SNCC 28th Anniversary Conference: “Alabama Bound: Selma, and the Lowndes County Black Panther Party, 1964-1966”

We Shall Not Be Moved: The Life and Times of SNCC 1960 - 1966 Conference
Date: April 16, 1988
Location: Trinity College - Hartford, CT

Host:
Jack Chatfield - Professor of American History, Trinity College

Songs By:
Hollis Watkins - Field Secretary, SNCC McComb, Hattiesburg, and Greenwood, Mississippi, 1961-1966; Director of Social Service, Child Development Group of Mississippi, 1967-1971

Moderator:
Cheryl Greenberg - Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of History, Trinity College

Panelists:
Silas Norman**:** - Sit-in leader, Payne College, Augusta, 1960; Field Director, SNCC Alabama project, Selma, 1964-1965

Martha Norman Prescod - Field Secretary, SNCC Mississippi, 1963; and Selma, Alabama, 1965-1966; Professor of Afro-American History, University of Toledo and Wayne State University

Robert Mants - Field Secretary, SNCC Southwest Georgia project; 1962-1963; Project Coordinator, SNCC Lowndes County project, 1964-1965; County commissioner, Lowndes County

John Jackson (Field Secretary, SNCC Lowndes County, 1964-1966; Mayor of White Hall, Alabama, 1980-1988

Hollis Watkins: So to begin the process, we want everybody to begin—can you hear me in the back? Can you hear me in the back? Extreme back? Okay, then I just ask it, because it didn't seem as if people had begun to move this way, and I was wondering whether you heard me or not. So asking people to move down this way so we can begin.

I still woke up this morning with my mind on freedom, I don't know about everybody else. And since I woke up with my mind on freedom, I want you to know that, and I feel like singing a few verses of "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Freedom."

The other thing that I want you to realize is that if you feel like clapping your hands, if you feel like patting your feet, do that. There's nothing wrong with that. You know, that was a song we used to sing in the movement — "We Gonna Do What the Spirit Says Do." So if the spirit moves you to do that, then you do that.

[singing]

I woke up this morning with my mind
My mind, it was stayed on freedom
Oh, well I woke up this morning with my mind,
My mind, it was stayed on freedom…

You know, yesterday we sang a song. [It] was "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around." Now, if you wake up with your mind on freedom, you can definitely say that you ain't gonna let nobody turn you around because you're determined. But in order for you to say that, you have to have another little ingredient to go with that.

And we sang a little bit of that song in a small session last night, so I want us to say it in this session. And to be able to do that, you have to be able to look your enemy in the face and say point blank to him in no uncertain terms:

[singing]

Ain't scared of nobody because I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom.
Ain't scared of nobody, 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom now.

Ain't scared of your jails, 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom.
Ain't scared of your jails 'cause I want my freedom. Freedom. I want my freedom now.

Ain't scared of your dogs 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom.
Ain't scared of your dogs 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom now.

Ain't scared of your sticks 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom.

Ain't scared of your sticks 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom. I want my freedom now.

You know, in the [19]60s, people talked a little bit about the Kennedys and we did a song in the [19]60s that we asked the Kennedys to do something for us, and I'd like us to sing a couple of verses of that song. We call it "Calypso Freedom."

[singing]

Freedom. Freedom. Give us freedom.
Freedom come and it won't be long.
Come on Mr. Kennedy, take me out my misery
Freedom come and it won't be long…

Thank you.

Jack Chatfield: …had to interrupt Hollis because we can only use this room today until 6:30 because there's an event, a social event, this evening. We've got three panels between now and that time, and we don't want to crowd any of them. I have some quick announcements.

I'm reminded this panel is supposed to end in 40 minutes, but it may be a little longer than that. A couple of announcements: stay off Summit Street. Stay out of the curbside parking on Summit Street, or you may be towed by the Hartford Police Department I've been told.

SNCC people, we've got to get an exact count on the banquet list. If any SNCC person, scholar, journalist, has not signed up for tonight's banquet, please do that in the lobby.

Tomorrow morning at the Summit Hotel, we have reserved a room for anybody who's still there at the summit. Books and records are on sale downstairs in the Trinity College bookstore. They could not arrange a table up here. So if you want books by any of the conference participants—those that are still in print and which we could get— they're on sale in the bookstore, which is on the first, on the basement level of Mather Hall.

Mendy Samstein asked me to announce that there is going to be a meeting of all teachers — secondary school—all teachers of... Mendy, where are you? I don't know if this includes college professors, so not anybody can come to the meeting. There's a teachers' meeting, which will be held during the lunch break. It'll be held at the tables or toward the back of this hall, between the two panels.

This morning's panel. Are we all ready to begin now? This morning's panel is devoted to what occurred in Alabama under SNCC's guidance between 1964 and 1966. It is fortunate that Stokely Carmichael, now called Kwame Ture, is here, and I hope actually is here in the room. So you'll have some things to say, I'm sure, after this panel, and Kwame will be on this afternoon's panel.

The moderator of this morning's panel is my colleague in the history department, Professor Cheryl Greenberg, and indeed, she is one of the ones who worked most closely on this conference and whose energy was indispensable for the events that have occurred during the course of these last two and a half days. Cheryl Greenberg will introduce the panelists.

Cheryl Greenberg: Thank you. I want to begin by taking the prerogative of the chair to make a couple of comments. First of all, I just want to say how pleased and really honored I am to have been able to meet you all. There's been a lot of debate during these past few days, and I'm sure we'll continue, about the role of SNCC.

But I just want to say, as someone who was very young when this all started, that as far as I'm concerned, in my generation, you really have changed the world—at least for us and for people who have come after me. So thank you.

Second, and only slightly from the point, as a revisionist historian, I feel compelled to make a statement about my profession and my understanding of the term. While I grant virtually everything that was said about revisionist historians and certain problems with it, I just want to present another alternative view.

As someone who grew up at a time that history meant white male people in political power, I just want to say that I'm proud to be a revisionist historian, because I think that revisionist history, among other things, has added two things to the question of history.

First of all, it's added a new dimension to traditional history. It has questioned, for example, American culpability in foreign affairs, in the Cold War, things like that.

Second of all, I think revisionists have broadened the question of history from white males and political power to include the lives and the struggles of Blacks, of other minorities, of women, of the poor and the disenfranchised. And I just want to say, I'm glad that we're trying to do that. So that's just the other side of the revisionist history question.

Welcome, after all that, to the first panel of the last day of the SNCC conference. If the past few days' worth of comments are any indication, we've come to a rather difficult period in SNCC history. We're approaching the moments of tension in SNCC when those tensions became most visible and pronounced.

Just to use an understatement—tensions between SNCC's original position of nonviolence and, quite, the rising questions of Black Power and self-protection, and tensions between SNCC interracialism and later questions of Black separatism and the idea that Blacks ought to take control of their own future.

So our panel is devoted to the beginning of that larger question in Alabama, and I will introduce the panelists—not quite in order, but close enough.

And our first speaker is Silas Norman. You'll know him as a sit-in leader from Paine College in Augusta in 1960, Field Director of SNCC, the Alabama Project in Selma in particular, 1964 and [19]65. He's now Medical Director of Southern Michigan Prison, which he reminds me to tell you has a dubious honor of being the largest walled prison in the world.

Silas Norman: Good morning. As we approach the topic this morning, I'm sure, as all of the other speakers over the last number of days, we have thought about any number of ways to approach it. I think what I will do—as I realize over the last several days there are many small details that I do not remember. What I will try to do is give you an overview of how I got to Selma, and then the other speakers will take you from there.

There's a song called "Ordinary People." "God uses people, ordinary people, like you and like me, to do His will. No matter if you give Him your all, no matter how small your all may be, little becomes much when you place it in the Master's hand."

The story of SNCC and the story of Selma is a story of ordinary people. And if there is anything that we need to remember after this conference, it's that thousands of ordinary people made this movement. There's been some talk in the last several days about connectedness, and I want to talk a little bit about connectedness.

There's someone in this audience who knew me in about 1960–61, and I didn't know her. Connie Curry was at Paine College, where I went to undergraduate school, as a representative from the National Student Association during a conference, which we used to have annually in the spring. During the spring—it was an unusual thing in Georgia—there were white students from all of the schools around Georgia, as well as Black students, coming to the Methodist school that I attended for spring conference.

And during that conference—it was in the early days of the sit-ins—we decided on that Saturday afternoon that we would give them a new experience. And we took young Southern white students, young Southern Black students on a demonstration downtown. This was a new experience for them. It was, let us just say, that the parents went crazy. By Saturday evening, Sunday morning, many of the parents of the young white students from around the state came to pick them up.

We were criticized and applauded alternately about our involvement in that activity, but that was our way of saying we understand some of what is going on in the South, and we were taking steps, organizing in ways we thought we needed to organize to deal with the problem.

I'm the first of five living children of working parents in Augusta, Georgia. The connectedness doesn't just start there. Augusta, Georgia has a rich legacy of a number of things, which I will not go into. Some of the significant personages in Black history lived and moved there.

