

SNCC 28th Anniversary Conference: “The Rise and Triumph of Black Power 1965 - 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

Singing:

[Hollis Watkins](#) - Field Secretary, SNCC McComb, Hattiesburg, and Greenwood, Mississippi, 1961-1966; Director of Social Service, Child Development Group of Mississippi, 1967-1971

Moderator:

Jim Miller - Professor of English / Afro-American literature, Trinity College

Panelists:

[Michael Thelwell](#) - Field Secretary, SNCC 1963 - 1964; Director, SNCC Washington office, 1964 - 1965; Professor of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts; Author, *Duties, Pleasures and Conflicts: Essays in Struggle*

[Cleveland Sellers](#) - Field Secretary, SNCC 1963 -1966; Program Director, SNCC 1966 - 1968

[Gloria House](#) - Field Worker, SNCC Lowndes County, Alabama, 1965 - 1967; Professor of Humanities, Wayne State University, Detroit

[Courtland Cox](#) - Non-Violent Action Group, Howard University, 1961 - 1964; Coordinator, March on Washington, 1963; Field Secretary, SNCC Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964; Representative, Bertrand Russell War Crims Tribunal, Stockholm, 1966

[Kwame Ture \(Stokely Carmichael\)](#) - Organizer, SNCC Chair, Freedom Rider

Hollis Watkins: [singing]

*Oh Pritchett open them cells
I hear God's children,
You clothe their suffering
I hear God's children praying in jail
Bonds getting higher, praying in jail.
Bonds getting higher praying in jail...*

We heard a lot about the Southwest Georgia project. That was one of the songs that came out of the Southwest Georgia project—Pritchett and Kelly. Chief [Laurie] Pritchett, Chief of Police, and Kelly was the bad jailer down there. And that was a song that grew out of the Southwest Georgia movement.

I'd like for us all to join in together. Is [Bob Zellner](#) in the house? Is Bob Zellner in the house? I wanted to sing this song when Bob was in the house, because this is one of Bob Zellner's favorite songs, and I'm not going to sing it right now, since he's not in the house. But I tell you so you can hold him, and—Bob is here? Well tell Bob Zellner to come up front and we want to sing this song together.

The name of this song that we want to sing is called, “I've Been Down into the South.” The song has different meaning for different people. Some of the people that came down for the Summer Project feel a certain way about it. And for those of us who are from the South, never left the South, and are still continuously fighting in the South, we have different feelings. The song means different things to us. So we want everybody to join in and we sing this song together.

[singing]

*I haven't been to Heaven, but I've been told,
Been down into the South
In heaven, there are no Jim Crow
Been down into the South...*

*Hallelujah, freedom
Hallelujah, freedom
Hallelujah, freedom
Been down into the South...*

We need another element. You know, those of us in SNCC was all about—we're getting closer to the people who are all about drafting folks to do things, male or female. So I'm gonna draft another male, because I know he has a heavy voice. I'mma draft [Silas Norman](#), wherever you

are. Where is Silas? We're going to do this been down to the South thing. And bottom tiers are always accepted. Come on up here.

Silas Norman: [Dorie \[Ladner\]](#) come on up here.

Hollis Watkins: Dorie, come on up here. How old Dorie is? She is one year older than her sister [Joyce \[Ladner\]](#). We'll leave it like that. Tell us how old she was. She said that she was one year younger. Seems like she said it was going on 19 or something. I don't know. But anyway, Dorie is one year older than Joyce.

[singing]

*I haven't been to Heaven, but I've been told,
Been down into the South
In heaven, there are no Jim Crow
Been down into the South...*

*Hallelujah, freedom
Hallelujah, freedom
Hallelujah, freedom
Been down into the South...*

Jack Chatfield: To introduce the upcoming panel, Professor Jim Miller of Trinity College, professor of English, a specialist in Afro-American literature, and also one of the organizing forces behind this conference. Jim.

Jim Miller: As this carefully constructed history of SNCC has unfolded, it's been clear from almost the very beginning that the years between 1964 and 1966 constitute a watershed moment for the movement. Some panelists have alluded to [Mississippi Summer of 1964](#). Others have mentioned 1965 as a crucial year. But virtually all speakers have agreed that this was a crucial period in SNCC development.

And it's clear that Black nationalism, the emergence of the idea of Black Power, and the debates about it, have had important consequences for SNCC, for the Civil Rights Movement, as well as for the character of the Black liberation movement. This panel is designed to shed light on that important moment.

Our first speaker is Mike Thelwell, who served as Field Secretary of SNCC from 1963 to 1964, Director of SNCC Washington Office from 1964 to 1965. He's presently Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the author of the recently published *Duties, Pleasures, and Conflicts: Essays in Struggle*. Mike Thelwell.

Michael Thelwell: Thank you, sir. Good afternoon. The subject we are to discuss is a crucial and important one, and I have very little time to make whatever contribution I can, so I should get directly to it. But with your indulgence, I rise—as the peoples used to say—on a point of personal privilege. I want to make certain acknowledgements.

When one thinks of the movement in retrospect after these years, one tends to think that one's recollections are colored by nostalgia and sentimentality, and the people could not have been as heroic and as sharp and as clear as you remember them. Just wasn't possible.

And then you come to a meeting like this, and you see the old SNCC folk come out and you listen to them. You say, by God, you know—they really were as you remember them. They really were that impressive. I mean, yesterday, I sat and listened to a panel, and I heard a young—not-so-young—man anymore, speaking. And I remembered the first SNCC staff meeting that I was in.

I thought I'd fallen among felons, because this very earnest young man dressed in SNCC blue was talking about decadence. He said, "You know, this money that we have gotten has corrupted the movement. Now that people are being paid, they no longer work. They hang out in the cafés and drink beer all day." And he was deeply distressed. He was talking about the \$9.68 [\$98 in 2025] we made.

And it just occurs to me, with great clarity and strength, that extraordinary people made extraordinary contributions in many different ways.

We talk about our great leaders. I mean—and I never talk about [Annie \[Devine\]](#) or [Victoria \[Gray Adams\]](#). To me, they will always be Miss Gray, [Miss \[Fannie Lou\] Hamer](#), Miss Devine—our leaders. Miss Ella Baker will always be transcendent in my memory and my recollection—for the contribution, for the spirit, for the inspiration, for the direction she gave us.

But there are other people who, in their own ways, made contributions. Now, I remember one person whom, long before I ever met her, she was always referred to as SNCC's angel. Now, what the hell is an angel in that context? It's the person to whom, when six or seven people doing what they should not have done ended up in jail and you need them somewhere else, and the bond is \$10,000 [\$102,172 in 2025], they would say, "Call Lucy Montgomery."

If the Freedom Democratic Party needed to bring a bus full of people from Mississippi to lobby Congress—"Call Lucy Montgomery." And she was always there. More than just a checkbook. More than just a rich white woman with a conscience. She soldiered through that with us. She ran a workshop in Bolivar [County, MS] and Sunflower County [MS]—[Amzie Moore](#) asked her to do it—on how to run for public office.

Now, how did she know that? This wealthy white lady from Chicago? Because she had funded and supported every Black candidate that would ever challenge the Daley machine from time immemorial. And I just want us to recognize the very shy and honest human—Miss Lucy Montgomery. Stand up Lucy.

I will tell you, young folk—when you build your movement, as I know you're going to, you're going to need a couple of angels somewhere in the wings to get your behinds out of jail. You're going to need another Lucy. All right. And having made those encomiums to SNCC's brilliance, talking to Lucy this morning, I remembered one case when we were not so brilliant.

A good friend of SNCC, who happened to be a banker, was so impressed with the organization that he arranged to have a SNCC speaker come to address a convention of American Bankers, thinking that we would enlarge the coffers of the organization thereby. So they sent the speaker—whose name I remember, but I won't mention it—who went there and gave an impassioned and very stern lecture on the redistribution of wealth. I will tell you what the contribution looked like from the back.

We're supposed to speak about the rise and the triumph of Black Power. I don't know who wrote that—because Black Power has not triumphed, unfortunately. But what we will talk about is the need and the necessity for it. And I think I'll begin by focusing on what is clearly the most traumatic moment in the history of this organization—the moment of the, quotes-on-quotes, “expulsion of whites.”

I was not at that meeting, but I will say that I didn't think that that particular event needed to happen in the way it did, and I'll tell you why.

It is not that it wasn't absolutely necessary—historically and politically—for SNCC to move into a very firm and clear nationalist posture. But if you listen carefully to the discussions thus far, you will see that we were that. We were nurtured by, informed by, and our programs reflected—whether we knew it or not—the culture and experience of Black people in this country.

It was a movement towards autonomy. It was a nationalist movement, and it was a nationalist movement of Black and white people. It was a Black organization—that was the source of its militance and its uncompromising nature. It was whites stuck so badly in the craw of the white establishment.

Now, we had an earlier model, an example by which we might have governed our decisions. And that was the question of red-baiting and McCarthyism. And the organization took the position—a principled position—we're not gonna refuse to work with anybody or expel anybody for reasons of ideological conviction or past membership in any political group.

Anybody can work with SNCC who respects and accepts the principles, the discipline, and the program of the organization. So it really don't matter whether you're a Marxist or a fundamentalist Christian—if you're in SNCC, you work according to SNCC policies and principles.

And on that basis, I think it was possible, theoretically, for the organization to define itself and affirm an aggressive, militant, nationalist posture and say: anybody who is in the organization will accept and work in that discipline. But there were forces and events and a context at work which made it not possible.

But even as that vote was taken, I know that if many of the older staff who had soldiered through the struggles—with [Mendy Samstein](#), with [Casey Hayden](#), with [Bob \[Zellner\]](#) and [Dottie \[Dorothy Zellner\]](#)—had been present at that meeting, the vote would have been different. And maybe we'll get a chance to go into what those elements were—why the vote was as it was.

But in support of what I say—anybody who knows the organization knows that it wasn't an organization of people who lacked conviction. And the vote, as I was told, was something like 27 for expulsion, 15 against, and 30 abstentions. There never was abstentions in SNCC. People supported stuff. So it was a traumatic decision. And what were they? What were the elements of that?

All during the time I worked in SNCC, I never had the pleasure of organizing in the Black community in the South. I organized, as it were, in the corridors of power. And what I ended up organizing was white folk—ended up going to the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations], ended up going to this liberal organization, that liberal organization, ended up going to the halls of Congress. And what I was doing, fundamentally, was asking white people—out of the goodness of their hearts and their moral consciences—to support the Black movement.

Our allies, if that's the right word, were allies purely out of convenience. We brought very little power to the equation. We had no cards to play. So ultimately, the movement for the liberation of Black people had to go about its business in the absurd way of asking for support from people who could give it or not, as their consciences or as their convenience dictated.

And it was clear when one looks at that, that what we needed to do was to develop a base, and a strength, and a confidence, and an organization, and a cohesiveness in the Black community so that we could enter into those discourses—as we're doing this year—as a consequence of the work we did then.

You notice that as a consequence of Jesse Jackson's campaign, nobody is talking about the Black vote like it's a dirty little secret to the Democratic Party anymore. They're talking about it with great respect. “We can't do this, and we can't do that, because of this Black vote. Black vote.”

It's of great satisfaction that I watch this—because this is what, in point of fact, one of the things, in point of fact, we were struggling for then.

But it became very clear, once we had exhausted the agenda in the Black South—once we had developed a movement built on the traditions and the cohesiveness and the force and power of Black culture and morality and its real history in the South, and had knocked down the doors of Jim Crow—that we had to come North.

