively involved in Washington, D.C., along with Larry Guyot, with one of the strongest political parents' groups in the city. And believe me, we do get heard.

Unknown Moderator: Anyone else wish to comment on that?

Joanne Grant: No, I agree with June. That's the only way to do it.

Unknown Moderator: I think we can take one more question. There is one—I can see it through the glare of these lights. Yes, sir?

Audience Question [Ron Bailey]: Ron Bailey, [indistinct] University of Mississippi. I want to ask a question about leadership. You mentioned Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer. And I just want to ask—also, you spoke about Dr. King being viewed as the center of the movement. I wonder if you could say something about grassroots leadership, SNCC's role in that, and its impact.

My sense is that today, many young people, especially, don't know these leaders. Part of what you're struggling with is how to bring the memory of these leaders and their needs back as a way of creating new role models. Can you speak to the impact this had on your development?

Mary King: Well, the notion that the movement was made up of the followers of Dr. King is such a grotesque distortion of reality that those of us who were involved—who are here with you—almost don't

know how to respond. It is hard to put into words. It is hard to articulate because it was so much the antithesis of the truth.

The fact of the matter is that, yes, Dr. King was an extraordinary figure and orator, and his impact through television helped people overcome their fear. We must remember that many people were dreadfully afraid. They stood to lose everything—not only their jobs, not only their homes, but also their lives—for any deviation from the protocols of segregation. Dr. King helped isolated rural people through his messages, through his speaking, through television and media communication. He helped them to overcome their fear. But he did not organize them. He could not organize them from a television.

Who were the organizers in the Black Belt counties of the South? They were people that are here at this conference. And who were the leaders of those communities who were thrust up? They were people who had been living there. That was based on our philosophy that leadership was inherent in everyone. And if there is any one person that I think deserves the credit for that as a framework, it's probably Ella Baker. She profoundly influenced many of us with her beliefs, which had been constructed through a lifetime of organizing.

She was born in 1903 and was organizing all during the 1920s and 1930s with the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. She was a founder of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], a founder of the NAACP. She was there when SCLC was born. She was the person who took \$800 from SCLC for the first conference on SNCC. She is the person that you find repetitively from the [19]20s through the [19]60s as the pivot, as the catalyst for many of the civil rights organizations. She profoundly believed that there is leadership in everyone, even in the most humble hamlet. From that, we took the belief that our job was to identify individuals with that potential and to elicit that which was already there from them.

In fact, there were thousands of people who demonstrated leadership. Many of them will never be noted in the history books. But as Guyot and many others can say, the leadership was there, and it was abundant. The courage was extraordinary. People born into the most debilitating circumstances, the most extreme oppression that this society has been capable of, were able to show the most unbelievable leadership qualities. This is the true story of the movement. And were Dr. King here with us right now, he would agree.

Joanne Grant: I would just like to say one thing on that question. The leadership that functioned in the movement in the [19]60s came out of movements that had existed in the South for a long time. You found Amzie Moore, for instance—he was somebody with whom Ella Baker had worked very early, and he was very key in voter registration work in Mississippi. But there were a lot of local people like that who had been working before the [19]60s and continued to work during the [19]60s. One of the great things about the [19]60s movement was that it spanned generations. It was a continuum. The movement was a continuum.

Howard Zinn: I just want to follow up on what Joanne was saying because it seems to me such an important point. History tends to be written around these great cataclysmic events. So you'll hear people say, "The Civil Rights Movement started in 1955 with the Montgomery Bus Boycott," or "Things started

in 1960 with the sit-ins." It's easier to think of things that way, but it's misleading because it doesn't explain—where did it come from? Did it come out of nowhere?

How many people know that before the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, there was a bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1952? Or that between 1900 and 1906, there were boycotts of streetcars all over the South? If you could trace it—and you have to work at this, you have to look at the tracks, which are very faint now—you could trace the connections going all the way back to the turn of the century and before that.