At Paine College during that time, we knew about Mr. [James] Lawson in Nashville. There's some other personages like Harry Ashmore, a white activist in the South. We were influenced by the Atlanta Committee on Appeal for Human Rights very profoundly. There were, of course, being in Georgia, there were people from all over Georgia. There were people in Augusta from Atlanta. And in that way, I got to go to Atlanta as a leader and meet Benjamin Brown, who was a contemporary of Julian Bond, and to meet Ruby Doris and others.

And later, when I would go to graduate school in Atlanta at Atlanta University, I would be in the same class. In fact, Tom Gaither from CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] and I were in the same biology program. We learned much more about each other's history at that time, so that the history and the connectedness was very important.

I was Vice President of the State of Georgia Youth and College Chapters of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] a very, very supportive organization to us in those early days.

I left Atlanta University and went to the University of Wisconsin and became president of the Student Council on Civil Rights. It was from that place, being connected there with all of the other activists at the University of Wisconsin—if you know anything about the University of Wisconsin, you will know that there were many student activists there, of many persuasions.

I remember being called into the Dean of Students' office, and he explained to me that being from Georgia, perhaps I didn't understand that I was associating with the wrong people.

It was from that place that I was recruited by Mary Varela, now Maria Varela, to participate in the Selma Literacy Project.[1] This was in the summer of 1964. I'm not sure how Mary found me, but through that connectedness, through her knowledge of people at the University of Wisconsin who knew what I was involved in, I was recruited to the Selma Literacy Project.

I had considered going to the Mississippi Freedom Summer. Ivanhoe Donaldson and the Freedom Singers had come to the University of Wisconsin. The Freedom Singers were late, and Ivanhoe Donaldson talked for about two hours, and I knew that at that moment I had to go back home, and I had to follow Ivanhoe. And so I was going to the Mississippi Freedom Summer. But then Mary Varela recruited me for the Selma Literacy Project.

I, along with James Wiley from Gary, Indiana; Carol Lawson from New York; Karen House from Washington, D.C.; made up that project.

Now, Bernard Lafayette has told you about what was happening in Selma up until 1963. At the time we arrived in Selma, Selma was under what they called the injunction. There was an

[1] The Selma Literacy Project aimed to empower Black communities in Alabama through voter education, literacy training, and political organizing during the height of the voting rights struggle.

injunction against mass meetings, against voter registration action, against anything. So that at the time we arrived in Selma, we were supposed to be undercover, because there were not supposed to be any gatherings.

And we lived, or we worked, in the Good Samaritan Mission—so, Catholic mission there—where the priests and the nuns lived, and that's where our offices were. Mary lived in the white community, and we lived in the Black community, because we didn't want anybody to know what we were doing. And our meetings at the Black churches and in the homes of the people in Selma were supposed to be secret.

And we were told very specifically in order to do our jobs, we couldn't be in jail. Mary made it very clear that we were to stay clear of the SNCC people, because if we got involved with the SNCC staff, we'd be in jail, and we couldn't do the literacy project. And it was important for us to do the literacy project.

We must have lasted about two, two and a half weeks, because on July the fourth or fifth, 1964, the Public Accommodations Act was passed, and we heard on that day that some of the old SNCC staff was down at the office, which happened to be across the street from the jail, cleaning it up and getting ready to move into action again.

And we decided during lunch that, in spite of Mary's warnings, that we would go down to the SNCC office and we'd help them clean up over lunch. However, on the way to the SNCC office, we decided, since the Public Accommodations Act had been passed, we would stop at a place called the Thirsty Boy, a white drive-in restaurant.

At first, we decided we'd drive in, and we said, "No, we don't want to drive in. We'll park across the street." So we parked across the street, and we went into the Thirsty Boy. We went up to the counter. They wouldn't serve us. So we decided, "Well, we'll sit down."

That's when I met Jim Clark. The Sheriff of Dallas County [AL], Jim Clark, entered without a word. I will never forget—I was facing the door—accompanied by a number of other white men in various kinds of uniforms, because it seems like a number of cars pulled up out there. He didn't say a word. He walked over to me, and that was my first experience with cattle prods. And let me tell you, it worked. I was trying to decide which car to get in, not whether we were going to jail. That afternoon, after hearing about our arrest, the demonstrations started again in earnest.

Now, you need to know that the staff in Alabama, before the influx of other SNCC staff from Mississippi and Georgia, was made up primarily of people from Alabama, primarily of people from Selma. So that I won't forget some of the names—high school students from Hudson High School had been the vanguard of that movement—people like Terry Shaw, Cleophas Hobbs, the Robertson brothers, Willie C [Ricks]. and Charles.

William Scott. Betty Fikes, whose voice you will hear on one of the films about Selma. Avery Williams, Sammy Williams, Alfred Austin, Eugene Pritchett.

Any number of persons were responsible for organizing that movement, and it was the indigenous staff that was in the office on the day that we got arrested. And they decided after we were arrested, that they would then go to the movies in downtown Selma.

And for the next 11 days, as we sat in the Dallas County Jail, hundreds of people filled the jails, and about 11 days later, we were released on bond, which had been sent down from the North and through the many other channels that SNCC usually used. That was then the reopening of the movement, to some extent. That was the summer of 1964.

Soon after that—at that time, I was not a SNCC staff member. I was on the Selma Literacy Project. I was supposed to be on the ground, but our cover had been blown. So Mary Varela introduced me to Jim Forman, and he allowed me to join the SNCC staff and so on.

The first project director who returned after the return of action was John Love. And at that time, in the fall of 1964, our actions consisted of getting ready to move in mass action again. And so what we would do—we were still sort of undercover—the SNCC workers would go out to homes of members in the wards, in the various parts of the city who would allow us to come. They would invite in their neighbors, and we would go into the homes and talk about voter registration and started to get ourselves ready to move into action again.

We felt that it was very important that we were knowledgeable and prepared, because we were going to move to break an injunction, and we were going to once again incur the wrath of Jim Clark and his cronies. We continued to involve ourselves in that way.

Also, you must understand that one of the active organizations in the community was the Dallas County Voters League. That is the organization to which Mrs. Amelia Boynton, who has been mentioned earlier, was a part. Her husband had been a part before he died in 1963. Later, Councilmen like Reverend [Frederick] Reese, Mrs. [Marie] Foster, other very active community persons were in the Dallas County Voters League [DCVL].

The Dallas County Voters League decided at some time in the fall of 1964 that they wanted to invite in Dr. King to spark the movement. And so in January of 1965, in the midst of our preparation to move again, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was invited to Selma.

Needless to say, there were a lot of discussions and philosophical and procedural differences with the organization, but that was mediated by the fact that by then, Diane Nash Bevel, who had originally been in SNCC, then worked for SCLC. James Bevel worked for SCLC [AND] had previously been a SNCC organizer. Bernard Lafayette, who had previously been in SNCC, by then was in SCLC. And those individuals helped us to bridge the gap.

And so immediately we got together, and we decided that we would work together in terms of working in Selma, in terms of organizing in the wards. And so we assigned an SCLC person and a SNCC person to each ward, and for the ward meetings, we would go to the meetings together, and we would essentially try to check each other and try to make sure that we were all working in the same direction.

We felt that there was a lot of—as always, you've heard us talk about grassroots organizing. We felt that that meant we had to be in the communities, living with people the way they were. We had to be with them. And we had to—that large demonstrations were not necessarily productive, that the hard work of organizing was sitting in those small groups and preparing to move in effective ways.

And so there was some disagreement. By then, you will understand that there was some disagreement over the march to Montgomery. And in fact, the organization voted—SNCC voted—not to participate in the march on Montgomery. But as always, there were individuals in SNCC who participated in that march because we had freedom of conscience, if you will. And people were free to participate in any way they wished. And so there were members from SNCC who participated in the first march on Montgomery.

You will remember the pictures. You will remember seeing Hosea Williams from SCLC. And you will remember seeing a picture of John Lewis with a knapsack on his back going down under the batons of the state troopers…with Bob Mants behind him.

At that time, after that incident, I decided that I could no longer sit back and philosophically be opposed to participating in the march. And on the second march on Montgomery, I emptied my pockets, and I prepared to offer my body as a living sacrifice.

We started the march across the bridge for the second time, and as we got to the end of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, state troopers lined up on every side. I noticed they were not moving towards us, and I will remember that Dr. King said—he was a row or two behind me—said, "Let us pray." We prayed, and then the march proceeded to turn around.

Well, Jim Forman was close to me. We were all sort of baffled. Jim was saying, "What's going on? Let's go ahead"—not quite in those words. And as we turned around and headed back across the bridge, there were hundreds of people behind us asking, "What's going on? What's happening? What? What?" We had no idea.

We were to discover later that there had been some agreements with Robert Kennedy, with the government, that that march was not to proceed. Personally, I did not participate in that march again. I felt that we had been betrayed, and I no longer wanted to participate in that. And I felt that I would best spend my energies working with people in the movement, in small groups in Selma.

Now, about that time, SNCC staff had started to arrive to support us, from the Mississippi staff, from the Georgia staff. They had come over. At that time—we had, when I first arrived in Selma, we had one broken-down Jeep, was the vehicle. By that time, we had one car.

