

SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference
Shaw University, Raleigh NC, April 2010
Transcript Video Recording #22
(Raw, unedited, no annotation)

Speaker 1 (00:00:19):

Okay, so this is the, uh, workshop on women. And it was a controversial question back then. And it's a controversial question today. Um, there is, uh, when people think about SNCC and the women or the women's question, I think there are about, there are four things that come to mind when I go around speaking one is, and what people know about SNCC and women, one is that the organ, the organization was founded and had a profound, uh, influence on the direction, uh, of the organization by Ella baker, who was an organizational and, and, uh, political visionary that set the tone for the organization and all the work that we did afterwards. So that's one thing people are familiar with. The other thing is it was very obvious, even from an empirical point of view, that SNCC had a special quality about it. Insofar as this women relationship to women was concerned because a lot of women were field organizers, they stepped forward and did the types of tasks that were not generally done in society as a little whole, and certainly not in the other civil rights organizations.

Speaker 1 (00:01:44):

So the role of women in stake was very obvious. Now this did not mean that the organization did not bring into it, all of the prejudices and attitudes towards women that existed in society as a whole. But what it did did mean was that the ver in taking up the struggle for racial justice in this country, women stepped forward in ways that they had not stepped forward before and took on tasks that really led us to a new consciousness about the capability of women was in terms of social change activities. And that this eventually developed into social change activity in behalf of themselves as women was in another important, uh, aspect of this question. Uh, so, uh, we're very happy to have someone here who's gonna actually talk to us about one of those women in the organization. Ruby do Robinson who those of us in sick, all, you know, knew very well and loved dearly.

Speaker 1 (00:02:51):

Um, one of the other things people know about SNCC and they always ask me about is the statement, the state, that's what it is. Capital T capital S right? The statement in which a number of women, I believe they were exclusively white began to challenge some of the gender relations, uh, or pre question some of those relations in society that, that pertained to the organization. Uh, and, um, we have, we are very lucky that we have someone here on the panel. Who's a signatory to that, and can talk a little bit about it. Um, the third thing to the phase, first thing that everybody knows and has heard about is Stokley's comment. As the story goes, he was asked, what was the position of women in the organization? What should be, and he very flippantly responded, the position should be prone. And it was, believe me a statement that went, that humbled him for the next 30 or 40 years.

Speaker 1 (00:04:08):

And that is one of the things about the, the questions that we know about. And I'm gonna adjust myself a little bit to that when I make some comments. Um, the last thing that we people know about is that in its later stages sneak at the, this question of women and the role of women in society at large, particularly black women, because we grew out of the black power wing of SNCC. We founded an organization at one of the last SNCC staff meeting that was then called SNCC black women's liberation committee. And we're gonna try to touch on all of these subjects a little bit. So without further ado, we're going to, um, begin

Speaker 2 (00:04:58):

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Darris Derby, and, um, I'm a 10 year veteran in the civil rights movement with SNCC and SNCC spinoffs. Um, I started in 1962 and continued until 1972, uh, in 1962. Well, let me say before that, uh, I worked with Peggy Damon and several others with the Northern student movement when I was a college student at Hunter College in the Bronx, and we were supporting the Southern student movement. And after that, um, I graduated in December of 1961. I was a third grade teacher when I heard that Peggy Damon had gone to Albany, Georgia, and she was in jail and she was sick. I was traveling, uh, south and I decided to go to Albany, Georgia also to see about her. I was told that the best thing I needed to do was to stop in the SNCC office, uh, in Atlanta first and then be moved on to, uh, Albany, Georgia.

Speaker 2 (00:06:08):

Well, I stayed in the SNCC office for about a week and a half, and then Jim Foreman and Bob Zelner and I rode over to Albany, Georgia. Little did I know at that point that it was very dangerous to be driving with, uh, a mixed, uh, car pool, but, um, we made it safely to Albany, Georgia. I was only going to stay a week, but I ended up staying for the rest of the summer. So, uh, Jim Foreman persuaded me to stay and continued to work. Uh, in Albany, Charles Shard then persuaded me to, um, fundraise for Albany, Georgia when I left, uh, Albany. And, and then later on Bob Moses recruited me to work in Mississippi in the literacy project. Now I had learned about racism and discrimination from my, uh, parents and my grandparents, because even though we were in the north, I'm from the Bronx New York, we, he faced my father faced discrimination.