That the movement had now to set itself about the unfinished agenda of the Black community. And the North is a different question, as Martin Luther King would discover in Chicago [IL], than the Black South.

And at that time, when we declared Black Power, I—alongside my comrade and brother and friend—wrote a piece in 1966, from which I would quote if I had my glasses. But since I don't have my glasses, my brother Courtland [Cox] will quote for me.

Courtland Cox: I have my glasses.

Michael Thelwell: The agent of the movement...

Courtland Cox: “The revolution in agricultural technology in the South is displacing the rural Negro community into northern urban areas. Both Washington, D.C., and New Jersey have Negro majorities. One-third of Philadelphia's population of two million people is Black. In the city, in most major urban areas, it is already predominantly Negro. And with the white rush to suburbia, Negroes will, in the next three decades, control the heart of our great cities.

These areas can become either concentration camps with a bitter and volatile population whose only power is the power to destroy—or organized and powerful communities able to make a constructive contribution to the total society. Without the power to control their lives and their communities, without effective political institutions to which to relate to the total society, these communities will exist in a constant state of insurrection. This is a choice that the country will have to make.”

Michael Thelwell: Well, Oral Roberts is not the only person who can prophesize. I mean, that was written in 1966—and you see the state of our urban centers today.

What Black Power posited and projected—what I hoped for most profoundly—is that we would be able to move into these centers, using many of the techniques that we had developed in the South, and try to build some cohesion, some unity, some community power and discipline, so that those centers, which are very vital to this country and to the Black community, could become positive entities and areas.

That that didn't happen is due to a number of factors, which I do not have the time to go into right now. But it still remains the most pressing agenda for this nation—and the most pressing agenda item for the Black community. That is the area in which we are going to need to struggle, to fight, and to prevail—not only for the future of the country, but most precisely and most particularly for the future of the race.

And that is the area in which everything we called on in regard to Black Power—cultural consciousness, self-pride, self-help, initiatives to enable us to empower and define our own lives—it is in that very difficult arena that the struggle must move now.

And that, unfortunately, is the inheritance that we have to pass to the next generation of young Black people. There's a great deal more that could be said, but there are many people on this panel, and I don't want to take much more time. Maybe we can get back to some more detailed discussion of it. Thank you.

Jim Miller: Cleveland Sellers served as Field Secretary for SNCC from 1963 to 1966, Program Director SNCC from 1966 to 1968. Mr. Sellers.

Cleveland Sellers: Good afternoon. First, I'd like to thank Mr. Chatfield for having the foresightedness, or wisdom, or whatever it might have been, to put this conference together and have us here. And secondly, I'd like to thank many of my colleagues for taking the time and coming and beginning to share with many young people our story of the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement—and that's very, very, very important.

The topic that I am here to deal with today is Black Power, and I think that I need to probably set Black Power in the context. The reason for that is that Black Power has meant many things to many people.

The other thing is, in the context of the civil rights movement in 1965–66, the repression and external forces working against SNCC were so massive that much of the information that was coming out of the organization was distorted. And subsequently, many of those who report on what was going on inside of the organization have a distorted point of view in terms of what was actually going on.

Let me begin by setting the tone. [In] 1965, America escalated the war in Vietnam with the bombing of North Vietnam. With that, there began to come together the issue of Vietnam, the vision—the issue of fighting for democracy in Southeast Asia—when in fact the rights to vote in places like Mississippi and South Carolina, which is where I'm from, were not secured.

That raised a major contradiction. Matter of fact, if we follow the Vietnam scenario, what we find is that in 1966, after the murder of [Sammy Younge](#), who was a SNCC worker in Tuskegee,

Alabama, SNCC issued an anti-Vietnam statement and set the pace by which many of us, including myself, refused induction into the U.S. Armed Services—which would stand to draft.

Now, that was not a popular decision in this country. So, that's one set of dynamics that we have to hold on to. It all comes together.

The next thing that we look at is—we look at in the urban areas: 1964, you have urban rebellions in Harlem. 1965, you have the Watts Rebellion. The urban ghettos, thriving in terms of having a lot of agitation, a lot of energy, that many of us are concerned may be misdirected and need some focus.

The third thing that we have to look at is: after the Mississippi Summer of 1964, there was a delegation from SNCC that had an [opportunity to travel to Africa](#)—to Guinea and to Ghana. And through that trip, began to see independent African nations and people running and operating institutions and organizations that were never even heard of in America.

But there was something else that was attached to that. And that something else that was attached to that is that that delegation, including Miss Fannie Lou Hamer, had an opportunity—and John Lewis and Courtland—were you there? You were on the trip? That group had an opportunity to come in contact with the person that many of us might have had an aversion to—and that was Malcolm X.

So you begin to see the span in terms of our starting out with “one man, one vote.” We're beginning to expand our horizon and beginning to talk about the similarities between the struggle for independence in Africa and the struggle for the right to vote in Mississippi.

Then we look at the summer of 1964, and we examine the fact that the failed challenge of the National Democratic Party left in many of us a level of frustration and torment over the fact that we had presented the most persuasive argument of any group that I know of during that time—of the plight of poor Blacks in Mississippi to enter into the political process.

Even with the documentation on the murders, the bombings, the car from the three civil rights workers that was burned—and the bell from the church that was burned—which got [\[Andrew Goodman, and \[Michael\] Schwerner](#) involved in Philadelphia [PA]. And out on that particular occasion, we were rejected. Our moral concern and legitimacy and issues were turned down because of practical political considerations.

So at that point, in an organization like SNCC, we are observing all these things that are happening around us. We're very conscious. We're very observable.

The other item that we have to look at is: what happens inside the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee after the summer of 1964?

Up to 1964, SNCC was primarily a small organization. The summer of 1964, there was a large influx of new people. There was a large influx of monies. The organization began to expand. We even operated a [Sojourner Motor Fleet](#) with 30 automobiles.

The dynamics of the organization began to change. And many of us have difficulties understanding that particular dynamic, but that dynamic affected how we saw things and how we began to move after that point.

There was not—I don't think at any particular time—a consistent ideology in the organization. There were always competing ideologies inside the organization. There were always the struggles around philosophy, around direction, around tactics, around strategy—continuously.

I think somebody referred to it this morning as a kind of intellectual group that continued to debate and discuss issues. It was a growth process. We're talking about a legitimate social movement that was legitimately concerned about bringing about social change.

At the end of 1964, with the change in the organization, we began to discover certain things inside of the organization. One was a question of the lack of an internal educational process so that we could keep our people informed and abreast of what was going on.

There was also a certain fatigueness. I don't know if you can imagine being in Mississippi for, like, 12 months—under constant, constant fear, oppression—not knowing whether or not you are going to live tomorrow—having to feed for yourself and fend off everything, including not only the physical, but the psychological and the social.

These things come together. And what we do is we continue. We transcend fear. We continue to try to have the discussions. The organization expands, and we search and seek direction.

And in that seeking direction, we do several things. One is that we know we have a legitimate target area for our organizing—and that's in the South. We also know that, with the rejection by the Democratic Party of our effort to create Freedom Democratic Parties, that we had to talk about independent political organizing.

So we moved to go to Alabama. And when we go into Alabama, our effort is: set up an independent political organization made up of people who we worked with—primarily in our organizing efforts in Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia and everywhere else. And that group was low-peasant-income Blacks. That's the reality.

And out of that, we began to develop a model—of what we saw as a model—whereby we could begin to have an impact not only in Alabama but in other areas, where you might be able to put together an independent political organization.

When we began the process in Alabama, the press came in, saw the Black Panther, immediately went out and talked about the Black Panther Party, and how anything all Black was, in fact, negative. Anything that was not—in terms of the civil rights movement—that was not positive in terms of the Democratic Party was no good. And that kind of propaganda was being disseminated all over the country.

We made that effort to continue that process, and what we needed was—we needed a sprinkle, because we didn't want to just talk about the political concept of Black independent party-building and organization, but we wanted to talk about a development of Black consciousness. We wanted to talk about using that model in other places to begin to empower Black people.

That's where the whole empowerment comes from. No longer were we just seeking the moral transformation of America. We had begun to change—to talk about the empowerment of Black people.

Now, it's important for this—because all this comes prior to the actual articulation of Black Power. And what happens then, if we look at it in the political context, is we begin to understand the political nature of Black Power.

There is some, I think, concern about how Black Power is projected by the press and how people perceived it. So once we begin to do the organizing in Alabama, we have to do something inside of SNCC too. And that is—unfortunately—we have to go and find out what SNCC actually had in terms of assets and resources. And we have to look around and make some kind of analysis.

Stokely and I disagreed vigorously on this issue and on this question—because he had said that I had become a bureaucrat, because we had 30 cars and I wanted to know where they were. And he was of the impression that everybody would take good care of them. So we had that kind of conflict, but we did have to make that kind of assessment. The organization—or the nature of the organization—had changed.

So as we were going around to the different projects and trying to determine what was going on in those projects, trying to make people aware of what was taking place in Alabama in terms of the independent political organizing, is the point where [James] Meredith is shot. And when Meredith is shot—walking down the road, the highway in Mississippi—Meredith was marching against fear in Mississippi. No better place for us to then use that as a leaping-off point to introduce Black Power.

We had talked about “freedom now.” We had talked about anti-Vietnam. We had different issues along the way. So Black Power, when we talked about it, was in a political context, in terms of building political institutions and social institutions in the Black community where we worked.

Now, I had no idea—and I'm being honest—that Black Power was going to take off the way it did. The only other incident that I can think of that took off like Black Power was the emergence of Malcolm X. The only other thing that I can think of. And so I was thinking that in terms of how Black Power was picked up and rushed out across America was, in fact, an effort to make it negative, and create the climate whereby it became easier for forces—who were beginning to become threatened by the idea of SNCC—talking about empowerment of poor people and Black people across the South—to be put in check.

And that began to happen. That's when COINTELPRO [Counterintelligence Program] becomes alive and alert. And before I finish, I would just want to share with you an example of COINTELPRO—not from a theoretical point of view, but from a personal point of view.

The other notion that we want to put forth here is that after 1965—we had already—the Civil Rights Bill in 1964 had already been passed, which dealt with the question of public accommodation. The Voter Rights Act had already been passed, which dealt with the fact of voting. And so we were moving on beyond that. And we were moving in terms of grasping for: where do we go, and how do we assure that we bring about the kind of change that would, in fact, affect the destiny of those people who we were trying to, in fact, organize?

One other point that I want to make—and I differ with my friend and colleague brother Thelwell—when the whole idea of Black Power emerged, it did not emerge around the idea of putting anybody out of anything. That's a process. And as SNCC grew, SNCC dealt with issues as best it could, as an organization.

That was not the thinking when we were talking about Black Power. Our concern was to get the organization moving again—to begin to establish programs, and begin to have the same kind of impact on the communities that we were involved in as we had prior to that particular time, or prior to 1964, or during the Summer 1964.

The other thing I'd like to say is, is that in terms of the influences inside of the organization—we began to shift away from the [Albert] Camus and [Jean-Paul] Sartre and existentialist thinking—and we began to move toward Fanon and Malcolm X in terms of our thinking, in terms of our orientation.

And I'm talking about a transition—because people have to understand this transition. Because the way I read Black Power now is—all of a sudden, everybody got mad with, “Oh, they went and put them out”—that constitutes Black Power. And I want to put it in a—it's really important for us to put it in a political context, so we'll have some handle to work with it.