And in a caravan, one day, SNCC members will remember that we used Plymouths with radios and large antennas. And on one day, I looked up and Hollis Watkins, who painted these hands on the side of his car—Cynthia Washington—a number of other people came over from Mississippi and Georgia to support us. And the sight of these eight or ten Plymouths coming in front of Brown's Chapel [A.M.E. Church] was quite a sight to see.

And at that point, we were deciding what we were going to do in Alabama. And we decided that it was not productive for us to fight with SCLC, and so members of the staff then decided to move out.

We decided to move to places where we decided they would not come. Accordingly, there are members of the staff here who moved out to Wilcox County. There are members who moved to Greene. Cynthia Washington went to head a project in Greene County. Annie Pearl Avery went to head a project in another town—I can't remember—in Hale County. And then finally, there were staff members who went to Lowndes County: Courtland Cox, Stokely Carmichael—Kwame Ture—Bob Mants, Judy Richardson, Ruth Howard, Jennifer Lawson—there are many other names which Bob will have a chance to mention as he talks about Lowndes County.

But that's the way we got to Lowndes County. The decision was that Lowndes County was so bad that nobody would come in there, showcasing—that was only going to be serious work there, and that we would not be bothered and would not be in conflict. And so we decided to decentralize the movement.

I got a lot of other notes I can't read. I'm going to stop there. Selma, let me just say quickly, the projects in Selma—because again, staff members had an opportunity to devise any projects they wish—the basic project, of course, was voter registration.

But later, as we began to move in Selma—I believe it was Doug Harris [indistinct] and some others who started a unionizing project. And so we decided to unionize the Coca-Cola Company in Selma. In the midst of all of this, there was union organizing going on—the Coca-Cola plant. There was voter registration and some of the other things. I'll stop there.

Cheryl Greenberg: Thank you. We'll hear next from Robert Mants, who was Field Secretary of SNCC Southwest Georgia Project from 1962 to 1963 and Project Coordinator of SNCC Lowndes County Project 1964 to 1965. Nor was his commitment short-term. He's now County Commissioner in Lowndes County.

Robert Mants: Good morning. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Jack Chatfield in Trinity College, for taking whatever it took to bring those of us together who are here—many persons that I have not seen in 25 or more years.

I think as I look back over my movement experience and my involvement in SNCC, I would classify basically the periods in SNCC into four parts.

The early part in 1960, right around 1962, was what I would call the Beloved or Redemptive Community.[2] The period in which nonviolence was not only a philosophy for some of those people in the early days, but also was an attempt to establish nonviolence as a way of life.

The other period—and some of these overlap—was a period of desegregation, while there was more direct action, especially as a test of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

There was another period right after that, would be what I would call the Black Power era, that came right on the heels of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Right before that, too, was also the period of what was called the Great Society program or the anti-poverty program.

That period of time—and some of these periods, again, overlap—was about 1965 to 1967 or 1968.

That's the fourth period that I want to talk about at some point—not here today—but at some later point. I think it's imperative that people understand the period that I call "after the storm." That period after the storm is defined by me as the period after the SNCC workers left the South, and those of us like John Jackson, C.J. [Charles] Jones, Cleve [Cleveland] Sellers, Wendell Paris—we have a different story to tell.

I say that we got the chicken shit between our toes, and we have a different perspective and a different story to tell.

What I try to do now is to talk about giving my personal account of my involvement in the movement. This is my testimony, Reverend [Charles] Sherrod—or what local people would say—how I got in the mess.

I have the unique experience of having seen in SNCC these periods from the Redemptive, Beloved Community, where we were trained in nonviolence and made a serious effort to take nonviolence on as a way of life, to the more nationalistic, much more—what you would call radical—phases of SNCC.

---

[2] Beloved or Redemptive Community describes the early Civil Rights Movement ethos—particularly around 1960–1962—as a spiritually grounded, tightly connected network of activists committed to nonviolence, mutual care, and the moral transformation of society through collective struggle.

I sat there, 1960—I was in the 11th grade, minding my own business. You getting in the mess. Up the street in the next block was the office of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights, the Atlanta Student Movement. Our house was right there on Chestnut Street, right in the midst of the Atlanta University complex. I saw all these folks—these young folks, these young students—marching by my house.

My curiosity led me to stick my nose in other folks' business. At Rush Memorial Church there on Chestnut Street in the next block again, where all these students from Atlanta University Center were gathered. And I was wondering what was happening.

So I went up there. Sat around. They made me—I sat around long enough so—they made me the captain of the picket sign with no soldiers. My job was to look out for the picket signs. Those big placards. I took picket signs where they would come in off from picketing downtown places of public accommodations. My job was to stack the picket signs neatly and orderly and pass them out.

They raised my status in the movement to the manager of custodial services. They paid me $3 [$32.63 in 2025] a week to clean their offices. Some of those people who were there at that time, and I think recruited me and got me involved at that age—were Lonnie King, who at that time was Chairman, Committee on Appeal for Human Rights, the Atlanta Student Movement; Ruby Doris Robinson—Smith, at that time; her sister, Mary Ann Smith [Wilson]; Herschelle Sullivan; James Felder; Marian Wright; Frank Holloway; Julian Bond, to name a few.

At that time, I was the youngest person in the Atlanta Student Movement. They were reluctant to have me involved in much of the direct action that was taking place because I was the youngest. There were legal questions—if we got—if they were going to jail, I would be separated from them. I would go to the juvenile probation thing. But I stayed around anyway, and became involved in some of the sit-ins and demonstrations and some of the other direct action campaigns.

I remember very clearly the first time I met Jim Forman. I had the fortune of also living in Atlanta University complex, where the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights office was in the next block. SNCC, during that same period of time, moved its office off of Auburn Avenue, two blocks from my house, on Raymond Street.

My first encounter with Jim Forman was with the Peyton Road buffer. Some of you might not recall that—it was a direct action campaign in which Blacks were moving into white communities, and there was a buffer. Jim called it the Berlin Wall—to keep Black people from moving across from one section of that street to other sections.[3]

[3] Peyton Road buffer refers to a barricade erected by city officials in Atlanta in the early 1960s to block Black families from entering a previously all-white neighborhood; Jim Forman likened it to the Berlin Wall, underscoring the extreme lengths to which authorities would go to enforce racial segregation and resist integration, even within city infrastructure.

I was also, during that period, a student at Morehouse College. And when SNCC moved its office on Raymond Street, I started hanging around there, sticking my nose in other folks' business. And I met Dottie Zellner, and some other people who were working in the SNCC office during that same period of time.

And I think it's significant and important that I mention this. For the first time, I was introduced to the Nation of Islam through Minister Jeremiah X—some of you might recall—and through another fellow whose name was John Churchville, who raised my level of Black consciousness.

Here I was, a young, impressionable student—SNCC talked about during that time the integration, the love community. And here was this fellow, John Churchville, telling me about being Black and all this stuff. What I did, to find out for myself—after John Churchville [indistinct] nagging me somewhere—I went to the libraries. Went to the Atlanta University Library. I went to the local public libraries and started reading for myself Black history.

And it was that awareness—and that was through John Churchville—that I first became aware of my Black identity.

Some other things happened around that same 1963. [It was] the first time I met Willie Ricks. C.T. Vivian brought Ricks from Chattanooga, dropped him off and said, "This is the SNCC office." Left. Ricks been around all the time—I mean, since that time.

There were several things happening in Atlanta, but the one thing that I remember most during that early period, 1960, was a conversation after Sherrod nagged me to come to southwest Georgia. Here I was, a young student—first generation that is to be college educated—and my parents had suffered and sacrificed for me to go to college. And here's old Sherrod talking to me about coming to southwest Georgia, dropping out of school.

One Sunday morning, I asked my dad to come on the front porch. Sent us to the front porch so we could talk. I told Dad that I wanted to drop out of Morehouse and go work in southwest Georgia. My dad's immediate response was, "You must have been studying too hard. You need a vacation. You got to be crazy."

But something else he said to me—it was many years later before I fully understood what it meant. Without a school, my dad said—I was grown, married, and with family—he said to me, "If you must go, go. Because it's in your blood." I didn't understand that when he said that.

I later went to southwest Georgia, and I'll never forget—this is 1963—and hell had broke loose in southwest Georgia. Three SNCC workers—Ralph Allen, John Perdew, Don Harris—and a worker from CORE, Zev Aelony—were in jail in Americus, Georgia, for insurrection.[4]

[4] The Americus Movement was a local civil rights campaign in Americus, Georgia, during the early 1960s, focused on desegregation and Black voter registration. In 1963, SNCC and CORE activists—including Ralph Allen, John Perdue, Don Harris, and Zev Aelony—were arrested and charged with "insurrection," a capital offense, for their peaceful organizing.

Charles Sherrod threw me—near-little city boy from Atlanta—right in the midst of what I thought was hell at that time. I later learned that there were some other hells outside of Atlanta and in other places.

During that same period of time was the March on Washington. When some of us who were working in southwest Georgia at that time—was Sherrod and some other people from there—had gone up to the Justice Department in Washington to picket.