Speaker 2 (00:07:17):

He was only black, uh, undergraduate and civil engineering at the University of Pennsylvania. And when he won athletic awards, he was told that when he went to, uh, the ceremony for the awards, he was told that he would have to use the service elevator in Pennsylvania, and then he couldn't get a job after he received his degree in SIL engineering. So he later wound up as a civil service, uh, employee in the civil service in New York City. And then in the late fifties, he was fighting discrimination because even though, uh, he could be, uh, you know, a regular employee, when it got to the point of becoming a manager, there was discrimination there. I was a member of the N NAACP at 16 and along with my father. So what we were talking about with Julie yesterday about the NAACP and Snake and this group and that group, you were part of multiple groups depending on what it was that was needed to be done.

Speaker 2 (00:08:30):

So I worked with, after I left Albany, Georgia, the summer of 62, and went back to New York to fundraise for Charles Shard and Albany Georgia movement. Bob Moses came up for fundraiser and he said to me, look, you know, we really need you down in Jackson, Mississippi. I wanna start a literacy project. You're a teacher you've already been working with SNCC. So why don't you come down for a year? I said, well, I really hadn't planned to go to Mississippi next year, I'm teaching. And I've got some other things I'm doing graduate school, et cetera. He said, well, we really need you. So, uh, in May, I was looking at the news and, um, someone spoke about the images yesterday that you saw on the news. Uh, now in fact, Harry Belafonte spoke about it today. When I saw the images of the fire hoses, the dogs, the policemen, uh, beating young people.

Speaker 2 (00:09:37):

I said, well, the least I can do is go to Mississippi and teach in the literacy project. So Julie Prettyman, Bill Mahoney, and several of us, others of us worked in the, uh, in New York, at the time with, by Rustin organizing for the Martin Luther King. And then after the Martin Luther King, I left for TULO College to set up the literacy project. Now I see a lot of women's roles and my primary roles were in education, the arts, economic development, and political action. And I see women's roles as being multifaceted because I did several things at one time.

Speaker 2 (00:10:29):

So I was asked to organize the literacy project, to find people to work in the literacy project, to find students, uh, adults who wanted to learn to read and right, because, you know, there were a lot of requirements for just registering to vote. You had to read this a part of the constitution. You had to read this, that, and the other thing. So that was one thing that we were gonna do, um, at the same time, uh, I was wor uh, one of the persons that I recruited for the literacy project was John O'Neil and John O'Neil was a sec field secretary. And by the way, I did become a field secretary and I had my \$10 a week too, when I first went to, to Mississippi. Um, so John O'Neil and I, while we were working on the literacy project, we said, you know, there's so much going on here as far as local talent, but it's not out there. So John O'Neil Gilbert, Moses, and I founded the free Southern theater, which was a repertory theater to work with SNCC field political activities. Thank you.

Speaker 2 (00:11:43):

We wanted to, to, uh, ride our own plays, have our young people involved in the plays and, and, and really take these plays around in the rural areas, take them everywhere. And the free Southern theater lasted for 19 years. And you can read about it. There's a book by Jo, uh, Tom den on the free Southern theater. And by the way, uh, some of the things that, well, a lot of the things that I did while I was in Mississippi, I'm still doing now. So when Corland said that snake is a state of mind, it truly is. All right. So, um, another thing that, uh, I did while I was in, um, Mississippi, in terms of the arts, I'm gonna give you a couple of examples of the arts. Um, later on, um, I worked with the head start program, the first head start program in Mississippi that was education and the arts. And, um, we wanted to really try to bring resources for the children. When I went out into the rural areas and saw the conditions that children were, you know, facing, um, we had to see what, what could be done. And so I was recruited as a teacher and I first was up at Newell chapel in Holly Springs. And then later on, I was recruited to be a troubleshoot and teacher trainer at the Duran, uh, head start center.