The other thing is, is that the question of tying in the urban areas to the Southern areas—which was a mammoth kind of question—but our concern was, was that we had people in these urban

areas that were just begging for somebody to come in and assist with the organizing of those people.

And if we could use the Southern model in the northern urban areas, we might have something. We were not successful. There are two different kinds of communities. But that's a part of the reality.

And for many of you here—the information on the coming of consciousness among Blacks in the South and in SNCC—we have to understand that there are some dynamics that have never been written in the history books.

One of those dynamics is that the young people from McComb [MS]—the high school students who went to Harlem in 1964, was it? And they had the audience with Malcolm X. And I think it had an impact on him. It certainly had an impact on them. And the fact is, that dialogue and communication continued over a long period of time. I'm beyond the 15 minutes.

One last thing—and that is, is that it was SNCC people who, in 1965, invited Malcolm X to Brown Chapel [AME Church] in Selma, Alabama. There is a consistency here in terms of our growth and development.

And you take the assassination of Malcolm X—which many people were dear to. You take the Sammy Younge assassination. You take the persecution of people who said, “Hell no, I won't go.” You take the COINTELPRO that disrupted many of our lives—distortions and lies—and you can begin to see the context in which Black Power emerges. And I'll stop there. I'm sorry.

Jim Miller: Gloria House was Field Secretary of SNCC in Lowndes County, Alabama, from 1965 to 1967. Now Professor of Humanities at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Gloria House: Thank you. I'd like to say good afternoon to everyone, and to tell you how happy I am to be here with you—especially with my friends and coworkers, comrades who are in SNCC.

I'd like to thank Jack Chatfield for all his work and all the students who helped him, and my friend and confidant, buddy Martha Prescod Norman, for giving him all of the help she did to make this conference possible.

Courtland told me that I'd better not get up here and say how I was in awe of all the other people. But I'm going to say it anyway, because I am. And I'm going to say it for the same reason Martha said it. I have a great deal of love, admiration, and respect for the people I came to know and love in SNCC. I did then, I still do. I still feel about them as if we are a beloved community—even after these years. So yes, I am in awe. And I'm pleased to be a part of this—of this conference.

I'm going to take up where Cleve [Cleveland Sellers] left off. Generally, when you read about the Southern movement, there is a kind of one-dimensionality about the narrative, so that you don't get a full texture of what the lives of people were like. The lives of local people and the lives of young people who went South to work with those people. And Cleve has given you some of the dynamics that were at work there.

And I think that what I'm going to share with you very quickly—I'm going to read part of it because I want to go through it quickly—will just add to an understanding of just how complex and how rich the texture and fabric of our lives were at that point.

I went South to Selma, Alabama, from Berkeley, California, where I'd been in school as a graduate student in the Comparative Literature Department. For a few years, I had been watching the Southern movement, and some things had happened in the South that were just so horrible that they preoccupied me, and they kept a hold on me.

One of them was the murder of the four little girls in the Birmingham church. The other was the killing of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner. I remember walking home from campus one day from the library, picking up a newspaper and looking at a photo of Southern Mississippi policemen dragging bodies onto the shore of the river and putting them into huge black sacks.

And something in me—just—there was a thud in me. And I was horrified. I felt, then, of course, we live in a country where the ruling class, the power structure, will allow genocide against us as a people. I wanted to be a part of changing this.

Meanwhile, something happened in Berkeley that kept me there for a little bit longer: the Free Speech Movement. And again, I'm going to get back to a theme that Silas [Norman] brought up before—the connectedness of the movement at this time, and of students who were involved in the movement.

The Free Speech Movement was, at root, a struggle against the university administration, who had told us that we did not have a right, as students, to mobilize and to raise funds to support the struggle in the South. And we said, we do have the right, and we will go on.

And we had set up tables at the entrance to the campus there at Telegraph Avenue and Sather, and we were collecting money. And one of the people who was instrumental in the leadership of the Free Speech Movement was Mario Savio, who had himself been in Mississippi the summer before, and came back with a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment to work—even though he was still in school—to work to support the Southern movement.

As a result of this determination on the part of students—to go on collecting funds and politicizing people and talking about the movement in the South and engaging in boycotts and pickets right there in the Bay Area—the administration decided this just had to stop.

And when we couldn't get the administration to negotiate any further with us, some students decided to stage a sit-in in the administration building. And I was not one of those students who decided to stay overnight. But I remember coming to campus early the next morning and being shocked to see that there were police forces—the National Guardsmen—every armed body they could find from all of the neighboring cities in the Bay Area were there on the University of California campus, lined up for blocks.

And as we stepped onto the campus, we could see policemen dragging students down the marble staircase in Sproul Hall. Those of us who were outside immediately started to organize, and I can remember students sending us messages out of the administration building—since they couldn't get out to talk to us—their messages dropped out of the window.

As a result of this mobilization, we carried on a major general strike at the University of California that changed the relationship between university administrations and students. I think once and for all in our history, students sat on the Board of Regents. Students had a say in government. And teaching assistants and graduate assistants organized the first labor union ever in an American university.

So we learned that a few people, unified around an objective, trusting each other, could require even the most powerful institutions to change. And we were, of course, very exhilarated by that.

By the time FSM [Free Speech Movement] was over, I learned that a group of students from San Francisco State were collecting books for freedom schools in the South, and they were planning to go to Selma and set up a freedom school. And I thought, “Aha! Now is my chance, finally, to go South.”

And we all got together and we drove South. We rented a house right on the edge of the housing project—I can't remember the housing project name—but in the center of this housing project was Brown's Chapel. And Brown's Chapel was a central organizing place for the Selma movement.

The first night in Selma, people who were there in the [Freedom School](#) house encouraged me to come with them to a mass meeting at Brown's Chapel. And who should be the main speaker at Brown's Chapel but my colleague to the right here—Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael]. And I was introduced to Kwame after the mass meeting. Of course, fell in love with him immediately. But that's a different story that we won't take on today. Some other time, maybe.

I went on teaching at the Freedom School in the mornings and working with the children. By the way, the children in Selma—when I first came into Selma, the two things that impressed me most were the energy and enthusiasm of the children and the incredible music of the movement. This kept spirits very high. Resistance was very high.

In spite of the [Edmund] Pettus Bridge and all of the accommodationist policies that you've already heard Silas talk about—early SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]—and all the things that we were outraged about in terms of how they organized in Dallas County and in neighboring counties, the people's spirits were still high.¹

I worked in the Freedom School in the mornings, and Kwame invited me to come into Lowndes County and meet the families that he was working with, and to come to some of the mass meetings that took place on Sunday evenings in the churches in the county.

[I] started to work with a group of people in Lowndes—informally at that point. Kwame had also invited a young seminarian from the East, who was studying at an Episcopal seminary—I believe in Boston—Jonathan Daniels, to come into the county too and to be involved in this work.

A few weeks later, during the summer, a group of us agreed to go with some local youngsters to picket a store in Hayneville, Alabama, which was the Lowndes County seat. We went, and we picketed this store. And of course, we were arrested. We were all hauled onto a big garbage truck and taken to the county jail, which was almost as filthy as the garbage truck. There were puddles of refuse on the floor.

There were three sisters, three women—myself and [Ruby Sales](#), and Joyce Stokes, I think was her name. Was it, Kwame? A local sister from Lowndes. And several young teenagers from Lowndes County. Kwame and Scott B. [Smith] and a few other Lowndes County organizers.

We agreed within a few days that Kwame and Scott B. should go—we should get them out—and they should go and try to raise money so that bail could be paid and the rest of us could get out. Meanwhile, we kind of sang and tried to keep ourselves together.

It was while we were in jail there in Hayneville that we heard the news of the Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles. And we all had the sense—we are living in a very, very important time. All of us there in the jail had that feeling—wow, things are beginning to open up. Move outside. We're part of something very, very important.

After about a week—I think we may have been in jail for about eight days—all of a sudden the guards just came to us and said, “Okay, you're going. We're releasing you on your own recognizance.”

And of course, we were suspicious of this. No one from SNCC had been in touch with us. We had not been told that bail had been raised. We had no information from anyone. And we thought, no, this doesn't sound right. But they forced us out of the jail at gunpoint. Yeah—being

¹ In the context of the passage, the Edmund Pettus Bridge represents the violent repression and systemic obstacles that civil rights activists faced in their organizing efforts—particularly in Selma and surrounding counties.

forced out of jail at gunpoint, right? If you know something worse might be waiting for you outside, you sort of hang on to that jail.

Well, we did. And then we were standing around on the outside of the jail, and they forced us off the property there, onto the blacktop—one of the county roads—and again at gunpoint. And since we'd been in jail and really hadn't had any treats or anything fun to eat or drink—I mean, we'd been eating, what is that, pork rind and horrible biscuits and whatever—some of us thought, “Okay, let's walk to the little store here and get a drink, have some ice cream, whatever.”

And we headed to a corner store. Just as we turned onto the main drag of Hayneville, gunfire broke out. And we realized the gunfire was coming in our direction. The youngsters, of course, started running everywhere. Some of us just fell on the ground. Ruby Sales and myself had been walking with Jonathan—fell there on the ground. Jonathan was hit immediately, and we think he must have died immediately.

Father [Richard] Morrisroe, the only other white member of the group, was also hit, but did not die immediately. And moaned and groaned and moaned and groaned—moaned and groaned in a horrible way that none of us who were there will ever forget.

It seemed to me that it was hours before anyone appeared on this road in Hayneville. Everyone had been informed, of course, that something was going to happen. So this curiously deserted highway—or main road—was silent, because that's the way it was intended to be. We thought we were all going to be killed.

We later learned that the targets were Jonathan and Father Morrisroe—the two whites in the group—and that a marksman had been hired to kill the two of them, and had been deputized for that purpose. And this man got off scot-free after the trial. Most of us returned to the county for the trial and watched him get off scot-free.

I was scheduled to go back to Berkeley and to resume work as a teaching assistant in the French Department—which I did. And I stayed for about three days. And I remember going into the chairman of the French Department and saying, “You know, I'm really sorry to inconvenience you in this way. I know that you're going to have to now find another teaching assistant. But I'm leaving.”

And he said, “Well, what's the matter? Where are you going?” And I told him. And he said, “Oh, I understand completely. I'm Algerian. And I have been involved for a long time in revolutionary struggle.” So I came back. And I was hired by Silas as a Field Secretary and started to work in Lowndes—officially.

I have to thank people like [Judy Richardson](#) and all the others who had worked there long before I showed up. I was like the rear flank, right? The staff at that point was Kwame—when he was not off doing speeches and tours, because by this time, he had been elected Chair of SNCC—Courtland Cox, Bob Mance, [Janet Jemmott](#)—whom I miss a lot today. I wish she were here.

Our job was to, as has been said frequently, to do what the people said we should do—to help them move the struggle forward in the ways that they thought it should be moved forward.

There were already some very strong activists in Lowndes County. The Jacksons, for example, who gave us a Freedom House—a place to live—and other families who were not afraid to take a stand and who were ready to cooperate in the work.

[Jack Minnis](#) had discovered in the Alabama code that it was possible to get an independent political party on the ballot in Alabama if you met certain stipulations. So that gave us immediately a way to get in and organize people independently.

The Democratic Party was still the party of white supremacy. That rooster that Johnny Jackson talked to you about earlier today was about white supremacy. People knew that that party wasn't something that they wanted to be involved in.