Sherrod left me and others with the responsibility of organizing people in southwest Georgia, get 'em on the train. We had to get people from Albany to Thomasville, Georgia, to get folks on the train to go to the March on Washington. When we hit Washington, D.C., there must have been 28 coaches of people from southwest Georgia and from Florida—Tallahassee and Miami—for that occasion.

Some other things were happening during that same period, and that was—the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. And again, here we were with some more direct action, because we wanted to test whether or not these places of public accommodation would allow us in.

One of these same fellows who had been charged with insurrection, John Perdue—who was a Harvard student and from Denver, Colorado—came to me in Americus and said, "Bob, we need to test these places." I said, "John, let's see what happens everywhere else before we go in there."

There was a little place called the Hasty House on Highway 19/41. We went. There were about five of us, and there was a local fellow who went with us to test this place at night. We went into the place, and we were the only Blacks in there.

I sat down—see, I'm from the South, I grew up in the South, and there were some things that we—before the movement—we had to—we were [indistinct] for survival. I sat so that I could watch front and back, and the way I did that—there was the glass, so that I could see what was happening in front of me, and from the reflection of the glass, I could see what was happening. That's what happens when you don't plan.

It was John Perdew's last minute, "Let's go test the place." I was watching in the glass, and one of the local fellas we called Kitty got up and went to ask the waitress where was the restroom. We had no intention that Kitty was going to do this. So she sent Kitty around the building.

We didn't know what happened to Kitty. It was the next morning, after we had walked out of the Hasty House and got the shit beat out of us there, that we found Kitty.

I said, "Kitty, what happened?"

He said, "Man, I had to use the bathroom. I went back, told that lady—asked that lady, where's the bathroom. She sent me around to the back of the restaurant." And he said, "I got the dog shit beat out of me back there."

I said, "Why didn't you come back and tell us?"

"Man, they ran me all across the bridge and all the swamps of hell. I didn't get back in till this morning."

We spent a good time in South Georgia. We remember what we call the prayer breakfast. Anybody who went down there to work with Sherrod in South Georgia remember the prayer breakfast?

Well, every morning over a glass of orange juice and a cinnamon roll—and the ravioli that people had sent from the North. That was my first introduction to ravioli. We would sing and pray over cinnamon rolls, a glass of orange juice, and ravioli. I will never forget how we sang "Let Us Break Bread Together." Very meaningful experience.

I guess if I had anything to say in sincerity—and there were two things, well, three things—first of all, what the Southwest Georgia project did for me and for most of us who came through there, who later went on to other projects, was to build a sense of camaraderie, a sense of reverence to what we were about, and a sense of commitment to what we were about.

I think that Southwest Georgia was the proving ground for many of us, and in many ways, the way in which we would go for years to come. I'm thankful for that experience.

There was one other thing that Southwest Georgia taught me, and that was how to survive on nothing. How to survive on nothing.

I remember going with George Best—may he rest in peace—over the cusp of Georgia in Randolph County. SNCC didn't have any money. Some people would see us coming—they'd run. We had to eat.

We used to steal folk chickens at night. Go up on the house and bury the feathers and eat right on. Some people who were there during that time—our groups used to go out in different parts of Southwest Georgia from Albany, pick cucumbers, squash, go fishing so that we could eat.

I remember the time when a farmer in Lee County, James Mays, told us that he had some wild hogs loose. And if we caught the hogs, we could have one. Needless to say, that hog didn't have a possible chance. And we ate well—for a little while anyway.

From the Southwest Georgia experience—and I hope I'm not taking too long, because see, the reason why I'm talking [about] this—is because this is the first opportunity. You have other folks

who always tell their stories. This is the first opportunity, in a very long time, that I've been able to put together my movement experience, and particularly to give you my movement experience—some of those from 1960 to now.

See, some of y'all didn't even know I was around. I watched many of you come and go. I want to—during this summer in Southwest Georgia—I'm going to move on. Sherrod, I talked enough about you in Southwest Georgia probably. But I want to make a point.

In 1964, there were many direct action campaigns, especially to test the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in regards to public accommodations. We were having mass meetings all over Sumter County, which also happens to be the home county of Jimmy Carter. We knew him before he was President Carter. We also knew him before he was Governor Carter.

But that was very—the town and the county was very tense with demonstrations. And I remember at the Martin Theatre—we attempted to go into the Martin Theatre before the vote of the Civil Rights Act was passed. We later were able to go, as a result of the Voting Rights Act, into the theater. Around the corner and up the back was the flight of stairs where the colored folk sat.

And I remember very vividly all those nights we had mass meetings there. There was a little girl, about 12 years old, who used to walk across town from the south side of Americus, Georgia, and would come to the mass meetings. Her name was Sandra Gail Russell—about 12 years old—and we would make sure that she got a ride back home after the meetings.

I later decided to leave Southwest Georgia and to go back to school. And I was trying to do some against—a report on myself as to what activity, what was the significance of it, what was—what did my participation there in Southwest Georgia, more especially Americus—what difference did it make?

I couldn't think of anything, until I took a taxi from the Freedom House, going down the main street to the bus station to go back home this Sunday afternoon, and I looked at this theater. On the side, around the corner, where the Black people always went—there were some of those people who were leaders in the marches. There was other Black people still going up the—what we called the peanut gallery—around the back, in the back way.

But I also looked at the front, and there was a little girl, 12 years old—Sandra Gail Russell—with all these white people standing in line, with another little Black kid, about six years old, holding his hand.

I said, "My God, Bob, that's your report. That’s your report card."

I went back to Morehouse, and I took a course in public speaking. And part of our grade was based off—our semester grades were based upon making a speech—giving a speech, an eulogic or tribute speech.

My colleagues at Morehouse and in our class made tributes to Martin Luther King, Dr. Benjamin Mays, Thurgood Marshall, Mary McLeod Bethune. And a little boy sitting there in the class—Bob Mants—made his tribute to a 12-year-old girl from Southwest Georgia, Americus, Georgia, named Sandra Gail Russell.

My classmates said to me, "Who in the hell is Sandra Gail Russell?"

But that experience of how the movement, of what we attempted to do in SNCC in Southwest Georgia, was transformed from us to Sandra Gail Russell, to that little kid that she had in line with her at the Martin Theatre in Americus, Georgia.

They want me to continue. Let me tell you how, very briefly, how I got involved in Alabama. We left Southwest Georgia and had gone back to school at Morehouse. James Bevel came to Frank Smith and myself, who were students, and said, “We want y’all to go down to Alabama, because there’s an effort in the United States Congress to bring about the Voting Rights Act.”

Frank and I both refused. Bevel said we had been out there, made our lick and strove, and we wanted to go to school. We wanted to go to school to get a college degree.

Not long after that—and almost the next few days—Frank Smith went to Mississippi and I went to Alabama. John Lewis—again, one of those spur-of-the-moment things—to participate in this march in 1965 from Selma to Montgomery. I never will forget how the leadership of that Selma to Montgomery march, on the Sunday—the first march—was selected.

Some of us who had had experiences in other places had gathered at the Brown Chapel Church, and then we went to the parsonage at Brown Chapel. Some of those people there were Andy Young, James Bevel, Hosea Williams, Albert Turner, myself, and others.

They were deciding—Dr. King was not there that day. They were trying to decide who would lead the march for SCLC.

Andy, James Bevel, and Hosea Williams flipped a coin to decide who would lead the march for SCLC. I guess I will always believe Andy and Bevel, having worked longer together in the movement, playing hard, man, put the stuff on Hosea.

John Lewis volunteered to lead the march for SNCC. Albert Turner volunteered to lead the march for SCLC. And here I am with no other choice but to march behind John Lewis.

It was during that period, the first attempt to march and going back to Atlanta, that some of us decided—once Selma, there was a project director there—decided to go back to Alabama.

It was during that time that Carmichael—Stokely Carmichael, as he was known then—came from Mississippi. I came from Southwest Georgia. And we, at SNCC, by itself, decided that this was the opportunity for us to capitalize off the motion of the march to go into Lowndes County.

Now, Lowndes County had had a very long history of being the most violent county in Alabama. Folk that told you that they will kill you in Alabama—I mean, in Lowndes County—and there was no question as to whether or not they would kill you.

I remember the first time we went into the county—Stokely Carmichael, Scott B. Smith, Judy Richardson, and myself went into Lowndes County. The people there—some of the people that we were able to talk to at first, including John Jackson's father, who was here, and others—told us, "SCLC said this is a very dangerous place."

Highway 80 runs through Lowndes County—was notorious. I remember one evening, a prominent Black doctor in Selma—almost at sunset—her car stopped on her, and I stopped to ask her if I could help her.

And she said, "No, boy. Just give me a ride into Selma and get me out of Lowndes County." Lowndes County was, again, a proving ground for many of us. I'm talking too long, I guess.

It was also during that same time when we went to the Lowndes County Training School. And must remember that during those days, Black folk were trained—and most of the schools in that area, more especially Alabama—were called *training schools*.

We went there, capitalizing off the motion of the Selma to Montgomery march, as an attempt to organize people there in Lowndes County. We went to the Lowndes County Training School, where we were passing out leaflets about the march coming through Lowndes County. It just so happened that school was letting out for the day. And we were passing out leaflets around the school, on the buses.