Speaker 2 (00:13:25):

There was a film made chance for a change that was later used for a lot of fundraising, et cetera, about the head start program in Duran. And one of the significant things about that was that the people in the community donated the land for the head start center and they built the head start center themselves. And so there were a lot of spinoffs that occurred a lot of spinoff that occurred, um, you know, with all of the head start centers. Um, one other thing I wanna talk about is an example of economic development. I worked in 1965, I worked with the poor people's corporation and the co-ops that were set up, we set up about 20 handcraft cooperatives throughout the state, getting people, uh, who had lost their jobs because of, um, intimidation, trying to vote, et cetera. And they learned skills. They learned how to start a business, how to work together and SNCC would, uh, be out there organizing and ask how many, if there's anyone who wants to, uh, set up a co-op contact Liberty house in the poor people's corporation, and that's what we did.

Speaker 2 (00:14:43):

And so we were able to work in those areas. There were many women that were involved in learning co-ops someone talked about co-ops today. Yes. It was very important, uh, for the cooperatives to be established and the set of mind, the mind frame of being able to do things for yourself. The final thing is, uh, in terms of documenting, uh, women's activities, I took a lot of photographs from 1968 to 1972 with a group called Southern media. And now one of the things that I'm doing is, uh, getting my photographs out, um, and exhibits, um, in different parts of the country. And I will continue to do that. Um, finally I am the director of African American student services and programs at Georgia state university. And I've been there for 20 years and I'm still doing the things that I did with SNCC, with our students. We have over 8,000 black students out of 30,000. I advised 20 student organizations, and I just formed a theater production

company, and we're putting on plays and we're doing all kinds of things. And those of you who want to do something, just start doing it as Cortland said, imagination, time and energy. Thank you.

Speaker 3 (00:16:21):

Wreck the for about the last, um,

Speaker 3 (00:16:30):

Oh, who am I today? Oh, this is Maria Valla. And I worked in SNCC from about 1963 to 1967 for about the last, uh, 30 years. I've been organizing in rural communities in New Mexico, largely Northern New Mexico to build the kinds of co-ops that I first encountered when working for SNCC. And I concur with Doris that everything really I did and that whole stretch of, uh, my life was the foundation was built in terms of SNCC. And really when you think about comparing the organizing approach of SNCC to, for example, the organizing approach of back of the yards in Chicago, SNCC was a very female organizing paradigm that men and women carried forward because it was about building relationships and in sort of the community, you know, knock your heads in the battle of the Titans world of community. Organizing it isn't necessarily about building relationships is about building power and pushing it and, and all of those things are needed.

Speaker 3 (00:17:37):

But what SNCC modeled was a very female approach to organizing, which is what I learned my experience with, with SNCC in terms of women's roles, was that I went down very reluctantly, did not wanna go at all, except that I was going around on Catholic college campuses, preaching that they should all support the movement. And then when Casey Hayden asked me to come down, I thought, how hypocritical for me not to go, um, after telling them to support the movement, but I didn't want to go. And I went down there and, um, just before I started in the office with Casey, I ended up being a staff on a summer program for young people that had been brought in from different communities around who just on their own were doing sit-ins without any SNCC office there, nothing. And we were really worried about these kids.

Speaker 3 (00:18:21):

And so they were brought in Connie Curry, helped put that program together, the national student association SNCC. And I forget who else. And in the process of that, uh, Frank, um, Smith was brought in from the field to talk to these kids. And he and I started talking, he asked me what I did. Um, and as I said in my session earlier, he got a very strange look on his face and I couldn't figure out why. And then the next thing I know, he's inviting me to sit down with Bernard Lafayette and talk to them. And they wanted me to go to Selma. And I said, mm-hmm, you know, I did not sign up for this. Um, I'm, Atlanta's at least relatively safer. Well, of course the old guilt thing, uh, that's not hard to do with us Catholic kids. Anyway, they worked, worked on me.

Speaker 3 (00:19:05):

Next thing I know I'm on a plane to Selma, to meet and work with father Morice Ette, who was the, um, he's French Canadian pastor of an African American Catholic church there. And I was to do a literacy project there. Um, and from then on, I worked in the field, but it was, it was Bernard and Frank's, I, they, I don't feel like, I mean, I considered myself more, a second class citizen, gender wise than I think they did. They basically said, we need you there and you can do this. And I really didn't think I could. And it was their faith in me, um, that made that happen. And that's been a lot of my experience with many of the men in SNCC was, was everything great? No, it wasn't. And we were as much in a sense victims of, you know, that internalized gender discrimination, because this is like the sixties.