So it wasn't difficult for us to talk about independent organizing. What was difficult was to make clear the process by which this kind of legal operation had to be undertaken. And that was our job as SNCC workers—to inform people, to make that clear.

There was also some literacy work to be done. Many people in the county could not read and write. Also, there was some teaching of history because we learned very early in the work that it was our own sense of identity as a people, our own sense of historical continuity—that gave us the strength to do the kind of work that we were doing. And it would also empower the people that we were working with.

Now I want to say something again about the context of this work that is left out in the history books. The people who joined in, agreed to register to vote, and to become a part of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization—whose symbol was the Black Panther—those people knew that they were taking extreme risk. Many of them were thrown off the land that they had farmed for whites for years and ended up in a tent city in the county.

I should tell you that Lowndes County, of course, was one of the Black Belt counties in Alabama that SNCC had agreed to move into. These counties had, for 100 years since Reconstruction, seen no participation of Blacks in any electoral form. Blacks had been denied all of the farm subsidies, all of the various programs that were supposedly theirs through the federal government. Have I gone over my [time]? Okay, I'm gonna wrap up real fast.

So this was bringing people who had been excluded 400 years back into this political process. And this was a county where 95% of the land was in the ownership of a very, very tiny minority of whites. So when sharecroppers agreed to be a part of this movement, they were also accepting that they were risking their livelihood.

And again, the texture—many of those families ended up living in a tent city, just off—just on the corner of Highway 80 that’s been mentioned to you earlier today—where whites would drive by at night and shoot in at us. And we learned very quickly to hit the ground and wait until people had left. So this was the climate in which organizing took place in Lowndes County, Alabama.

Now, quickly, while we were doing this work among the local folk, inside SNCC, some very important things were happening—towards the Black Power, or I would prefer to call the idea or the ideology of self-determination, independent politics.

One, we were able to, through a lot of debate and hassle and fighting, to finally agree to accept—to do—a public position against the Vietnam War. And this, again, was out of our growing consciousness of ourselves as a people, as a nation oppressed, and understanding our identity with the Vietnamese and other Third World nations also fighting for national liberation.

The other major political struggle within the organization was the one in which white field secretaries were asked to work in white communities or in the SNCC offices. There was never a vote to expel any field secretary. This point of history has been misrepresented repeatedly. There were no expulsions.

The idea came out of the fact that we were talking about independent politics. We were talking about Black consciousness. We were talking about pride in our own background, in our own achievements. It seemed to us a major contradiction to ask white field secretaries to go among Black sharecroppers and convince them of their power to be self-determining and to be independent. We simply said, there’s a great deal of work to be done in white communities, and white field secretaries can do it.

But of course, this position was projected in the media as SNCC racism, as separatism, etc. And fundraising in the North, of course, suffered from that. And of course, then the \$9.68 very, very rarely appeared after that. That’s what I want to say about the work in Lowndes County. Let me just make one more comment, and then I’m going to stop before Kwame hits me.

I think it’s very important for us to understand that what we were doing—as students, young people in the South, with local folk—was a part of a worldwide movement for national liberation. We were part of an upsurge that really took hold in the [19]60s, though it had begun as far back as the early 1900s in Africa and Asia and Latin America, with people saying we want to determine our own way. We want a third way. We constitute a Third World.

And if those people were fighting for national liberation, for national identity—so were we. And we were very much influenced by the independence of Egypt, the independence of Ghana, the independence of Tanzania, the independence of Guinea, the struggle of the Portuguese colonies in Africa. We watched these things, and they had an impact on us.

We did read Frantz Fanon. We did read Malcolm. We did talk about these things, and we took them in, and we internalized them. And we were moving out of this consciousness towards what later was coined Black Power.

Jim Miller: Courtland Cox was involved in the [Nonviolent Action Group](#) at Howard University from 1961 to 1964. Served as coordinator for the 1963 March on Washington. Field Secretary for SNCC in Mississippi during Freedom Summer in 1964. Field Secretary for SNCC in Lowndes County, Alabama, 1965 to 1966. Served as a representative to the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal in Stockholm in 1966. Mr. Cox.

Courtland Cox: Good afternoon. I'd like to do two things this afternoon in the limited time that we have. I'd like to talk a bit about the reaction of the country to the slogan Black Power—or to the issue of Black Power—and to give some thinking about the development of the [Lowndes County Freedom Organization](#). I think those two things, while—as other speakers have talked about—are part of a larger piece, given the time that we have, I'd just like to focus on those two issues.

The issue of Black Power—when it came out of the Meredith March, as enunciated by my good friend Mr. Ture and Willie Ricks—raised, to this country, that there was a major threat in the land.

And I tried to think—especially trying to give an example to the people who were not around in 1965–1966—a similar circumstance that happened in the immediate past. And I guess on a small scale, the thing that comes first to mind is the reaction of the country after Jesse Jackson won the Michigan caucuses.

There was an alarm that went through this country that said: the status quo is under attack. And there was a call for politicians, for newspapers, and for everybody to denounce and to come to the attack of Jesse Jackson. And those who came to the attack of Jesse Jackson were given a great deal of say and popularity. And those who didn't were not given the audience.

That is the same thing that happened—probably with greater intensity and for a longer period of time—during the question of Black Power. And if you want to have a sense of what had happened during that period, let Jesse Jackson win New York—and you will see it come back again. The need to attack. Because there is a danger in the land.

And the first thing that was called upon during that time in Black Power—and at this point—is the need to denounce. Now, there's a very cute trick that—well, they will rule with us—but there's a very cute trick they do to Jesse Jackson. They say to him, “The reason we're trying to bury you is because we're taking you as a serious candidate.” As a friend of mine used to say, that's pissing on somebody and telling them it's rain.

The second thing that usually happens in this situation—what happened to SNCC after the rise of the issue of Black Power—is they call on you to constantly answer questions: “What do you want? What do you mean? You cannot really mean that. Don't you mean this?”

And I think, as Martha and Cleve and others have talked about this morning, the reason that the history books have a certain perspective is because there is a need to have a certain perspective for the history to function within certain parameters.

And the fact of the matter is that Black Power, and things that are perceived as threats, have to be exorcised. And there is a process that goes on—that did not only happen with Black Power, not only happened with Jesse—it happens every time there is a sense that there is a threat to the status quo.

The next thing that happens is they call on you to—to modify what you said. Or they call on responsible Negro leadership to be able to help you understand what is said. Or they call on responsible Negro leadership to establish a different context for what is to be said.

So that King gave a sense that, especially in the early days, that what we were about was trying to be part of America. He was not saying, “We want to change America.” And those things that pick up on that theme are given high visibility. Those things that do not pick up on that theme are given no visibility.

And finally, they ask you yourself—once they see there's a crack in the discussion—they ask you to redefine and repudiate what it is you've initially stated, to make it less radical and more moderate.

This process is almost automatic—not only in the issue of Black Power, but in the issue of Jesse Jackson. When we issued the statement on the Vietnam War, when King issued his speech at the Riverside Church, there is a mechanism that goes automatically into play. You watch it. And especially watch it if, by some situation, Jesse gets more votes on Tuesday than [Michael] Dukakis.

Now, on the one hand, you have the reaction of the establishment to things that they view as a threat to the status quo—in particular in terms of the Black community, and particularly in terms of Black Power. The Black community came to the defense of SNCC and—to, at that point, the Chairman of the organization—Kwame Ture.

Because, without saying it in any long letters to the Op-Ed, the Black community believes that if the establishment is so adamantly against it, there must be something good in it. Because they understand—their final analysis through history and experiences, people talked about this morning—that that is the same establishment that is responsible, in many respects, for their plight.

The other thing about the Black community's response to the question of Black Power is that it delivered a positive message to them. It said: you are beautiful. You must be strong. You have a proud history. And there's unity in strength.

And with that, many people took the discussion in many arenas—into electoral politics, into the social arenas, into the economic arenas, and into the cultural arenas. While many people have given great emphasis to the cultural arenas, I think when you look at what has happened and what changes have been made, the other two arenas have been just as profound.

I think the question of Black Power—while it was beaten about by the press—was very helpful to the Black community. Because as they were alerting the white establishment community about a particular danger, they were also alerting the Black community about an opportunity.

I think that we could not have spread the word and the concept about issues of Black Power and the thrust to give the Black community a better definition of self, give the Black community a greater sense of organization in terms of electoral politics, and the Black community a greater sense of economic organization to the various caucuses and emphasis that developed, if it did not have the widespread currency that the press gave it.

So in the final analysis, I think that the response of the press was predictably hostile. That there are certain mechanisms that they undertake when they feel the establishment is under attack. That while, in some respects, while the issue of Black Power may have seemed to cause a great deal of confusion, I think, as we look at it historically, there are a number of advances that occurred in the political, economic, and social arenas that can be directly attributable to that debate and discussion that occurred at that particular time.

In the remaining time that I have, I'd like to talk a bit about the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. Because I think probably, it's one of the most important things that SNCC did. Johnny Jackson referred to the rooster, and Gloria House referred to it also. I just happen to have a copy of the document. And I know you can't see it, but the rooster on the top of it says "White Supremacy," and on the bottom says "For the Right"—the official slogan of the Democratic Party of Alabama.

I think that what we were trying to do was to pose the question that was very important after the Voting Rights Bill. And I think the O'Jays sing the song: "Now that we found love, what are we gonna do with it?"

I think our view was: now that we have the vote, what are we going to do with it? I think it was very important for us that, if we had the vote and we looked at the situation in Lowndes County, that we develop a strategy that would move us forward.

In 1965, Lowndes County had a population that was 80% Black, yet only 4% of that population was registered to vote. All the elected officials were white, and the people of Lowndes County—like the rest of the people in Alabama—faced a number of conditions. They faced police brutality. They faced poor housing, substandard education, poor health facilities, very low ownership of land, a hostile and arrogant courthouse which had a tax assessor, tax collector, and probate judge that cared nothing for their views or their ideas.

I think what we were faced at at that point was: do we complain and protest about these conditions, or—when you have a situation where the community is 80% Black—then why complain about police brutality when you can be the sheriff yourself? Why complain about substandard education when you can be the Board of Education? Why complain about the courthouse when you could move to take it over yourself?

There was a certain logic to that position—that is to say, in places where you could exercise the control, why complain about it? Why protest, when you could exercise power?

I think, as mentioned by Gloria, Jack Minnis—who was probably one of the smartest people that SNCC ever had—looked at a law. He liked to look at laws and play with concepts. Raised the issue of putting together in each county a party that would be responsible for carrying out the wishes of the people.

And one of the things that we did is, we took the law and we broke down the responsibilities of the sheriff, tax assessor, Board of Education, tax collector—in comic-book style, that people could see and read. And if it was difficult reading—at least through the pictures, they could get a sense of what was being talked about. Because educating the population—not just manipulating them—was very important to us.

We felt that as we organized the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, three things were stressed. The first is organization itself. Second, that people had to understand what the responsibilities and duties were. And three, that local leadership had to come from among the population and had to be supported by the population.

I think in the discussion of Black Power, Lowndes County was a logical reaction to trying to deal with people's concrete realities. It was, in fact—when you look at it—the only way to deal with their concrete realities. I think for the SNCC organizers, what it began to say to us is that we must find ways to stop asking those who oppress us to deal with the nature of our oppression.

And secondly, that in those issues and limited areas such as Lowndes County, where we could exercise power and control, that we should. And in those areas where, in fact, we are trying to establish the just society, that we have to coalesce with others in other communities who had gotten strength, who had gotten an understanding, as if we had, and tried to move to another agenda.