Now, there was one young fellow there—other people dodged him, didn't want to take the leaflets and stuff. There was one—and SNCC buttons. There was one fellow who was there—kept begging for us to give him some leaflets and some SNCC buttons.

And that was the first time I met the mayor of White Hall [AL], now, John Jackson. Carmichael, Judy, and myself were at the school. We left. As we left the school, the sheriff and state troopers came to us, pulled us over.

Said, "Come on back to the school." They said, "Don't y'all know that y'all ain't got no business passing out leaflets and stuff on the school campus?"

And the first time in all time Carmichael probably ever used his head—we were all there shaking, perhaps, with the exception of Judy—Carmichael. We had, as Silas told you before, we had these two-way radios in our cars. It was along with antennas.

Carmichael picked up the two-way radio as if he were talking to the base in Selma. The problem was that we were out of range, but nobody knew that. He told them—he was talking—and the sheriff and state troopers and other folks could hear it—that if we weren't back at a certain time, what to do. That perhaps saved our lives at that time.

Because what happened was—they let us go. And it was from that point that we were able to begin to organize in Lowndes County. I would suspect—and I still suspect very strongly—had it not been for that incident at the school, it would at least have been two or three more months before we moved into Lowndes County to actual organizing.

But what happened was, when the teachers and students were getting out of school, the word had spread around the county: "Them civil rights folks was in here."

The next morning—and we knew that—the next morning, we rolled back out. People waving, "Y'all all right? Y'all all right?" And once they had seen us at school—this incident—we knew we had to be bad then. We were back out there the next morning.

Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] is to speak later today—and will have the opportunity to say what he wants to say about Lowndes County and some other things that relate to the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Party, as it was called. The press called it the Black Panther Party.

There are some people who you might not ever hear if you listen to some people who were involved in that process. Without a doubt, formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Party—the emblem of the Black Panther—was drawn by Ruth Howard. Stand up, Ruth.

There were some other people who were involved in that. The Alabama law required that any political party have an emblem. The Alabama Democratic Party had the white cock. We wanted the Black Panther. Courtland Cox—I don't see him—was also involved, very involved in that process.

It's always amazing—and I'm always marveled—by how the public perception is of these great thinkers who sit up, sit around, and carefully plan and strategize. Most of the things that have happened in my experience happened sporadically, spontaneously, or freak of nature for some other reason.

They're about to call time on me because they said I'm talking too much. But we're going to have an opportunity one day when they won't pull the time on us—to fully tell our story.

I think if—in conclusion—if, and this is my challenge to some of the young students: if you don't want to get in the midst, don't stick your nose in other folks' business.

Cheryl Greenberg: I hope you understand that eating lunch is not nearly as important as talking about this. So we're just going to go on.

Our next speaker was the Field Secretary in SNCC in Lowndes County from 1964 to 1966. And as I discovered this morning, the best introduction, the best way to present this, is just simply say: Ladies and gentlemen, I present Johnny Jackson, Mayor of White Hall.

John Jackson: Let me say good evening to all of you. And when I say, coming from Lowndes County, that it's good to be here, I really mean—it's good to be here. Let me just say thank you to Jack Chatfield and to the student body here at Trinity, and to all of you for allowing me to share in this great occasion.

Lowndes County, Alabama—it straddles Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery—was further distinguished as being the place where the marchers camped on the way, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In which the Ku Klux Klan chased down Viola Liuzzo to kill her that fatal night when freedom refused to take back seat to fear.

For those who do not recognize my perspective, I will enlighten you and educate you a little bit further. It was in Lowndes County where the Black Panther political party was formed. Its real name was the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights, and its purpose was to allow poor Black people to exercise their constitutional rights as U.S. citizens by accepting the nonviolent, constitutional means of registration and voting.

This is the American way—not murder on the highway by night riders, and church bombings, and bus burnings, and standing in the schoolhouse doors—but the patient, fearless, Christian method of education, enlightenment, and conversion of enemies to our just cause.

Don't you believe Bob Mants when he tells you I was begging for him—they were so afraid in Lowndes County 'cause they was begging for us. And I was crazy enough to stop my bus and take some of the leaflets.

And I went home and I talked to my father about it. We had an abandoned house that my brother had just left and went to California. And I said to my father,"Them boys are going to get killed trying to make it back to Selma, and George Wallace gonna hang them if they keep going into Montgomery. So they need a place to stay."

Of course, my father met with them, and I think he kind of liked those fellas. Or, he thought like me: they're crazy. So he said, "Hey boys, y'all can take this house over here. There's nobody staying in it." They were kind of glad, because they used to have to get the hell out of Lowndes County before dark.

So they began to stay in Lowndes County. We began to work. And of course, after I took the leaflets—I was driving a school bus, 16 years old, making $50 [$510 in 2025] a month—of course, the next week, I was fired.

And of course, you know, Bob and Stokely assured me that I could be hired with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. But the only thing about that was—I never got a chance to get with Jim Forman. I wanted to have an executive meeting with him. I never got a check yet.

And to make bad matters worse—after I lost my job—the large landowners during that time, they financed the sharecropper. And being a son of 13 children, and the son of a sharecropper, we didn't have no money that year to plant the crops. I was kind of glad—'cause I didn't pick no cotton nowhere.

After that, my sister was a school teacher in Lowndes County—she was fired. And of course SNCC said, "Well, we'll find you a job too." Neither one of us seen a check yet.

My father was supposed to be getting rent on the house. I have not seen that check yet. And the white folk in that county called my father in and said, "Hey, you ain't got to be in that mess. You don't need those folks staying there."

And clearly, I remember his words: "If we are not for ourselves, then who can be for us?"

And we continued to work. Then—I don't know what happened to me. I graduated. I got a scholarship to Tuskegee, and I would come back every summer to work with the movement. I was just so excited. Still hadn't got no check.

Ed Geffner, great friend of mine in Michigan—I had never been on a plane before—sent for me to come to Michigan to work in the SNCC office that summer. Never got a check yet.

But I worked in the SNCC office in Michigan that summer. Then he fooled me the next summer to take a trip to Russia, I believe. That was long before [Richard] Nixon even thought about going to Russia, wasn't it? And then, when I come back—I couldn't get back into my school. They said I was a communist. Still hadn't got a check yet.

But one thing that we did—SNCC did for us in that county—they aroused us to the conscience of getting up off ourselves to do something to help ourselves. And we were really committed. After being shot at—seventeen times. Seventeen bullets went into the car. And seeing Samuel Younge, Jr. laying down in Tuskegee because he wanted to use the restroom.

And Jonathan Daniels being forced out of jail—and I think Gloria [Richardson] is here—she was standing by his side when he was shot and killed. And seeing him lay on the ground three or four hours before anybody came to get him.

We made a total commitment of ourselves. We also offered ourselves up as a living sacrifice. Every member organization has four kinds of bones.

There's a wishbone—and I know we don't have those kinds of bones at Trinity—folks who sit around, don't do nothing, and wish somebody else would do all the work. You also have a jawbone. There was a lot of jawbones in SNCC too. Folks who sit around and talk and don't do nothing else.

Then you have the knucklebones—folks who knock everything you do and don't do anything else themselves. Lord and behold, you have the backbone. If I could say anything about SNCC, they were the backbone of the movement.

SNCC was the kind of organization who got under the load to do the work. And when they came into Lowndes County, they were different from a lot of the young people. They did not come in there telling us what we needed to do. They came into the county asking, "What are the problems? What can we do to help you?"

And I remember very clearly—I don't know whether it was Stokely or Bob—but they asked the question, "Can these bones live?"

And I was confused about that, because I had always read in the Bible about the dry bones in the valley. And I thought that was a bunch of just bones out there laying with nothing on it, you know? And the preachers used to preach the sermon about the bones connecting.

And I was confused about it. I didn't realize you could be living asleep and be dry bones in the valley. But that's the way we were in Lowndes County.

No registered voters. No Black people owning their own homes. Denied the right to go into the Republican Party to run for office. Denied the right to put our name under the rooster.

And a lot of people don't understand why we chose the black cat as an emblem. There were a lot of people who could not read and write. And when we did petition to get on the ballot, they typed the name so little we couldn't see it. So we had to have something that people could identify with.

And I want you to know, when we did petition and get on the ballot—that cat gave that elephant hell, and picked all the feathers out of that chicken.

And I could hear the old sister over in the corner—Stokely, you remember Miss Jackson—and all the old sisters used to sing all those songs. When they asked the question, "Could those bones live?" That sister said, "Yes, these bones can live."

Then we looked around, as we began to get on the ballot and rattle those dry bones in the valley. I began to see Charles Smith's arm move—and he became first Black county commissioner. Then we looked around and saw the head bone begin to move—and we elected the first Black superintendent of education.

Oh my goodness, those leg bones began to move—all the way into Montgomery, Alabama—elected the first Black representative and the first Black senator from Lowndes County. Then that chest bone began to jump—and we elected the first Black sheriff from Lowndes County.

Oh, we began to rattle those dry bones in the valley. I could go on and talk.