Speaker 3 (00:20:05):

Right. But if you, Dan, when did she come out with her book? 63, 63, you know, we were just starting to read this stuff and it's like, whoa. You know, but it's like in, in, when it came down to work, we worked, we were working like partners. Um, and I know that, uh, one of the things I was supposed to do was then when I moved to Mississippi was to work with other SNCC organizers and they wanted materials and they wanted to know if I would do some materials for them to help with like ASCs elections or building an or co-op or whatever. And I kept bugging Bobby Fletcher about, will you please come with me to take photographs? Because, you know, we need images of black people in leadership positions doing these things. So people, you know, that visioning is there. Finally, he got really tired of it. And he said, why don't you do it yourself? And I said, I don't know how to take pictures. And he said, we'll learn <laugh>. And he said, go down to new Orleans, Matt Herron is running a program for any SNCC staff person that wants to learn how to photograph. And that's how my sort of little photography it's really not a career, but <laugh> got going, um, was because Bobby saying, you can do this.

Speaker 3 (00:21:16):

I wanna just comment on the Stokely thing, cuz I was there, the Waveland yeah. Women, which thing, this is a woman's session here. Um, this remark that he said, Stokely, we were all like just exhausted emotionally and everything from both the field work and then coming into Waveland, which was not a very easy conference, you know, meeting of SNCC and a bunch of us. I Julian, were you there? And

Speaker 4 (00:21:48):

I was at the conference,

Speaker 3 (00:21:50):

You didn't go to this. Well, this was not a session. This is going out on the dock at night. Carol

Speaker 2 (00:21:55):

Me was there.

Speaker 3 (00:21:56):

Yeah. So anyway, we wandered over after hours with the, had some wine. We verified. Yeah. We brought some wine with us and it was a beautiful Gulf night and we were all kind of laying on the deck and Stokely started <laugh> riffing on everybody, including himself, including people from Trinidad, including, you know, I mean, anything was fair Gabriel, but it was so funny. We were just like, you know, and then I think, did he turn around and point to you and say, what is the position of women?

Speaker 2 (00:22:26):

Yeah, but this is like after 45 minutes of, oh yeah. Joking about, um, Mississippi, black people and Trinidadians and every other group and anything at all. And finally, after 45 minutes of monologue and comedic remarks, um, he asked this question, what is the

Speaker 3 (00:22:45):

Question? Right? I mean, he was doing it himself too. He was making fun of himself. So it, it was when I read the version of it that came out wherever it came out, I was like really shocked. You know, that that's how it got interpreted. And because I never found him, at least in terms of my relationship with him at all, a person who felt, you know, that women were second class said he a very strong mother come on. You know, he knew about strong women and what they did and the contributions they made. So I just wanted to kind of clear the record on that, but I wanna say that, um, I'm just gonna wrap this up. Now, a lot of there's a lot of organizing going on today and because a lot of it is being done by women. We have a very militaristic or sports paradigm about what leadership is.

Speaker 3 (00:23:37):

And as women, we don't kind of do that. I'm working with this amazing group and it happens to be mostly women, but it's men too. It's at, it's a native American, Hispanic, blue collar, Anglo, former U Iranian workers. Some of them, um, that are now struggling in the grants area to stop this whole thing about reopening the whole nuclear industry, which depends on the Iranian being coming out of their backyard, which is poisoning the water, which is creating terrible birth defects among the children. Um, and this group has just quietly been able to move legislators, not to where we really need them to be. But I think that that whole model continues and probably was there before SNCC clearly Ella. Right. Did she not model that? And what we need to do is get off of this, looking for leaders and looking for the movement and start investing in that local or that regional or that what's going on in the state that women primarily are doing,

Speaker 2 (00:24:48):

Hello? Hello, hello, I'm Mary King. And I worked for four years for SNCC. It was the most important thing I've ever done in my life. Everything else I've ever done dwarfed by the experience of SNCC. And, um, I was particularly pleased and privileged to work with an extraordinary person named Julian bond. Um, Jim foreman, when he first interviewed me, said, as he would say to most people, well, what can you do? Well, I had been an English major. And when he found that out, he said, well, I think we need you in communications. And he showed me where the office was and send me over to talk to Julian. So I had the privilege of learning from really one of the greats in so many ways. Uh, and one of the ways that Julian was, I think intuitively brilliant is that his own tendencies toward understatement were exactly what was needed in dealing with the press.