So I think that as we look at the discussion of Black Power, that we can say that there's been a distortion of the concepts. There's been a distortion of reality. But I think, while that has operated and has triumphed at one level—in terms of the media and the press—when I sit down and have a conversation with Johnny Jackson and find out what, in fact, is going on in Lowndes County.

When Johnny Jackson is talking to me about putting in economic development activities in Lowndes County, when he's talking about joining with other whites in the county to stop a toxic waste plant in the county, when he talks about what ideas he has both in terms of the political and economic—I know that the logic of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization has triumphed in the end. Thank you very much.

Jim Miller: Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, served as Field Secretary of SNCC and chaired the organization from 1966 to 1967. He now serves as an organizer for the All-African Revolutionary Party. Kwame Ture.

Kwame Ture: Using the Rastafarian phrase, we give thanks to all who had something to do with this conference. All philosophers, whether materialist or idealist, admit of change. Discussions and disagreement only arise when the question is posed: how does change come about?

Certainly, if we are to speak about the development of Black Power and what it meant, we must look at how the changes evolved to this point.

Change comes only through one process. It is the dialectical process, which has many aspects of it. But just briefly, the aspect we would like to deal with now is that the dialectical process says that everything has inside of it, its own contradictions. And it is the struggle of these contradictions for a position of dominance that allows for the fluidity of change.

We must understand that this possibility of change is instinctive to many of us. For example, every human being sitting in this room instinctively understands that it is incorrect to cheat or to lie. Thanks to the wonderful mechanism of the human body, making this the superior animal on the face of the earth—even when one lies, one's body acts abnormally. Even one's palms can sweat or one can even shiver.

Of course, the human body—a wonderful piece of machinery—can get accustomed to anything. And after a while, you can lie so your palms do not sweat.

But it is clear here that there is this constant struggle that exists between us. And either one cheats—and consequently, here, cheating being bad, the negative is dominant—or one does not cheat—and consequently, being honest is a positive characteristic in human life.

But one does dominate. Either one cheats or one does not cheat. There is no in-between ground. And of course, if one does not cheat, the possibility of cheating is always there. Consequently, even when the positive is in command—even when the positive is dominant—there's need for constant struggle, for increased struggle, so that it remains that way.

Simply put, I must be more honest today than I was yesterday, to remain honest tomorrow. The constancy of the struggle, then, is clear here.

In order to understand Black Power, we must look at some of the contradictions inside of SNCC. Obviously, in the limited time that we have, we cannot touch them all. Consequently, I have picked just two, and picked some of the examples of these two within SNCC to show the weaknesses and the contradictions that allowed for the development of Black Power.

The major contradiction in SNCC was between revolution and reform. Here we must be careful. When we speak of revolution, we mean here a change of values of the society. When we speak of reform, we speak of a change of the structure of the society. Thus, we can see here that revolution is fundamental, affecting the very values of the society. Reform is not fundamental and only touches the superficial aspects of the society.

There was then a constant struggle inside SNCC between those who were revolutionary and those who reformed. This, of course, demonstrated itself in the political arena—by those who were anti-capitalist and those who were pro-capitalist. It demonstrated itself in practical activity.

Those who were anti-capitalist understood that, in order for Africans in this country to be free, the American capitalist system must be totally and completely destroyed. Those who reformed felt that some aspects of the capitalist system were unjust. For example, its racist aspects—and perhaps if we knocked out the racism and allowed some Africans to join the bourgeoisie, then the problem itself would be solved. This contradiction must be properly understood.

At no time was the revolutionary aspect of SNCC dominant. At all times, the reform aspect of SNCC was dominant. And certainly, we can see that today from the activities of those who are no longer in SNCC. But it is clear here. But SNCC, of course, produced some sterling revolutionaries.

Its second contradiction we want to touch was that of African nationalism versus American nationalism. The word "African" here is to replace the incorrect word of "Black nationalism." This constant conflict between the allegiance of Africans in this country—totally to Africa or to

America—is one that has plagued us since we first came here. This contradiction, of course, was found uppermost in SNCC.

These are the two contradictions, then, that we wish to touch on. We want to say one thing about some of the problems that existed inside of SNCC that affected these contradictions. The first was a lack of a clear ideology inside of SNCC.

We must understand here that every society has an ideology. Every organization has an ideology. Whether that ideology is spelled out or whether it is not spelled out, whether it is overt or covert, each individual in every part of the world is dominated by an ideology—whether they are conscious of it or unconscious of it.

Because SNCC ideology was not clearly spelled out—in fact, SNCC ideology was a capitalist ideology, which dominated SNCC. Here, the aspects of struggle against this capitalist philosophy, against racism, can be clearly seen.

SNCC, we said, had no clear ideology simply because an ideology is not just something negative—a statement against. You know, in America, we're tired of hearing people: they're against this, they're against that, they're against this—but they never tell us what they're for.

In order for there to be a revolutionary, just to have a clear ideology, it's not just that you're against something. But more important is, what are you for? And while in SNCC, all of us were against the brutal exploitation of the oppressed masses in this country, we never came to decide exactly what it is we were fighting for.

Thus, our coming together in SNCC was really coming together in opposition—against that which we were fighting for, for different reasons and for different objectives.

This can be seen clearly, for example, in recent years over the struggle that occurred in Angola—where MPLA, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, and the FLNA, the National Liberation Front of Angola—these three liberation movements fought seriously against Portuguese colonialism in Africa, with guns in hand, each of them inflicting great damage upon the Portuguese colonialists. But not all three of them had the same idea of what they were fighting for.

It was only the MPLA, the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola, that had a clear analysis of a socialist society—a society in which all aspects of exploitation must be totally uprooted.

UNITA and FLNA did not have this idea. They wanted to put the Portuguese colonialists out so they could come now and take the place of the Portuguese colonialists and continue to dominate

the suffering masses in Angola. This is a clear example of what occurred inside of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Second contradiction...the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee saw the necessity for organization in order to make clear their protest and to make it more effective. This was in clear contradiction to that of Martin Luther King and the spontaneous movement that everywhere followed.

Indeed, Brother [Bob] Mants this morning explained and touched over and over again on the spontaneous nature that existed inside the movement whenever we had relationships with SCLC. But SNCC itself recognized the necessity to fight against the spontaneous nature and to become more organized.

Unfortunately for SNCC, relying again on the contradictions between revolution and reform—because revolution sees the necessity for eternal struggle, reform sees the necessity for temporary struggle.

Indeed, if one only wants to get rid of racism under the capitalist system, it is clear that once this aspect is gone, we can easily melt into the capitalist system and live happily ever after. If one takes a position against capitalism, one sees the necessity for constant struggle to uproot the entire system.

Because of this, SNCC saw organization only as temporary, in terms of its being effective as a protest movement, and did not see the necessity of eternal political organization to guard the vigilance of every human being.

This error, then, we saw, was completely reflected when Black Power, in fact, did come—and SNCC no longer was able to come itself and to carry out the struggle because of the temporary nature.

SNCC, of course, did not see the necessity for a political party. And this one is clear here—especially, SNCC helped to create two political parties: the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization.

Yet SNCC itself, because of its lack of clear ideology, had some sort of stupid and anarchistic trend which made it appear as if things, by itself, would pop up and go along and we had no reason to worry about it. This struggle, of course, was clearly seen and most dominated in the figures of James Forman and Bob Moses Parris. Here the question—of course, that's what the struggle was. If you missed it, I didn't.

The role of the intelligentsia in SNCC was crucial. Of course, we discussed last night briefly at the meeting, whether or not students are used for reform movements or revolutionary

movements. And if used for both, they will have different forms and different ideas of the work they're doing.

But SNCC shows clearly the truth of the statement of Karl Marx, that ideas, when taken over by the masses, become material reality. Certainly, this is what SNCC was able to do with students. They sent students to the South—peasants, sharecroppers—and it was this combination that gave to the world Black Power.

One must not misunderstand it any other way around. Some think that Black Power came out of the Northern ghettos. It did not. It came from the combination of the work with the intelligentsia—the African intelligentsia in this country—and African peasants in the South.

It was the other shortcoming of SNCC—and Cleve touched upon this—is that it was a Southern organization. It was not a national organization. And thus, when called to respond nationally to events, it carried a Southern mentality with it. This really was its greatest problem.

All right, now we want to look and see the complete development of Black Power within this context. Black Power arises after the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is refused seating at the Atlantic City convention of the Democratic Party.

One must come to understand this piece properly. It's swept under the rug quickly by many who've made their compromises with the Democratic Party. But the Democratic Party is a racist party—of that, there isn't the slightest question. The Democratic Party is a corrupt party—of that, there isn't the slightest question.

We hope Jesse's of strong moral character, because we think even if Jesus Christ went into the Democratic Party, he would come out corrupted.

Once the Democratic Party gave its racist response to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, those in SNCC who were reformist—those in SNCC who assured us that we could easily melt into the Democratic Party—had no program for SNCC at all.

It was the revolutionary and the nationalist element that was able to come forward and give a program to SNCC. And Courtland Cox is absolutely correct—because of the floundering of the liberals and the reformist elements in SNCC, having no way to go, Lowndes County became their only program.

It was Lowndes County that became their program—because Lowndes County spelled out clearly: no relationships with the Democratic Party at all. Independent political party. The struggle in Lowndes County is a crucial one, and shows SNCC clearly ways back to go. It is this struggle that will, in fact, define Black Power—its strategy and its tactics—for SNCC.

We just put here in passing that Dr. Martin Luther King himself came into Lowndes County—himself—to urge the people of Lowndes County to vote in the Democratic Party and not to follow the line of SNCC. We might also add in passing that the SNCC chairman at that time himself went into Alabama and preached the same thing—against the very workings of his organization.

The contradictions then in SNCC were boiling clearly to a point: whether or not the Democratic Party was or was not our savior. Whether or not, as Courtland Cox eloquently ended his presentation, whether we will continue to speak to our oppressors to stop oppressing us, or whether we will speak to the masses of the people—organize them—and let their strength turn against the wrath of the enemy, and hit him without pity and without mercy, until he's knocked down.

This is precisely what Black Power represented.

We said—Karl Marx says that ideas become material reality when the masses take hold of them—and the masses took hold of Black Power. Of that, there isn't the slightest question. Mike Thelwell is absolutely correct: Black Power has not been achieved and cannot be achieved. Certainly, we cannot consider African elected officials as Black Power. This is indeed an insult.

The Africans in this country have more elected officials than any other ethnic group in the country. They have 303 mayors. They have 24 Congresspeople. They have 5,600 local, county, and other elected officials—the overwhelming majority of whom belong to the Democratic Party.

Africans have less political power than any other ethnic group in this country, and less power inside the Democratic Party than any other ethnic group in the country.

It is clear then, that Black Power, which calls upon the emphasis of depending upon no one except the oppressed masses of the people, is still the correct line for the liberation of our people—not only in this country, but throughout the world.

In no way must you think the struggle is not continuing. It is continuing everywhere. Black Power came to transform the struggle. It came down, in the first place—as Cleve clearly pointed out—to knock out this idea of morality, as if morality will decide our relationship to capitalism. It is only power that will decide this relationship.

And indeed, it is the power that we have that will be able to show us how to transform the Democratic Party—how to transform the bourgeois electoral politics in which we say that we must take part.