I think of William Monroe Trotter, a Black leader in Boston who is mostly not known, but he organized a demonstration against Booker T. Washington at the turn of the century, and he was arrested.⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois was so filled with indignation at this arrest that he called a gathering at Niagara called the Niagara Conference. This led to the formation of the NAACP.

The formation of the NAACP led not just to creating a legal organization in New York or a fundraising organization—it led to little groups throughout the South, NAACP chapters, youth chapters of the NAACP, in which people who were not known, who were not heroes, who were not leaders in the conventional sense, carried on remarkable struggles.

Some of the kids who participated in the 1960 sit-ins had been involved in local chapters of the NAACP. Rosa Parks was not just a person who just happened to be sitting in the wrong place on the bus in Montgomery, just because, as they said, she was just tired. Other people had been tired. But she had been to [Highlander Folk School](#). She had been in the local NAACP. The connections go on and on over the decades and generations. People carried it on.

It's important to know this because otherwise, we will not see the importance of the little things we do that carry on the struggle. The things that don't make the history books but that pass the baton from person to person, from movement to movement—that's what has done the thing throughout history.

Moderator: To Howard the last word—if you still have a small announcement you said you wanted to make, then we better—

Howard Zinn: Yeah, I said I had a small announcement. It's an announcement like Bob Zellner's was a question. In keeping with the notion that we want to recapture this history and make it available, some of us thought—the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York took the leadership in us and contacted me—thought it important to get in touch with the organization that has kept the best records on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—that is, the FBI.

There is a Freedom of Information Act, which is not a great act and has all sorts of problems with it, but it does—with an enormous amount of effort—it sometimes enables you sometimes to get records from very reluctant organizations like the FBI and CIA.

⁴ William Monroe Trotter, a radical Black journalist, was arrested in 1903 for publicly challenging Booker T. Washington's views, an event that intensified ideological divisions and helped pave the way for W.E.B. Du Bois's 1905 Niagara Movement, which laid important groundwork for the later founding of the NAACP.

So, we want to make an appeal to those people here who were connected with SNCC and who, therefore, because of that connection, can request their files or the files of SNCC from local offices around the country. To indicate that they would be willing to do this, to sign the request and join a little group that is trying to contact our favorite organization, the FBI, and get this information from them. Thank you.

Moderator: I'd like to thank Joanne, Howard, Mary, and June for getting these three days off to such a wonderful start. I'll now turn things back. Jack, did you have anything to say by way of closing announcements?

Jack Chatfield: A couple of very brief words. I made a very, very serious omission in my introductory remarks. Between 7:30 and 8:00 tonight, a very distinguished blues and gospel singer named Sparky Rucker is going to perform for about a half-hour before the beginning of the 8:00 panel. Knowing that the SNCC people may begin conversations which they'll have a difficult time ending, I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Rucker performs until 8:15. But he'll be here in this room. I owe Mike [Michael] Honey of Wesleyan [University] an apology for having forgotten that, and I owe Mr. Rucker an apology as well. This is included on the revised schedule.

For the SNCC people, the friends of SNCC, and the handful of scholars and journalists who are here—dinner will be served in the faculty dining room in Hamlin, which is in this direction. You'll see people drifting back in a kind of modest mass march—nothing like the old days, of course. As I'm quick to observe.

Trinity students who wish to help with essential tasks: there are going to be people who will need rides back to their hotels at various times of the day. Equally important, those staying in the homes of faculty members or members of the Trinity staff on the fringe of the college will need help finding these places once the events are over. So, if students—perhaps not so much right now, but after the evening panel—any students who wish to help guide or transport someone to his or her house, we would very much appreciate that. Thank you.

Ron Bailey: I want to make just a brief announcement. I really hope this is not inappropriate. My name is Ron [Ronald] Bailey from the University of Mississippi, and we're making an effort, in conjunction with Doug Harris of Rio Productions, to produce a film to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Medgar Evers. I'm concerned that some of you might be leaving the conference at various times. We very much need your assistance in making this film on Medgar Evers. If you would contact me, Marilyn, or Doug, we'd like to interview you and record your recollections on tape. We'll be around for the next two or three days taping the conference and interviewing. Thank you.