Speaker 2 (00:26:01):

If we were going to try to break the black out on atrocities against black people, killings of black people, oppression of black people, the worst thing you could do would be to exaggerate. And Julian's instinct was always to downplay the numbers and be very, very cautious. So I learned to be very cautious in anything that I said when calling from Dotty's Zelner's hot list, I took over from Dotty's Zelner. She gave me her, uh, clipboard with all the telephone numbers of the most trustworthy reporters. And whenever I would call them, we made sure that we had the numbers, right, or that we had talked with someone if we were giving a quotation. Uh, so I started, uh, actually in Danville, Virginia with Avon Rollins and then went to work with Julian in Atlanta and then was sent over to Mississippi to help set up the communication shop there prior to the summer of 1964.

Speaker 2 (00:27:13):

And Francis Mitchell came in from Los Angeles to help with that. I had to pick up writing a press release along the way. I learned that in Danville, the same way that Maria learned photography, I was just taught to write a press release. It's one of the things about SNCC. You didn't stand on ceremony. You just went ahead and learned how to do it. And you did it. You didn't wait for proper trip prepping. In fact, I would, everything that I have to say is actually a tribute to SNCC. Um, it's a, it's a story of awakening, my own personal awakening, awakening of women, and some men in SNCC and awakening that gets spark plugged and grew and combined with other awakenings taking place. But most of all, it was the audacity of SNCC that gave permission and allowed women in SNCC to raise and ask unspoken questions, to talk about unspoken issues in the same way we raised and asked unspoken issues and questions relating to all sorts of other forms of oppression.

Speaker 2 (00:28:34):

And I suppose the most important thing that I learned is that I did not have to participate in my oppression. My being oppressed as a woman, because at the heart of nonviolent struggle is the ability to withdraw cooperation. Nonviolent struggle is a system of powers, political powers with specific capabilities and limits. And at its core is an understanding that all systems rely on the cooperation and obedience of the people involved. And one of the powers that allows you to

interrupt that or break it is non cooperation. So I learned that it was possible not to cooperate with the oppression of women. Now, there were phenomenal discussions going on after the failure at Atlantic city in Mississippi, we were, as Maria has hinted, it was a very difficult time emotionally for everyone. We were uncertain and adrift. One minute, <laugh> one minute, um, a long minute, um, it's too bad.

Speaker 2 (00:29:59):

You asked me what I did, Fran. I would've had a lot more time. <laugh>, uh, in 1964 and again, in 1965 Sandra Case and Casey Hayden, and I put pen to paper for a variety of reasons. And within the Milu of SNCC, which was debating all sorts of structural issues and our future wanted to contribute to the discussion. And in particular wanted to weigh in for decentralization. We wanted SNCC to remain decentralized so that local movements could proliferate with a variety of different concerns and issues. In 1965, we wrote a memorandum in which we raised issues from within the heart of the movement, reflecting discussions that were going on with lots and lots of people. I remember Muriel tilling has Ruth Howard, um, uh, Donna Richards. Uh, don't forget that I had worked with Ella baker for a year when I first came to Atlanta. Uh, the formidable women that we were meeting in Mississippi, Victoria, gray and Annie divine and so on. But the point was that an expanding an enlarging concept of self-determination and political, uh, awareness in the context of asking about the future of SNCC. We wanted to ask if there would be room for the concerns of women in that picture as well. The following year, the war resisters league magazine published that memorandum. Uh, we sent it Casey and I sent it to 44 women who were organizing in peace and civil rights across the country.

Speaker 2 (00:31:43):

And very soon thereafter, there began to be small groups from within that 44 women who got that memo. Many of them started calling together their friends and associates and organizing small groups where they felt free to raise questions. And those became called consciousness raising groups, which became the sort of, uh, pathway or the avenue for, for the, what happened in the 1970s. Now, no mobilization ever comes from a single source, but that memo did strike Tinder with some consciousness and raising groups, which took on a no number of issues, including rape and domestic abuse. And the 1970s movement did have a number of successes in the development of rape crisis centers and a variety of policies that we can go into into more detail. Um, and now those groups are looked at as second wave feminism. Well, what does that mean? Second wave feminism. Postly the term first wave FEMM was coined meaning giving credit to those of the 19th century and early 20th century who had worked on other forms of, uh, uh, circum circumscribing and constraining of the rights of women.