The one thing SNCC taught me is that time does not change things. Men change things. When you act, something will happen. If you don't act, won't nothing happen. I want to challenge you students today. Nothing I can say here will save you. But I want to challenge the students at Trinity today.

I'm mayor of White Hall, Alabama. When you come in, you'll be escorted. You don't have to run. I want to challenge you to get out in the community, because we got a global problem. We've got problems that face this nation that don't discriminate. And I want to challenge you to get involved.

Because as SNCC rattled those bones, they challenged us in Lowndes County. They challenged us to dream a little bit, long before Dr. King started dreaming, I believe. They challenged us to dream of a community, a city, and a county full of love instead of hate. They challenged us to dream of people who were concerned about the human race—not the dog race. They challenged us, as a people, to bury our weapons and serve the human family.

SNCC challenged us as they rattled those dry bones in the valley. SNCC challenged us to dream of teachers who would teach for life, and not just for a living. SNCC challenged those ministers and preachers who would preach and prophesy, instead of profiteer.

SNCC challenged us to dream in Lowndes County—to dream of lawyers who were concerned about justice and not a judgeship. SNCC challenged us to dream—to dream of becoming elected officials who would become public servants and not politicians.

I challenge you, Trinity, to dream today—to dream of a people who will love one another, and who are motivated and obligated to serve the human family. I challenge you today to dream. And when you dream, and when you act, something will happen. And when you do that: "No greater love than this—than a man who will lay down his life for his friend."[5] Thank you very much.

[5] John 15:13 underscores the moral and spiritual conviction that guided many civil rights activists, such as those in the Americus Movement, who faced death-penalty charges like insurrection for nonviolent organizing—risking their lives out of love, solidarity, and commitment to justice for their communities.

Cheryl Greenberg: Our final speaker this morning is Martha Prescod Norman. She was Field Secretary for SNCC in Mississippi in 1963, and in Selma, Alabama from 1965 to [19]66. She's now a professor of Afro-American History at the University of Toledo and Wayne State University.

And I must add that, next to Jack Chatfield, probably the central person in getting this conference together and making it look like it does now. So thank you from all of us. Martha.

Martha Prescod Norman: Thank you. I really almost feel as if I have nothing to say after these three speakers. I do want to say Jack promoted me a little bit. I'm really a part-time instructor of history. I've been doing that for the last ten years. I wish it was that easy to become a professor, Jack.

I just want to say it's a real honor for me to be on this panel with three people who really have impressed me a great deal.

I don't think anybody spent more than a second in Lowndes County that they didn't know the Jackson family and respect them for their courage and their tremendous dedication. I mean, they have given everything there was to give.

I think also Bob Mants—I met Bob in 1963, when he was making that transition from being a student activist in Atlanta and moving into the Black Belt community organizing. And he's just still there—just so impressed.

And of course, my ex-husband, Silas Norman. I thought so much of what I saw of him—this is a true story—that after he left Selma, two years after he left Selma, after no letters or phone calls or anything, he almost literally showed up on my doorstep one day and said, Would I marry him? And I said, Yes.

I'm going to talk about the historiography…I've kind of worked with it a little bit over the past 10 years, as I've been teaching and trying to think how to present the movement to my students, as I've been a perennial graduate student and tried to keep up with some of the literature on the movement.

And I want to talk about some of the problems and oversights that I see in the work that's been done—mostly because I'd like to get some feedback from the movement folk who are here as to whether my concerns are shared. And I hope this approach will give some of you who were not participants a discussion or framework for reading and learning, and teaching about the movement.

Before I go any further, I want to stress that my connection with this history is obviously deeply personal. I was 16 when I first became involved in movement support activities in the North. I

was 21 when I left Selma to return to Detroit [MI]. During those years, movement activities—either of a supportive nature or working in the South—took up most of my time.

Like other people who have spoken here, I can't think of any job or any activity that I've been involved with before or since that has played such an important role in shaping my life, both politically and personally. I grew up in the movement, like Cleve. It shaped my views. I married in the movement. And now, 25 years later, many of the people that I still feel closest to are movement people.

When I look around this room, it's a group of people that I know—that when I've asked anybody for anything—a room, a place to stay, a meal, support, comfort—that I've always gotten back what I asked for, and much more. I have always found it difficult to put into words the bond of comradely love that I feel here.

Beyond this, I feel another kind of personal interest in how this history is written. That is, I have three children. And I have read interpretations that have made me cry, to think that my boys would be left with such ridiculous explanations of what it was that their mother and their father were doing in those days, and why it was that their parents decided to put their lives on the line in the early [19]60s.

That said, I'd like to title my presentation "How They Stood," *or* "Not Seeing the Forest for Being Too Close Up on the Trees."

"How they stood" is a quote from Amzie Moore, a tough, longtime Mississippi activist who stopped his work with the NAACP to support SNCC's first efforts in Mississippi. When he was asked to explain what it was about SNCC, when compared to the other civil rights organizations, that led him to make such a decision, Mr. Moore mentioned a number of things about SNCC people.

First, he suggested that they were just regular, everyday kind of folk. To quote him: "These kids wore blue jeans, and I used to have them sleeping in my house, six, eight, ten, twelve at a time. I bought lots of cheese, and always we'd eat cheese and peaches, and sometimes we'd eat spaghetti. We'd make a huge tub of meatballs and spaghetti to fill everybody up. And this is how we were. They'd eat that without complaining."

Similarly, he continued, "When it came to meeting, it wasn't a matter of meeting at the Masonic Order, or an office, or at a church to do this. They'd meet anywhere."

Mr. Moore further complimented us by describing us as a group of strong, intelligent young people who always had a smile. Another characteristic that he referred to a number of times in his interview in "My Soul Is Rested" was an orientation toward action.

*"*They were moving," he noted. "Always ready to try to do something. Certainly did not hesitate to get about the business for which they came here.*"*

Also, Moore remarked that SNCC brought a notion of leadership as something broad-based and non-elitist. Quoting him again: "One great thing I think was introduced in the South, with reference to SNCC tactics, was the business of organizing leadership. If 11 people went to jail this evening, who the power structure considered leaders—tomorrow morning, you had 11 more. And the next morning, 11 more."

But the thing that most impressed Moore was the courage of these young people. Several times he pointed out how they seemed to have no fear of death. And this is how he put it: "I found that SNCC was for business—live or die, sink or swim, survive or perish."

In an effort to further emphasize this quality, Moore brought up the following image:

"When an individual stood at the courthouse—like the courthouse in Greenwood and in Greenville—and watched their tiny figures standing against a huge column of triggermen, drivers, and lookout men riding in automobiles with automatic guns…" And at this point, he just stopped, and he exclaimed:

"How they stood. Oh, how they stood. How gladly they got in the front of that line and went to jail. Didn't seem bothered."

In this short description, I think Amzie Moore went right to the heart of SNCC, capturing our spirit and our substance. And his final quote, I think, is the essence of writing SNCC history—that is, describing how we stood at the front of the line during the civil rights struggle.

Unfortunately, we don't have much scholarship that does that with anything near the accuracy that Amzie Moore did some 10 years ago. In fact, I think the current history—in spite of just tremendous good points—tends to distort and obscure our role. Why?

Let me suggest a number of reasons that center around assumptions about the movement as a whole, and youth in particular.

To begin with, public discussion of this period has become dominated by the figure of Dr. Martin Luther King. He's presented as the creator, builder, and shaper of the civil rights movement, to the extent that we could easily believe it was the force of his presence that brought the movement into being, and his spirit that propelled it along.

King and the civil rights movement have become so interchangeable that many of the students who come into my classes have no idea that there was a Black student movement in the 1960s. And if they are interested, once they learn this and probe farther, they will find a literature that either neglects or minimizes the role of young people in the southern civil rights movement.

To begin with, the scholarly work reflects the public view, and focuses on King, and leaves students almost completely out of the picture.

For example, David Garrow's book "Protest at Selma"—its subtitle is "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965." The continuous activism of the Selma students, which Silas referred to earlier, as well as the ongoing programs of SNCC, are relegated in this book to an occasional mention of this particular activity or that specific arrest.

Similarly, when Aldon Morris discusses the origins of the civil rights movement, he assumes—in his words—that the SCLC was, and I quote, "the organizational center of the movement," and suggests that the charisma of King and his fellow SCLC ministers was indeed a major factor in mobilizing the southern Black community.

In his introduction, he does acknowledge that SNCC represented what he calls "another source of power," but then is quick to mention that its presence fostered inter-organizational tensions in Albany and Birmingham.

Morris's further minimal treatment of SNCC in the book remains quite disparaging. SNCC was handicapped, he suggests, by its own ambivalence—of having, and I'm quoting, "adopted an anti-leadership and anti-structure ideology at the outset, while at the same time feeling the need for leadership and coordination."

He further derides what he believes to be SNCC's concept of leadership by quoting James Bevel, saying that for the SNCC activists, the slogan "let the people decide" really meant "let his people that agree with him."

Morris then goes on to suggest that it was SNCC's injection of its organizational interest into the Albany movement that led to the organizational conflict, which in turn, he insists, was the primary factor in the defeat of the Albany movement. There's a biography of King by David Lewis that has that same kind of interpretation among other things.