It certainly is a tragedy that one would think that Africans in this country, in order to become mayors, had to shed their blood—and when our people become mayors, they act just like a white man who didn't have to shed his blood, but had to play corrupt politics to become a mayor.

Thus, the logic of [Wilson] Goode bombing Philadelphia becomes even more tragic, when he took over positions from [Frank] Rizzo who in fact oppressed and brutalized Africans everywhere.²

Black Power came to put clearly in line the tactics and the means of struggle. Dr. King's era had, everywhere, come to affect the struggle. This era of making nonviolence a principle in a nonviolent world. Nonviolence can only be a tactic and Black Power came to show properly the tactic of nonviolence: if it works, use it; if it doesn't—toss hand grenades. Let's be free. That's the only issue on the floor.

The destruction of the capitalist system—four minutes. Four minutes on the timekeeper Jack [Chatfield].

The job of the capitalist system, of course, is in all places and all attempts, in all places, all times—to derail the people's just movement for their just liberation. Thus, everywhere, the Black Power movement has been derailed.

We are to be told that it represents voting strength. We are told it represents this and represents that. We are clear here—it is only the organized masses that will free us. Thus, our energies must be directed only toward this area. Anytime we direct our energies anywhere, we're serving the interest of the enemy.

Certainly, the last ten years—from [19]76 to [19]86, from [19]78 to [19]88—with all the improved, quantitatively speaking, number of added representatives, elected officials we have, can clearly demonstrate—we are still a powerless people. We are still the victims of racist attack, not only in Mississippi but in New York City.

These will not end through getting us a president. They will only end when our people come—firmly and properly organized, determined to smash capitalism in every aspect—who will be followed by those who truly love justice—will we arrive at our total liberation.

Black Power, we said, has not been achieved—and it's clear. Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah told us carefully that Black Power can never be achieved until Pan-Africanism is achieved. And Pan-Africanism is nothing other than the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism. It is only when Africa is free, unified, and socialist that Africans all over the world will be free.

This solution is tied to the contradiction of African nationalism versus American nationalism—a struggle that still continues in this country within the African masses—but one that we're sure African nationalism will work out, without a doubt. Its tenacity, its determination, and its hold on

² This line underscores the painful irony and tragedy of Wilson Goode—a Black mayor—ordering the bombing of the MOVE organization in 1985, an act of state violence that mirrored the oppressive tactics of his predecessor, Frank Rizzo.

the African masses has not lessened at all. It is only the American system, its press system, which tries to confuse us in tying up.

America today is more ripe for revolution than it was in the 1960s. This is clear for all those who truly love justice and who have continued to come to work for the people. Those who have abrogated working for the people are lost in bourgeois hallucinations and cannot see clearly.

They become confused by the press, which informs them that the people in America don't like politics—they're not involved in politics—that "do your own thing" since the [19]60s is nothing but another lie by the American capitalist system.

Every segment of America today—every social class, every national minority—is more conscious today of their oppression than they were in the 1960s. No one can tell me that women today are less conscious of their oppression from men than they were in the 1960s.

No one can tell me today that Africans, who have produced 303 mayors, are less politically aware than they were in the [19]60s. No one can tell me that the right [wing] in this country is less politically active than it was in the [19]60s. On the contrary—the right today is involved in activities which they considered communistic in the [19]60s. That's fact.

Every segment of this society is more politically conscious—even the handicapped is more politically conscious inside this society. Consequently, for anyone to tell us that the people are less conscious, and for us to believe this—are those who are reading television and following television.

The same ones who said the television distorted Black Power and the civil rights movements are the same ones who are getting their information now about the movements of their people from the same television.

It is clear that the people are more politically conscious. It is a fact that the conditions are worse today than ever before. We didn't have three million homeless people to discuss. If you're talking about problems facing this country in the 1960s. Today, anyone discussing problems in this country and not discussing three million homeless has lost all touch with reality.

The conditions are worse today than they were in the 1960s. In addition to this—throughout the world, wherever American imperialism has been strong, it's been knocked down, everywhere.

In [Ferdinand] Marcos—they themselves, who put him in, had to pull him out. In South Korea—the gallant students there, followed by the masses, have come to turn out a military dictator. We have seen since 1979 the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi] fall. We've seen [Anastasio] Somoza [Debayle] fall. Everywhere, we've seen the puppets that America put forth. Even American imperialism is so weak today that it cannot bark at [Manuel] Noriega nor bite at [Daniel] Ortega. Everywhere, it's on its final stand.

American imperialism will be destroyed—of that, there isn't the slightest question—because of the instinctive love of justice of the masses of people everywhere. American imperialism, we say, is weaker today than it's ever been. The people, we say today, are more conscious than ever before. All that is lacking is revolutionary organization.

The All-African People's Revolutionary Party continues to make its contribution to humanity by playing its humble role in organizing the masses of our people for a unified socialist Africa, which will ensure the destruction of American imperialism. This is Black Power—ready for the revolution. Thank you.

Jim Miller: I should point out that there's a particular tradition of eloquence that seems to be associated with Howard University. All of the men on the panel came out of Howard University—and they came out at the same time.

I think that we are going to clear the decks immediately and go to commentary and conversation from the audience. And I simply ask, in the name of maximizing the roughly 30–35 minutes that we have available, that both people in the audience and people on panel be as concise as they can with their responses. Brother [Lawrence] Guyot.

Lawrence Guyot: I would like to say this is the best—with the exception of the last speaker—the best explanation that could be, historically based, of Black Power that I've ever heard. But I wanted to talk on some of the earlier statements.

Cleve, I want to make a couple of additions to the period that you're talking about. The anti-poverty program had been offered as an alternative to SNCC at the Waveland Conference. Bayard Rustin had written his commentary article on the difference between protests and politics.

Martin Luther King, speaking at Howard University, had already established that MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party] was a good PR program, but shouldn't be considered serious politically.

[Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak had already [indistinct] SNCC and raised the question of who are the mildest in SNCC. Some of the good white liberals in Alabama—specifically Charles Morgan of the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union]—who had done the same thing to SNCC.

I think it's important that we understand, also, for the sake of the struggle of clarity, that the good people of McComb had come out against the Vietnam War before SNCC did. SNCC came out before Martin Luther King—but not before the MFDP.

One other point needs to be made. While SNCC certainly was key in the organization of the MFDP, it was [Bob] Moses' position that the MFDP should be discontinued after Atlantic City. There were other forces who continued it.

Another point that was going on in this period, was the congressional challenge still pending during this period, to unseat the five congresspeople in Mississippi. The Supreme Court had not yet heard and messed up the case *United States v. Mississippi*—because of Archibald Cox, who later gained fame in the Saturday Night Massacre. You know—vitriolic, symbolic obsolescence. Victim of it. Had done the right thing as Solicitor General.

Mississippi would've won. Alabama would've won. Texas would've won. I think it's very important that we look at all those [indistinct]. Carmichael, you said one that I agree with. The three most terrible places in this country [indistinct]: Neshoba County [MS], Oklahoma and yes, the good mayor of Philadelphia now is the capitalist terror in this country. God bless him.

Audience Member: I wanted to ask if Courtland or whoever else could talk a little bit more about the role of the government in undermining the organization. You mentioned COINTELPRO and didn't get back to it. I think that knowledge is not widely understood.

Cleveland Sellers: I'll take just a few minutes and do again a kind of personal analysis of COINTELPRO.

For me, 1968 was a year of interest. In February 1968, while organizing in South Carolina, I was among students on the campus of South Carolina State College. Forty-seven students were shot. Three were killed. I was shot and imprisoned as a result of being involved in that incident.

When I was taken to the state penitentiary in South Carolina after I was arrested, I was placed on death row and remained there for three weeks—while bond was set. After I got out of jail in 1968—shortly after that—I was indicted and brought to trial for refusing induction in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shortly after I was found guilty, Martin Luther King was assassinated. I was called back after the assassination of Martin Luther King, and ended up being denied a bond.

I went to the Atlanta City Penitentiary, Fulton County Jail, Newnan, Georgia, Rome, Georgia, Tallahassee Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, Lexington, Louisville, Nashville, and ended up in Terre Haute, Indiana.

I stayed out of communication for a period of the entire summer of 1968, and was eventually granted a bond by Justice Black. Came back to Atlanta, Georgia by way of Nashville, Louisville, and Lexington, Kentucky. I was arraigned, a bond was set, and as I was being unshackled, I turned around and was re-arrested by the sheriff in Louisiana.

Now, this is all happening in a period of a year—and that's not theoretical. That's what happened. And if you look at SNCC—and you look, I think Brother Bob Mants talked about “after the storm”—that these kinds of incidents were going on with people inside of SNCC the whole way. I was drafted out of term because of my participation in SNCC, and I was given the maximum sentence because I was in fact in SNCC. The case was subsequently overturned.

The Orangeburg Massacre—it was often assumed that one of the persons who was killed had my same resemblance and build, so the assumption is that I was a target.

I was later tried for that. At first, the charges were assault with intent to kill a police officer—anyhow, it was five charges: breaking and entering. I was facing 83 years in the penitentiary.

When I got to court, there was absolutely no evidence. I was charged with being involved in a riot. The statute in the state of South Carolina says that in order for you to be charged with a riot, two people have to be involved. There was no other person involved. I was sentenced to a year in the penitentiary in South Carolina. And did do that time—in 1973.

So many of us were not outside of that—we were involved. I think that might help put some perspective on what was happening. I have seen some of the materials since that time. I know there was a conscientious effort to undermine and destroy the Black movement.

I have been able to see a letter that was developed by the FBI to create an element of distrust between Stokely and [H.] Rap Brown. There are some other materials available. But there was a conscientious effort on the part of the FBI to silence all Black leaders. And I say that because I don't want to differentiate. It went all the way down to SCLC and all the way through RAM [Revolutionary Action Movement].

Gloria House: I just want to add a few more details to what Cleve has said. COINTELPRO was—in case there are students who are not familiar with this—the Counter Intelligence Program organized to combine the, quote, “resources” of both the FBI and the CIA, working together to destroy the Black liberation movement in this country.

There are documents that are available to you. At a certain point in the late [19]60s, the Senate published hearings—the hearings that it held on the COINTELPRO—and if you read those documents, you will see the extent to which the government went to undermine the movement.

For example—writing letters and signing the names of certain political workers and sending them to other political workers, in order to, as Cleve said, undermine the movement. For example, between the West and the East Coast Panther chapters—they did this. Between the Panthers and the Republic of New Africa—they did this.

I also discovered that they were responsible for calling Kwame's mother and telling her that if she didn't encourage her son to leave the country, she'd find him dead. You already know, I think, about the threats on Dr. King's life, about their meddling in his private affairs with his wife.

So this was an ongoing, wide-scale program targeted at specific individuals—but also at organizations. And I think that people who are activists now need to get those documents—so you understand what you're up against on a day-to-day basis. People are tracking you by telephone. They are watching you from cars, etc. And you should know.

Kwame Ture: Just to add to that. J. Edgar Hoover was the one who arrested the Honorable Marcus Garvey and did the fraud case against him.

Audience Question: My name is Anthony [indistinct] I'm from the University of Massachusetts. My first statement is directed toward Michael Thelwell. You mentioned the student movements and the need for white angels in the supporting of the student movement.

When will Blacks learn that they need to support their own movements in order to direct them in the direction that they need to go—and that's necessary for Black people to progress in this country or in the world?

Michael Thelwell: One assumes and hopes that—if the question is, "When will they learn?"—that Black people are learning, and constantly learning, that. They are learning that to an increasing degree.