Speaker 2 (00:33:17):

And then later, yes, a third wave feminism evolved, which is entirely, uh, fractious and delightfully diverse and open to a full range and host of issues. The most important development, however, is in the last 30 years using a term from the old French is a field has emerged called gender. And the issue is no longer women. It's the socialization of human beings as women and men. And this is changing the face of our globe. There are about 1.5 billion women throughout the world who have no rights whatsoever. Harry Belafonte referred to rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at lunch. Every single workshop that I have participated in here at, at, at S this week has talked about women in one way or another. This is something very major throughout the world. Uh, feminism will be eclipsed. A field called masculinities is becoming important. Gender allows us to ask questions about the socialization of men for warrior roles. And it also allows us to ask, for example, as one example, why the United States government has never enacted sanctions on any country in the world for allowing permitting and condoning the trafficking of women, selling of brides, prostitution of the girl, child, and hosts of other abuses. We say, we stand for human rights. We have a woman's secretary of state. We have never taken a stance in favor of the egregious abuses of women that we have the authority to do.

Speaker 5 (00:35:21):

Good afternoon. I'm Cynthia Fleming. And I am not very good at this. <laugh> tall at tall. I am humbled to be in the presence of all these activists, cuz I'm the only person on the panel who is not an activist. I'm a historian from the university of Tennessee. And I'm going to talk some about Ruby, Doris Smith, Robinson, whose biography. I was privileged to write several years ago, but I'm also going to talk about how I came to write that biography, which is an equally interesting story. Just a real quick background. I was born and raised in Detroit and I'm just got a native homegirl out there. And I was just a little bit younger than most of the people here. Um, because I graduated from high school in 1967 at the height of the black power movement. I went to college, wanna go to black college, big hair, big ideas, ready to change the world.

Speaker 5 (00:36:26):

After I graduated from college Knoxville college, I joined the peace Corps for a couple of years and I served in Liberia, west Africa, where I had the rare and wonderful opportunity to observe tribal historians who recited the history of the group with no notes at all. And I'd been a history major already. So of course I was hooked and I came running back to this country, ready to go to graduate school. And I wanted to do oral history when I got back here though, there were only three universities at that time that had oral history programs, Howard university, um, Columbia, I believe and duke university. And because I was still black power, I wanted to go to Howard. And this has been one of the biggest disappointments of my life. I got in both Howard and duke, but because of trying to attract white students, Howard didn't give me any money.

Speaker 5 (00:37:20):

So I had to go to duke <laugh> anyway, I ended up finishing my degree and you have to realize that when I started graduate school in 1973, the movement wasn't really history yet. I mean, I'm old enough to know the movement. Wasn't history, I've lived through it. I've observed it. I've been moved by it and so forth. And when I finished in 77, I went to teach at Morehouse college and that was an education. I didn't have any gender consciousness much. When I went, when I left, trust me, I had a lot of gender consciousness.

Speaker 5 (00:37:58):

I started working at the university of Tennessee in 1982. And when I first got there, I still thought I was going to be doing late 19th, early 20th century history. And right after I got there, they had one of those endless receptions for new faculty that everybody gets sick of going to. And I went to this particular one and there was one of those pesky pushy, SNCC people there, Avon Robbins and Avon approached me and said, cuz UT is a really to this day, UT is a really white school. They just don't have that many black people. When I first moved from Atlanta to Knoxville, I literally used to ride around looking for black people. When I found him, I would way better him. I was so glad to see him <laugh> but anyway, Avon approached me and he said, you must be the new black historian.

Speaker 5 (00:38:46):

And I said, yeah, that would be me. So he starts telling me without any preamble about Ruby, Doris Smith, Robinsons Robinson, this dynamic sister who was in SNIC. And I thought, who is this man? Why is he saying this stuff to me? And he said, now somebody needs to do her biography. And I, you know, I agreed with him to just to kind of get rid of him. And so he contacted me several, I guess, a couple of weeks after that and said, don't you have any graduate students who would make a great thesis or dissertation topic? I said, no, you don't understand. I'm a specialist we're specialist. I do the late 19th, early twenties. I don't do that. So this went on, you know how those SNCC people, they dig in their heels, every place I would see Avon, this is a true story for the next five years.