I think Morris strikes his most serious blow at student activism with his analysis of the sit-ins in 70 cities in the two months following the February 1 Greensboro, North Carolina sit-in. Finding that the news of these sit-ins were spread through established civil rights networks, and that many of these sit-in groups met in SCLC churches or bore some connection to CORE organizers or the NAACP youth councils, he suggests that Howard Zinn's notion that the sit-ins represented independent collegiate actions has to be abandoned.

And while it's really good that he stresses the tradition of activism in the Black community previous to the [19]60s, he goes a little bit further than saying that the students received tactical advice and support and bond money from adults.

He suggests that really, it was the adults who organized the students and put them into action. “In many instances,” he states, “it was the adult leaders of the movement centers who organized the student protesters.” And on this basis, he concludes that SCLC was essential to the rise of the 1960 sit-in movement—not helpful, but essential.

And because there are adults present, Morris just assumes that the adults were in charge—and so the students ceased to be the prime mover in their own social protests.

I think there's also another way in which some of the history sort of minimizes the role of SNCC, and I think it's through an emphasis on the discussion of SNCC that dwells on the notion that it was a kind of undisciplined, middle-class, youthful rebellion against authority that played a significant role in the motivation of some SNCC workers.

I think the problem is that this can be focused on to the extent that it seems to become the major characteristic of the organization, and you'll have these histories that put together some expressions for me that just seem ridiculous, given the context. And I'll talk about that later.

Also, I think with the discussion of the question of growing consciousness within the movement, somehow our early vision becomes extraordinarily limited, as does our decision to support a nationalist position with Black Power. And all this, I think, adds up to a notion of students ceasing to be serious actors on the historical stage and instead becoming some kind of nearsighted, bumbling stand-ins in history’s eyes.

Looking at all these works, I think there are two basic problems in their interpretation. The first: that the wrong standards are being used to judge the success or failure of movement activities. The second is a kind of confusion about what people were fighting for. In both cases, the difficulty stems from applying a narrow and superficial vision to a broad and deep social terrain.

I think in the first instance, Dr. King’s weight is again disproportionately felt. He judged the success or failure of any given activity by the fairly simple standard of whether or not he was able to get a negotiated agreement from city officials and leaders. Hence, Birmingham was a huge success. Albany, Georgia—a dismal failure. As we have already seen, a significant number of movement scholars have adopted this view.

Others use the passage of legislation as some kind of standard. The March on Washington was followed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Selma-Montgomery March by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Therefore, they're both successes and events of great historical importance. But what is the sense here? What is the context?

A movement for social change ought not to be judged by some unenforced local agreement or even by the passage of an almost equally unenforced piece of national legislation, but by the

degree and amount of social change that is accomplished—and by the actions that bring about the change.

What made change in the South was not the Birmingham Agreement of 1963, nor the Civil Rights Act of 1964. What made these agreements get made and got this legislation passed—and ultimately ended segregation in the South and clipped the wings of white Southern terrorism and brought the franchise to many areas where Black people had not voted since Reconstruction—was the consistent, widespread, relentless activism of Southern Black communities.

Communities who refused to stop struggling in the face of all kinds of harassment—physical and economic—arrests, evictions, beatings, dogs, fire hoses, bombs, and bullets. When these communities went into motion and stayed into motion, everyone understood that the South had to make significant changes.

If we understand that continuous activism and a serious level of commitment on the parts of hundreds of thousands of Black people across the South—if we understand that's what made change—then it's in that context we can understand the role of students in helping to make that change. We did serve in a vanguard role, setting the pace and then supporting continuous activism.

From 1953 to 1960, there was a bus boycott here and there, and a number of national demonstrations. From February 1, 1960 onwards, after the Greensboro sit-in, there was activity all the time, every day, everywhere. When the Freedom Rides seemed finished after two weeks and Diane [Nash] and the Nashville students stepped in, they carried on for three months.

SNCC, by encouraging, supporting a number of programs during this period—again—supported continuous activism. And we don't have a book that even begins to describe the length and breadth of SNCC activities. There were a lot of them. And I think in this conference, you've heard of them.

There are beachhead projects in Albany and Selma and Pine Bluff, Arkansas, that spread out into surrounding counties all during this period. Almost completely a statewide program in Mississippi.

There are sit-ins, march and voter registration activities, union organizing, co-op organizing, Freedom Schools, Free Southern Theater, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the Lowndes County Black Panther Party, and on and on and on—an assortment of creative and continuous activities.

All these carried out by a couple of hundred students who really brought nothing more, as Sherrod always said, but our bodies and souls as their main resources to make social change. I

just have to ask, when I read these accounts, how it was that we managed to maintain all these programs if we were so undisciplined and floating all over the place? To me, as Spock says, “it does not compute.”

And when I think of the kinds of decisions we were making—and let me kind of bring this down to a personal level—the whole issue of discipline. I know it took a lot of discipline for me just to be there. Just to stay in Mississippi. I mean, to be there, and then to go out and canvas and teach —that was a plus.

In addition, my stint with the movement was nowhere near as exciting as all these wonderful stories we've heard. I know other people here said just the opposite—but I was scared. When I arrived in Mississippi, there were these white men riding by the office with these guns hanging out the window and stuff like that. I was scared, and it took every bit of internal discipline I had not to bolt and run home.

And then, in addition—to make a decision—I remember that, thinking, well, maybe if I leave the office and go out and canvas, it’d be a little better.

I do recall George Greene and Stokely Carmichael going out to canvas a plantation around Greenwood. And I kind of thought since we were going on these places where you'd be trespassing and people could really feel free to shoot you on sight—I thought we were going to quietly sneak into these places and kind of talk to people and move off.

No. No, no, no. We got out of the car. We were walking. They were singing freedom songs. I did that for a couple days. And I went back to Bob Moses and asked—could I not please stay in the office with those people?

I think that a lot of the methods of operation that people talk about in SNCC—with things that I like the most—I mean the long discussions where people figured out 15 different ways to approach something and then looked at 25 possible significance to place on each approach. I've been to school a lot, and I have never been in an environment that was as intellectually stimulating as SNCC.

And I think the fluidity and the sense of trusting each other's judgment is exactly what made us strong as young people, in being able to do so many things. That someone would call me up when I was 19, you know, someone from [indistinct] [and say], you all have to canvas the Democratic Party in Michigan for supporting the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That's all they said. There weren't any instructions. And it made sense to us, and we did it too.

In addition—just to name a couple other things here—in addition to generating and supporting continuous activism, students in the [19]60s also set the pace in terms of commitment. That

is—and we've heard that—that participation in the struggle was to be based on a willingness to go to jail, and a willingness to risk life and limb.

They did so in the sit-ins, again, in the first Freedom Rides, and again, when they entered the rural Southern communities of McComb, Mississippi, and Albany, Georgia. You can search the history of civil rights activism in the previous 50-year period, and you cannot find a national organization suggesting struggle on this level.

SNCC workers also, I think, heightened the struggle with their sense of immediacy—that now was the time to fight. They demonstrated this by the simple action of leaving school, leaving promising careers, stopping all other activities, to work full time in the struggle. They didn't go back every other Sunday to keep up with the church in another city, or to take a part-time course, or somehow continue their education.

I remember one of [Chuck] McDew's speech lines that he always spoke, and that was that "we were going to make more changes in the next five years than you've seen in the last fifty." And I think it was that—just believing that and taking that as a reality—that made a lot of difference in the civil rights movement.

We also changed the focus and direction of struggle by moving into the Black Belt. Again, this represented a change—a significant change—in civil rights strategy, which to that point had been to emphasize the border and urban areas to win over the moderates and isolate the hardcore South.

Jim [James Forman] refers to this strategy when he talks about the difference between what the Taconic Foundation thought of voter registration, and what SNCC did with it. It's in this context, I think, when King entered Albany or SCLC developed a program for Selma, it represented that organization following SNCC—not just in organizational terms—but following SNCC's strategic lead.

This move into the Black Belt heightened struggle by tapping the strength of these communities, not just in the sense that on the basis of numbers these areas had the greatest potential for political and organizational power, but also in the broader sense that these communities, by virtue of their level of oppression, were composed of some fairly tough, struggle-oriented people whose courage and determination—again, whose willingness to risk everything they had, whose refusal to quit—is, in fact, what propelled the civil rights movement along, much more so than someone's charisma or some specific organization's presence in an area.

This is where we found families like the Harris family in Albany, Georgia; the Jackson family in Lowndes County; people like Miss Hamer and Hartman Turnbow.

This link between SNCC and Black Belt communities needs to be examined from a number of angles. But before we do that, I think we're going to have to drop the notion—the myth—of this Black community's "awakening" in the [19]50s or [19]60s.

And you see that word in a lot of presentations: awakening. Because it suggests that before this point there was a totally quiescent and slumbering and passive Black South. Common sense ought to tell us better.

The way that we saw these people struggle—and you've seen it now too in *Eyes on the Prize* and some of these other things—facing off dogs, off ballots, off bonds—you know that struggle was not some new skill that these people learned in a two-hour workshop on nonviolent direct action.