Audience Member (continued): So why is it you preach on this—the need for white angels?

Audience: He didn't say that.

Audience Member (continued): Now, I heard him say that. Next statement. I'm not sure who said it, but it's going to be brief. The next statement, I forget who it was. It might have been [indistinct].

White supremacy—we talked about it as being an element in the [19]60s and something that we need to work on as far as eliminating it at that period. Is that not the case still today? Is that not the same dilemma that we are dealing with, even in 1988—white supremacy?

How is it that we can go about receiving the necessary power that many speak about, but I'm not sure understand? I would also—to wrap it up—say that I was very, very disappointed in the first four speakers. But Kwame Ture, I was very impressed by your speech and the direction that you were pushing.

Could you also advise on a program that we need to follow in order to move toward the African power in which you spoke about?

Kwame Ture: The statement I made—but I made the statement in relationship to those who were reformist in the organization, thinking that the only problem we had, indeed, was to eliminate the racist aspect of capitalism.

Of course, racism is part and parcel of capitalism. In order for capitalism to continue to exploit the people it must divide them—whether it be on race, whether it be on class, whether it be on sex. So consequently, until capitalism itself is destroyed, these are divisions—whether they be racial, whether they be gender, or class—that will continue.

And that’s the aspect we only want to show—that those who took the reform line have not solved the problem, even if they occupy elected official positions.

Audience Member [Larry Sekou Johnson]: My name is Larry Sekou Johnson. I’m a resident of Hartford and do a lot of reading. I had some things that came to mind. Nothing happens before its time, but it’s clear we need to do some things—maybe this is time for it.

I think it was Malcolm X who said, “by any means necessary, the ballot and the bullet—or the ballot or the bullet.” I think it may be necessary that we use the ballot, and if we have to defend ourselves, we might just find ourselves using a bullet.

But I think that it’s obvious that there’s a problem with structure—a lack of structure that can cause development in the Black community, because we’ve been sliding backwards for the last ten or twenty years.

What I think that we need to do—we need to have more self-help, and need to have more help from our friends, of course—whoever they are. You’re not going to help a person by giving him a fish, but if you teach him how to fish, that’s better.

We need to learn how to produce things for ourselves. We have an economy of \$200 billion plus. But that economy is like 12%, but it’s spent with Blacks. So what can we do? I see it as basically an economic thing.

I think that if Jesse Jackson wins the presidency, that’s good. I intend to vote for him. But even if he does win, I think that there are still a lot of things that are going to have to be done in communities that are going to remain unchanged—until we start taking control of the economy in the community.

Jim Miller: Do you have a question?

Audience Member [Larry Sekou Johnson]: No, I don’t.

Audience Member:

I have a question to the panel. I'm an academic—political scientist of some sort—and I'm a little younger than most of you also. I was about thirteen, fifteen, when Dr. King was killed in [19]68. I lived in D.C. And I was just thinking—listening to you all reflect about Black Power—it seems to me that one of the issues you raised is, how do we increase the sense of Black self-empowerment that you all were faced with in SNCC?

And that's a very—that's an issue I think we need to wrestle with a lot. Because in many ways, it seems to me that the sense that Black empowerment has been misunderstood as only being realized through nationalist politicization.

And I would like us to think—and I want to just raise this kind of question—that it seems to me that we have to start thinking in terms of some strategy of Black self-empowerment that allows for and sustains some type of possibility of working in coalitions with whites—whether it's class-based coalitions or whatever, however you want to put it.

It seems to me that that might, in fact, be one of the strongest visions that come historically [indistinct] that I don't want to lose. And coalitions—interracial coalitions—are problematic. You have to fight racism within them versus confronting racism outside of them.

But otherwise we're caught in a dead end. It seems to me that there's just no viable strategy outside of making some type of coalition that would allow—at least within the context of the United States—that would allow for some kind of social change.

Now lastly—so that's the question I'd like to throw: how do we define a sense of empowerment? And I just want to say this to you, [Kwame]Ture. I was in D.C. in [19]68 when you came through after Martin King was assassinated, and you gave very cathartic notes. And those of us in the Black working class were very excited about your presence there, etc.

But the riot occurred—a lot of Black folk were killed, and a lot of destruction, etc., of Black neighborhoods. And I want to say that it's not at all clear that a phenomenal tactical mistake wasn't made by those that even came into our communities making these claims for the need for the grenade and not to vote.

And that it would seem to me that you might now have some reflective—more reflective, tragic sense of helping to participate in that tragic moment. Because people's lives were lost. Tremendous dislocation. It's not cathartic. If you were there, you could come and leave. But you know, those of us who lived in these communities—we were there. We saw that.

Kwame Ture: Let me ask you a question. Would you rather be—would you rather have a lot of property, or would you rather be free? Would you rather be rich, but free—or be—

Audience Member (continued): But there's no reason—I'm trying to say—given that did not result in freedom.

Kwame Ture: No. I'm sorry. You have a misconception. You have a struggle for freedom. In 1803, when the slaves began to fight in Haiti for their liberation—to give the most democratic country that the world had at that time.

Do you know what the first act was that the slaves engaged in? They burned all the crops and all the houses on the island of Haiti. And then they told the French, “Come, let us fight to the death.” We're talking about our freedom.

[cross talk]

Kwame Ture: Listen brother, we're talking about freedom and you're talking about a house being burned.

Jim Miller: Let me exercise my right to intervene. Because it seems to me that the first question had to do with the relationship, strategies of Black empowerment and coalitions. I'd like to get some response from the panel on that. And then we can resume for a minute, because I really do want to allow as many people as possible to respond to this panel.

Kwame Ture: I just wanted to point out, however, that I don't see how anyone can expect to get freedom without shedding blood. No one can demonstrate to me any social movement in the world—starting with the great movements of religion—which have not shed blood to advance their cause.

Consequently, by pointing to the shedding of blood or the burning of buildings as a means to stop giving support to a just cause shows that one has no understanding of the struggle for justice.

Audience Member (continued): No. But all shed blood doesn't result in freedom. That's all I'm trying to say. You can also just die.

Kwame Ture: But you cannot get freedom unless you are willing to shed your blood.

Jim Miller: Courtland, you want to say something?

Courtland Cox: I was confused by the question. I think that before you get into the coalition, you first have to understand what it is you're for. I mean, one is not opposed to coalitions. But unless you, in fact, have a position and have an interest, there's no use in having a coalition—because you have to go in there as equal. And I think if you are prepared to raise and outline the interest of a particular community, then we can have a discussion about coalitions.

Kwame Ture: Especially since the ones in the [19]60s were based on nothing but stupidity. They never held up.

Audience Question [Don Jackson]: My name is Don Jackson. Mr. Ture—welcome back to Trinity. When you were last here, I was a student, and I’m the fellow who gave you a ride from the airport. So welcome back.

Following up on your analysis of your development in the movement, and the movement itself—you mentioned two forces which seemed to, as you say, pull the movement apart: the issue of revolution or the reformists.

And I’m wondering if—and then can you also bring in the whole concept of capitalism versus socialism. I’m wondering, when you were president of the movement at that time, was this your mindset? Or is this the position you’re presenting now something more of a historical perspective based on your evolution in thought? Was that your sentiment back then?

Kwame Ture: These were discussions inside of SNCC. You found a lot of discussions around socialism. Any discussions—matter of fact, if you will pick up Howard Zinn’s book *Young Abolitionists*, you will see that that book ends with discussions of socialism—[indistinct].

Audience Member [Don Jackson] (continued): Did you write this book?

Kwame Ture: No, this is Howard Zinn’s book and that was in 1965 it was published?

Audience: [19]64.

Audience Member [Don Jackson] (continued): I’m wondering if the panel will also comment on—

Gloria House: I’d love to speak to your question and to respond to some of Kwame’s points along these lines. But did you want to make another question?

Audience Member [Don Jackson] (continued): I was asking for other opinions on the issue.

Gloria House: Of course, I have to agree that the question of whether or not you struggle for revolution in this country has to do with whether or not you want to see the end of capitalism and the structuring of a new society.

Where I disagree with Kwame is to hold those of us who were students in the [19]60s, in our 20s, trying to do what we knew how to do at that moment, responsible for what we have to be doing at the present moment.

It seems to me that, as he said and several others have said during our conference, struggle goes on. A commitment to struggle goes on. And you learn each time, and you consider new strategies

and new ideological references as you move and as you develop as someone committed to struggle.

And of course, many people who were student organizers didn't end their work as political workers, as makers of change when they left SNCC. And Black Power as an ideological reference found expression in many other organizations.

Say, in the urban centers up North, in the Black Panther Party, for example, in the Republic of New Africa, in community organizing—for example, where people demanded community control of their schools, or demanded decent housing, or spoke out against the inhumanity of prisons, the conditions in prisons.

So people go on struggling around things that are clear and immediate to them, and they develop in that way. And at some point, they say, "Look, it doesn't matter how many reforms we're able to make—this whole thing has got to come down."

But it seems to me that we have to admit that that is a process, and that people go through that developmental process. And no one can say that if a certain organization stops at a certain point, it has failed. It served a certain purpose up to a certain point, and other organizations, other forces, other directions, other individuals pick up—or even some of the same individuals continue, as Kwame has, into a more radical or revolutionary posture.

Audience Member [Don Jackson] (continued): I might add, then, perhaps the title of this particular segment ought to be *The Evolution of the Black Power Movement* rather than *Rise and Fall*. It seems to be a continuing process. Thank you.

Audience Member: I'd like to thank all the panelists for being here today. I have a question for Mr. Ture. I believe you said something to the effect of, "If nonviolence works, fine, but if it doesn't, throw hand grenades." Due to my own ignorance—lack of experience—I'm not certain about something, and that is: how does throwing hand grenades fit into your own personal sense of ethics?

Kwame Ture: The question which you raise has to do with an error made by King, which has been continued by the mass media in this country. King's error was that he tried to take nonviolence and make it a principle in a nonviolent world. Because of King's honesty, the error was compounded.

King, being an honest man, understood that there is no gray area in principles. Either one is honest, or one is not. Either one believes in God, or one does not. Either one is for the people, or one is against them. There is no middle ground.

Consequently, once you take hold of a principle and you're an honest man, you must—under all conditions, at all times—adhere to this principle. Since King took nonviolence as a principle, it meant that at all times, under all conditions, he must use nonviolence.

Just an aside—King himself came into contradiction with this principle. We are reminded of when his house was bombed in Montgomery, Alabama. While King himself took out the guns from his house and had no guns in his house, he did not stop the bodyguards who had guns from staying on the lawn of his house.

Of course, we understand that the Montgomery Improvement Association—here, the organization which he worked with—pushed very heavy and insisted upon it.

But King himself—later on—King himself came to publicly and politically understand this compromise when, on the Meredith March, he allowed the Deacons for Defense to march behind us and to provide armed protection for the marchers.

This, of course, was a result of Meredith being killed and people saying that we have to take reality into hands. So King's error was this: you cannot make a nonviolent principle in a violent world.

Let it be clear—all of us admire King. All of us love King. All of us want what King wants—that all problems between all human beings, individual or groups, be worked out nonviolently. But all of us know that we are oppressed through force, and the oppressor maintains oppression through force.

Consequently, it is only through revolutionary force that we will break this hold of the oppressor. So if nonviolence doesn't get to the conscience—toss some hand grenades at the pig and walk on. Be free. Thank you.