Speaker 5 (00:39:34):

He was after me. Do you have a graduate student? So finally one time I saw him at another reception and he was approaching me. And I said, before you say it, I don't have any graduate students who were gonna do that. And he said, okay, well, that's fine. Why don't you do it? And I said, me, I can't do that. I'm a specialist. So we went back and forth, back and forth. And finally I thought the only way to finally make this guy hush up was to kind of, sort of agree with him. So I said, okay, okay, I'll make you deal. I'll look into her life. And just kind of see what I think. And he smiled at me cuz he knew that the instant I investigated at all I'd be hooked, which I was. So obviously this study changed my life and my career.

Speaker 5 (00:40:19):

But along the way, as I began to try and research the life of Ruby, Doris Smith, Robinson, what I realized was how little there had been written on her or left by her. It was a, a Supreme challenge to try and figure out how to resurrect the memory of this woman. So what I had to do was to rely on my skills as an oral historian and SNCC people after thanks to Avon's entree. And then I met one SNCC person after another were generous and kind sharing all their memories with me. And then Martha Norman down there was the one who I can't even remember where we met. I was looking for Ruby's family, had never been able to find them. And Martha knew how to get in contact with must see Maryanne, uh, Ruby's older sister out there in the audience. And so I was put in touch yet. Here she is. I was put in touch

Speaker 5 (00:41:20):

With Mary Ann and began the research in earnest. And it was interesting. There were two, these two parts of Ruby, there was Ruby's biological family and there was Ruby's movement family. So there was no shortage of stories. Believe me about Ruby do Smith Robinson. And for those of you who are not acquainted with her, let me just tell a real quick story. Ruby, first of all was born April 25th, 1942 in Atlanta. And she grew up in Atlanta's summer hill neighborhood. And she was the second oldest of seven children born to Alice and JT Smith from the earliest time. And I can't remember, I don't know if Maryanne told me the story or Catherine, one of Ruby's other sisters told me the story. She determined that she was going to be one of the people to help three black people when she grew up. And she never, I mean, she was a child when she said, you know, she was gonna set the black people free and they were going, yeah, right Ruby.

Speaker 5 (00:42:18):

Um, at any rate after Ruby got older, she entered Spelman college and she joined the Atlanta student movement and she very quickly got the reputation of being a bold and daring person. And I'm gonna tell this story and I hope Julian BA won't get mad at because he said, that's such an awful story, but it's so typical of Ruby. One day a group of students from the Atlanta student movement were going to go and integrate Grady hospital, large public hospital in Atlanta that had separate entrances and separate waiting rooms. So the students got together and marched in the white side of the hospital. And as they marched in the door, you know, I'm sure everybody gas, all the white people sitting in the waiting room and they marched on in, and there was a receptionist sitting right by the door who stopped and cold with her voice saying something like, you know, you don't belong in here. You don't belong in this side. So everybody just kind of stopped when she said this. And as the other students, all the students are standing around, figuring out what their next move is. Ruby separates herself from the group, cuz she said, the receptionist said, besides, you know, you're not sick. Anyway. She separates herself from the group, walks up to the receptionist table, bends over vomits all over the table and then straightens up and demands to know, is that sick enough for you?

Speaker 5 (00:43:51):

That was Ruby. And there's so many stories I could tell you. Um, but I don't wanna, I don't wanna go on so that I don't have a chance to tell you the influence this has had on later generations, but at any rate, after collecting all these stories, I finished the book and it was one of the most difficult things I've ever done because I have to tell you, I realized what high esteem,

everybody who had shared their memories of Ruby held her in. And I thought as the book was about to come out, if I get this wrong, I am dead <laugh>. So about a week before the book was scheduled to come out, I seriously considered plastic surgery, changing my name, leaving the country, doing something. But fortunately it worked out all right. And most of the, no everyone so far there've been some criticisms, but everyone so far said, you've basically captured the essence of Ruby.

Speaker 5 (00:44:50):

And it's a very, very difficult thing to do. But I was privileged to be the one to try to do it. But real quickly, let me tell you that Ruby's memory continues to inspire because oh, about six or seven years ago, one of my classes read her biography and it was a black women's class. And the group of women in that class scared me that I had the students. There were. So there were so glad to have a class where they could talk about themselves. These were black women. So they had just finished reading the biography and I never will forget. It was October 31st Halloween. And I had gone out of town after we had talked about it that week, I'd gone out of town to a convention and I got a phone call from another professor to let me know that there had been a black face incident on campus.