When you see these mass meetings and demonstrations and voter registration—nobody had to come. They really did not have to come. What we cannot do is tell or understand this history without recognizing that Southern Black folk played an activist role in initiating and carrying out the civil rights structure.

Again, that neither charisma nor outside agitators were key in creating this movement. I'm not saying that these things didn't heighten the struggle—what disturbs me here is: if we posit a passive community, then the prime movers in the struggle do become King or the group of activist civil rights organizations—SNCC, CORE, and SCLC. And I think that's essentially the way histories of the struggle are written.

Then we miss all the local activism that preceded our efforts—and a lot of that was youth-based—and we miss also all the activities that took place in the hundreds of communities that were not initiated by civil rights organizations.

For example, the efforts of Fayette [County, TN] and Haywood County [TN] sharecroppers to register in 1959 aren't mentioned anymore in the sequence of events from 1954 to 1960.

Similarly, Danville, Virginia, and Cambridge, Maryland also tend to be left out of these histories. And in fact, we really can't even understand the March on Washington—why it was that far more people ever showed up than anybody anticipated, than the organizers anticipated—because these people all represented hundreds, thousands of communities in action all across the country.

If we teach history like that, we successively narrow movement history down to the history of civil rights organizations—and that's only part of the story. And even in doing that, we can't understand what it was these organizations were doing.

If there is any one thing for which SNCC ought to be remembered, it's that we had the good sense as college students to realize that we ought not to struggle just on our campuses but in our communities. And given the variety of communities that we could have entered, we chose to join

with those hardest hit by racist oppression. And that we approached these communities in a manner appropriate to their experience with hard struggle.

It's in this context that our non-elitist notions of organization, of leadership, of democracy, make sense—if you are prepared to join with a community that's ready to struggle on the highest level. And that's what we're talking about. People just leave their jobs. Get shot. Let their homes get burned—so forth. Risk everything they have.

Of course, you have to let the people decide what it is they're going to struggle for. And this is not some confused, ambivalent, rebellious idealism, but a common-sense approach to organizing for serious struggle.

I think again, that nobody here would have gone up to Miss Fannie Lou Hamer in Ruleville, Mississippi, or Mr. John Jackson in Lowndes County, or Amzie Moore in Cleveland, Mississippi, with some other approach. And if they had, I don't think there would have been a lot of response had we tried that. We did just what we should have done. When we met these people, we sat down and listened.

And when we think on this level, we know it was not some sense of emotional bravado that led us into these communities, but a rational understanding—conscious or unconscious—that these communities had what it took to raise a difficult and hard struggle.

They were ready to do a lot more than boycott and sing. And it's to our credit that we created a focus and an approach that gave us the opportunity to struggle alongside such courageous and determined people—and in so doing, helped make these communities' methods of hard struggle the solid foundation of the civil rights movement.

Now, I think we should see the specific historical victory in Albany, Georgia. Here it was that a Black Belt community showed the level at which it was going to struggle for civil rights.

When Albany, Georgia citizens marched to the courthouse by the hundreds in 1961, they said, We're going for broke. We're not worried about arrest. We're not worried about our jobs. And we really aren't worried about our lives. They were the first to do so. They were the model. They created the mold on which the rest of the civil rights movement was based.

Their numbers and their seriousness served notice that the South could no longer maintain its system of racial oppression—because that's all they had to uphold. It was the threat of arrest, of beatings, of economic reprisals, and loss of life.

When Albany, Georgia citizens announced, "We're going to the courthouse." They announced that these threats weren't going to work anymore. And I can't see that as anything but a victory. And as an aside—I hope when we lay to rest the interpretation of Albany as a defeat, we'll also

get rid of the other notions of Chief [Laurie] Pritchett as a nonviolent person, and worse, as a smart man.

There's something wrong with a history that makes Charles Sherrod's actions in Albany so difficult to understand that he has to constantly explain them, and at the same time glorifies Laurie Pritchett's actions as being not just reasonable, but smart and precocious.

All I'm saying here is I think historians get very confused when they get all up in the details of things. All that was to talk about getting the proper perspective from which to view success and failure of the movement. I've kind of worked with that a little while. I just want to briefly address what I think is a confusion over what it was people were fighting for.

One could easily leave the history with the impression that SNCC activists were motivated primarily by a kind of youthful emotionalism, an acting out, a rebelliousness against authority—and somehow they garnered a sense of pride from their activism but at all times reflected a certain stubborn middle-class individualism.

Again, I think it's here that the context is lost. How can that be? How can you tell my children and everybody else's children that when their parents put everything they had on the line for their community's welfare, that they were acting out of individualism?

There's no sense here. And if we wanted to act out some kind of youthful problems with authority and flaunt rebelliousness, we really didn't have to go to Mississippi. Whether we were white or Black or rich, we could have stayed on our college campuses and smoked dope and wore flowers in our hair—which, some people did do. When I read these kinds of interpretations, I want to borrow an expression from my kids and say, "Get real."

Secondly, I think there's this matter of goals. And in describing SNCC's changing perspective from the liberal "inside the system" to the radical "maybe there's something funny wrong with the system," there is this sense of—at first—struggling for very limited goals, such as having a cup of coffee, sitting down, and then the notion that these goals broadened into a fight for political rights, and then there was this glimpse of economic concerns.

This obviously is true, but I think we can concentrate on ideological views and miss the overall sense of the movement. Because I want to suggest here that from the beginning there was a consistency and a depth to our goals, which is the only thing that explains the consistently serious level on which we struggled from beginning to end.

And to miss this is indeed to take the heart and soul out of the civil rights movement. And I've heard a number of veterans, after reading certain histories, commenting that somehow the most exciting period of their life has been made dull and prosaic in these works—and I think this is why. They do take the life out of the movement.

From the onset, we acted with deeper goals in mind than having a cup of coffee sitting down. When the students formed these sit-in committees, they didn't call themselves "Students Tired of Standing at Lunch Counters." They didn't even call themselves "Students United to Build a Truly Integrated Society."

The Greensboro A&T students called themselves the *S*tudent Executive Committee for Justice. The Atlanta students called themselves the Atlanta Coalition for Human Rights. And when we focused on political rights, we didn't form groups called Black Mississippians United for the Vote or even Black Alabamians Fighting for Full Citizenship.

No—we formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. And when we moved outside, we didn't call it the Black Independent Political Party—we still called it the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. And I think in so doing, we didn't limit our sights to full citizenship or full political rights.

I've heard one veteran comment that when you see the image in *Eyes on the Prize* where the marching feet turn into the American flag, that it's a little disturbing, because this image suggests—as does a good deal of the literature—that the end goal of all that struggle was to be "complete American."

People don't put their lives on the line for a cup of coffee—or even to get the right to vote. You didn't see all those women, suffragettes, facing dogs, bullets, bombs, constantly. This level of commitment suggests that people were moving out of the most fundamental desires—of freedom, justice, and equality. And that is what we talked about. And that is what we sang about.

From 1960 right on through 1968, maybe—we were singing "Freedom's Coming and It Won't Be Long" in 1960, and by 1965, we were singing "They Say That Freedom Is a Constant Struggle."

But we were singing about freedom from start to finish, from beginning to end. And this was a fight for justice and freedom, and we cannot understand it if we overlook this fact. It was something with great height and great depth.

In order to keep from ending up with an unclear perspective of the movement as a whole—its nature, its overall significance, and its major components—we have to keep them clear. And that's the only way that we can write an accurate history of these days. And when we do, obviously SNCC will have to have a prominent role in that history.

But the truth is, no matter what we did before, no matter what we've done since, and really no matter what else we happened to be doing at the time—when the call came for people to stand at the front of the line in the fight for freedom, we answered.

And I think when a history is written that reflects our activities in that true light, our children will be moved like Amzie Moore to remark, “how they stood.”

And our children should understand why we chose to sing songs like “We Are Soldiers in the Army.” And I think really, when all is said and done, it shouldn’t be left to history to give our children that sense of us—because we’re still here.

And given our past, we have every reason to keep struggling to make a more just and humane world. And I hope now, whenever we continue to get together—10 or 20 years from now—all of us will be able to continue to testify with the words of the verse from that song:

I'm so glad I'm a soldier,
and I have my hand on the freedom plow,
and one day I'll get old and can't fight anymore,
but I'll stand here and fight on anyhow

Cheryl Greenberg: I want to thank the panel, and I think due to the lateness of the hour, Jack’s having us hold off on questions. Is that correct?

Audience Comment: [indistinct] yourself as a woman, that you will never again feel that you have to apologize in advance for not being up to snuff with any other people—any man.

Martha Prescod Norman: I wasn’t saying that as a woman. I was judging myself in relationship to levels of dedication, activism, and experience. I don’t stand on the same level with the rest of the people on this panel.

Jack Chatfield: Now you can understand why I spent $100 calling Detroit, Michigan, in the last three or four months. I should say more. We have two panels to go, and we are facing some limitations because this room is being used tonight at a certain time. So we really have to call it quits for this time. Lunch is in Hamlin Hall, the faculty dining room, which is out here and in—