One final thing. Now, King's error was that he was working with capitalism. And if you read nonviolence—even according to King—in order for nonviolence to work, the opponent must have a conscience. Capitalism has no conscience at all.

Hollis Watkins: I'm Hollis Watkins. I'm still one of the local people from Mississippi. I'd like to try to bring things back down to earth. I don't think it's fair for us to give King total error, because that's equivalent to some of the same things that we've talked about—of King being “the leader” of the movement.

But I think when we look at things, and we look at them properly, we have to make sure that we look at them in terms of context, and we look at them, talk about them in terms of levels. Granted, as we all say, the revolution in this country has not taken place—but there are many, many small revolutions that have taken place, that are continuously taking place.

You know, to me, we had a small revolution up in Belzoni, Mississippi, when Blacks had not taken the political seat of power in that city or had any part in it since 1874—and now they are in decision-making lines. To me, that's a small revolution.

We talked about after [19]64 SNCC not having a program—before Mississippi—so they moved into Lowndes County. I went to Alabama and did some things, but I never moved into Alabama. You know, I stayed in Mississippi. I still live in Mississippi.

I feel that I am, always have been—ever since 1961—and forever will be as much a part of SNCC as anybody else was a part of it. And to that, I'm saying SNCC did not leave Mississippi. Certain people left Mississippi. While certain people at certain levels in SNCC left Mississippi—SNCC, after [19]61, as far as I'm concerned, stayed in Mississippi and is still in Mississippi alive and well.

So I think we have to look at things in the proper context and at the proper level, so we can keep the record straight. Thank you.

Audience Member: I'm a Trinity College sophomore, and I intend to graduate in two years. After which, it appears I'll join the capitalist workforce upon graduation. So my question is: will the Black Power movement simply label me as a small part of the capitalistic evil, or can I distinguish myself from such a stereotype?

Kwame Ture: If you are a worker, you are exploited. What the Black Power movement says to white workers is that you are more exploited than we are—because you're exploited and don't think you are.

Thus, what you must do as a white worker is to help wake up the white working class—which is the fundamental class in this country—to make revolution, and not leave it on the shoulders of the African masses.

Jim Miller: I gather that the answer to your question is no—you won't have to worry about being labeled.

Gloria House: May I say something as well? I think what you decide to do with your life—in terms of political work—will tell Africans, and everyone else: Asians, Latin Americans, whoever you happen to run into—where you stand in terms of making change. So we're not going to assume anything. It's your own work—your own commitment—that makes the statement.

Audience Member: I thought everything everybody said was fascinating. But I really—I just want to ask Stokely a big question.

I don't think they were at all contradictory, really, but I want to focus on this question. I know you didn't have much time, and everything is very condensed. I wonder about American nationalism versus African nationalism.

I agree that—I think that the masses in this country are much more radicalized than they've ever been. But I do think it's the result of the good work in the [19]60s that was really led by SNCC at first and then carried out.

But one of the things that SNCC—that my experience working under SNCC leadership in the South did for me—was it made me an American. And I don't think in a reformist way. But for the first time, I felt like an American. Before that, I had sort of been an un-American—or what they used to call a rootless cosmopolitan—or anyway, SNCC made me, for the first time, feel that.

Or the work—the Black, the global Black people—everything about it made me feel that this is America. There's hope here for something in the American land that's related to what used to be the idea of the New World and all of the Americas—Latin America, North America.

But I just wonder—I'm not asking for a program or anything. You were the one person who really focused on what to do now, as opposed to the past. What's going to happen to the American nation? Or do you have any ideas on that?

Kwame Ture: Let me first show you one of the problems with the contradiction of the African nation for Africans in America versus the American nation. This country is populated mainly with aliens. And we want to remind everyone here that if you are not an American Indian, you are an alien in this country. It's as simple as that.

So that means now most of these aliens in the past came from two continents—Europe and Africa. Those who came from Europe came looking and expecting a better life. Whether or not they left as adventurers, whether they came as indentured servants, or whether they came fleeing religious or economic persecution in Europe. All of them, including the indentured servants, were expecting a better life out of America, and had a choice whether or not they would go to America or not.

So you can see here that Europeans coming to America came with a different outlook—a different relationship to America—than the Africans. No African came here voluntarily. No African was fleeing anything in Africa—not religious persecution, not economic oppression. Every African who came here came against their will and was put clearly into slavery.

Thus, if we understand historical reality—if we look at material reality—the relationship that the Africans in America would have to America, and the relationships that the Europeans have to

America, must be different. They expected a better life—and got it. The Africans got hell—and still live in hell.

Now, it is clear, it is the job of the American capitalist system to confuse the Africans. Let them think that they are part and parcel of the American nation. But this yields some contradictions that are really bizarre.

You will have to agree with me that more Africans in this country die fighting in wars that America wages than any other ethnic group—out of proportion to their numbers. At the same time, more Africans are killed in this country by terrorist groups such as the police and the Ku Klux Klan than any other ethnic group in the country.

The contradictions are clear. These contradictions have to be spoken to. And unless we speak to these contradictions, we're not touching the essence of the problem of oppression. This problem could really resolve when the Africans in America come to have a healthy attitude towards their past.

This healthy attitude towards their past has been denied them by the American capitalist system, which—as Malcolm X precisely pointed out—was such a tragic system that it turned a man against himself. Thus, the Africans in America hate Africa. Have no relationship to Africa. And if they have no relationship to Africa, certainly they cannot understand the present position in which they find themselves in America.

Once Africans begin to understand the true history of Africa, they will be attracted to Africa with an enthusiasm that will shock the world.

Michael Thelwell: I do not share, sir, your disdain for the Afro-American community. Are there—Let me finish. Let me finish. Kwame, let me finish.

I don't believe—at least, in fact, I'm certain—that the Afro-American community's attitudes towards Africa have clarified themselves in the past twenty years, are evolving in a very healthy manner and direction. And that, in point of fact, the struggle in this country is neither simple nor superficial. It cannot be solved by slogans, and it cannot be solved by wishing.

The capitalist system in this country is entrenched and is intransigent. If the liberation of Black people—and the contradictions to which you point are absolutely clear, and we all know them—if they were so—if they admitted so simple a solution—the Afro-American community would have liberated itself a damn long time ago.

What has to be made very clear is that the organization that we've been discussing for this weekend was at its most effective when it anchored itself in the legitimate aspirations and possibilities of the people, when it was respectful of evidence, and when it creatively engaged problems which are massive and very difficult indeed.

The only reason why we're talking about this organization is because it engaged some very massive and formidable problems—some very dangerous problems and some violence—and engaged them to a fair measure of success. And what we need to do is look at how it was able to do that.

And we need to look very carefully at the late [19]60s, when—because of the press of the Vietnam War, because of the disaffiliation of white youth, because of the rhetorical excesses of the so-called New Left—people who had no base, who had no organization in the mass of the people, who couldn't put fifty people in the street if their life depended on it—were talking on television about revolution, world revolution even, and adopting a set of slogans which had no basis in reality.

When that developed—it became possible for the system to introduce itself into that movement. To subvert that movement, with all the COINTEL practices that we have seen. There was a quality, almost, of hysteria in this country—with Black people firing on Black people in the name of ideology. It didn't advance the struggle a half inch. It didn't liberate anybody. It created a hell of a lot of confusion—which I see us in danger of recapitulating right here.

What people have got to understand—and understand very clearly—is that wishing for liberation or wishing the capitalist system would disappear, will not make it so. The struggle is going to have to be creative. It is going to have to take many different forms in many different communities. And we're going to have to struggle to articulate a practical, workable set of strategies which can involve people.

SNCC never accomplished anything in Mississippi or in Alabama. To be very precise, it is local people like Hollis—it is the local people who came forward because we presented them with an opportunity in which they could come forward and work in a creative way.

That has to be done any day. Simple? It isn't simple at all. The history of the Afro-American community has been a history of incredible struggle against the forces—yes, of capitalism and of racism—which have entrenched themselves in a very serious kind of way.

Now, we're going to have to look. We're going to have to look at the painstaking process of translating the Black vote, for which we struggled in the [19]60s, into some kind of a force in the legislative apparatus of this country.

The Black Caucus, at whom you sneer, and the Black elected officials, at whom you sneer, have played a positive role in every progressive piece of legislation and development. I believe that the transformation of American society is going to have to depend on leadership, inspiration, and an energy which is going to have to come from Black people. But we're going to have to approach it intelligently, maturely, and cut this bullshit.

Jim Miller: What we are experiencing here is another variation of—

Michael Thelwell: ...speaking out of one's own version of bourgeois fantasy.

[cross talk]

Jim Miller: ...conference since Thursday. I really know that this is a hot conference and that these are hot ideas, and I hope that they will continue. We do have another panel, and I really do think that we have to—

Gloria House: Jim, I just want to respond to the question on nationalism in a little bit different terms from the two former speakers. I think it's a very important question. It's important for whites, and it's important for people of color in this country.

I guess again, I'm disagreeing with Kwame on this issue of African consciousness. It seems to me that we have had, since the [19]60s, a very strong rise in consciousness of the Motherland on the part of Africans here.

And even before the [19]60s, we had layers—or as someone said yesterday, sediments—of this consciousness from the Garvey days and from the Ethiopian women days. And I think that we're going to go on growing in this embracing of the Motherland.

That's become less of a problem than what happens after the embracing of the Motherland. Because, as many of you out there know, we have a lot of so-called cultural nationalists among us who embrace the Motherland for some very interesting reasons—not necessarily having anything to do with struggle or making revolution or improving the quality of lives for people in this society.

Now, I'm going to share with you my own vision of how the change can take place in this country over the long haul. It seems to me that we have to go on developing a national consciousness among Africans in this country that moves toward national liberation. I am a nationalist, after all. I am also, I think, an internationalist.

But it seems to me that the first order of organizing and development has to begin among one's own people—responding to the needs of one's own people.

Clearly, there are other people of color in this country—the Asians, the Native Americans, the Chicanos, the Puerto Ricans—who have begun to move their struggles forward. Very much involved, for example, in the case of the Native Americans and the Puerto Ricans and the Chicanos, with the issue of land.

Because it becomes clearer and clearer to all of us that the question of a territorial base and a place where you call home is central to any national liberation struggle. Now that's going on. And it seems to me that coalitions between Native American organizations, African American organizations, etc., will be essential in moving us to a new level of struggle.

The question is raised, however, by a white woman, and I think it's very important for whites to come to grips with: where will they be in all of this? And are they capable of defining and developing a new American identity and consciousness that allows them to work at a progressive, radical level with these other organizations that are engaged in struggle? And that's, I think, a challenge for progressive, radical whites. Are you capable of doing that?

Over the last 20 years or so, we have had to withdraw—we in nationalist organizations have had to withdraw—from any efforts to work with whites, because of their persistent racism, because of their insistence on their superiority, because of their cultural chauvinism. It's been impossible to move together to make revolution in this country.

So I think the question is very, very important. What are whites going to do about this? Can you define a new American nationalism that is progressive, that understands the need to struggle, and to be in alliance with people who are truly about overturning capitalism here? Can you do it? Thank you.

Jim Miller: I really would like to thank the members of the panel. Cleveland Sellers, who had to leave early, Gloria House, Kwame Ture, Courtland Cox, Michael Thelwell—back to stimulate dialogue.

Audience Member: I think there were other people who did have questions. And I think it was kind of rude to not allow—particularly those who are students—not allow us to ask our question.

Jack Chatfield: The next panel will begin in five minutes.