Speaker 5 (00:45:38):

And she said, and one of your students was involved. And I said, what, what had happened was one of the women from that class, one of the most assertive had been driving down the strip and where all the eating places are adjacent to campus. A white fraternity had had a party where several of the guys had dress dressed up in black face. They had the tamity to walk out of the party and they were just strolling down the strip in Afro wigs and black face. While this woman who had just really latched onto Ruby was driving. She turned around and saw him. She said, she swerved her car up onto the curb. Cut 'em off whipped out her cell phone called for reinforcement. And in no time, a group of black students descended on these guys. And by the time it was over the university administration, which was not real thrill with all this publicity kicked the fraternity off campus. So I thank all of the activists in SNCC, particularly the women for all that you've done. And for the opportunity that you grant me, when you share your stories with me and you trust me to get it right. Thank you very much.

Speaker 6 (00:47:02):

Good afternoon. Uh I'm Martha Prescot Martha Prescot Norman Newnan. I'd like, uh, I wanna take my time. I'm one of six editors of upcoming book called hands on the freedom plow. 52 women who are in SN and there a lot of them in the audience today. I'd like you all to stand up. I see any Pearl Fay, Emmy Peggy Muriel, Betty Jean. Uh, the, the title of this book comes from a song, Betty. I, I can't sing, but I'm gonna start it. Okay. We, uh, soldiers, I want you to keep standing in the Yumi. We have to find, although we have to thrive, we gotta hold. We got

Speaker 7 (00:47:55):

To

Speaker 6 (00:47:56):

Hold up the free thing banner. We got to hold it up until we die. Now my mother, she was a soldier. She had her hand on the freedom plow. One day she got old couldn't fight anymore. She said, I'll stand here, fight on any house. Don't you know, we are so in the army in the, we have to fight, we

Speaker 7 (00:48:37):

Have to fight.

Speaker 6 (00:48:39):

Although we have to cry, we have to hold. We had to hold it up until we,

Speaker 7 (00:49:01):

Um,

Speaker 6 (00:49:03):

So I, I want to talk about women in the context of some of the stories, um, from this book. Um, I'm gonna start out with a little of my concerns. I'm a little distressed, uh, to be on a panel. That's mostly Northern women here to talk about what women did in the Southern black freedom movement. And I'm concerned as I was, I have this from SNCC about the use of the word leader and leadership. You know, we have traditions in the black community, the lifting as we climb the talented 10 and, uh, the models of using leadership and organizing a course from the top down and that kind of posit, uh, a group of organizers who are separate and apart from the community and turn around and give back this latest one really kind of wrinkles me a bit. But anyway, um, so instead of, uh, talking about women as leaders, I, I wanna suggest that there are ways big and small that women played significant roles in determining the course pace and nature of the civil rights movement and, uh, cite a few examples, um, that are all, these are in the book, which I know you're just gonna be dying to read, uh, Spellman student, uh, Zahara Simmons along with a group of other female Spelman students figured out a tactic, how to widen the effect of sit-ins there realizing that the restaurants immediately closed as soon as they're entering, instead of going and staying at one restaurant until they got arrested, they went from restaurant to restaurant effectively closing down many restaurants on the same day, uh, on this panel, there are women who were key partners in imagining and creating a number of new SNCC projects like the free Southern theater, the four people's corporation, literacy photography publishing radio projects.

Speaker 6 (00:50:59):

Uh, and in this light also I think of Diane Nash, who having the sense of the direction of history of the importance and potential of move of the movement was the first of the sit-in activist to drop out of school and work full time for the movement. Then when court disbanded the freedom rides in the spring of 1961, fearing that someone would be killed. She insisted that stopping the rides would give out the self defeating message that the movement could be stopped by white mob violence. And that valuable movement momentum would be lost if the rides did not continue. And she organized, uh, fixed students to continue the RS SNCC women contributed to the ideological and philosophical growth of the movement. Mary King, Mary King, Casey Hayden of course put the discussion of women's liberation on the national table. Also within SNCC women were key in the development of concepts of black liberation, as well as an anti-war and international third world perspective.

Speaker 6 (00:52:03):

Some leaning more towards the concerns of people of color, other towards the concerns of African people scattered throughout the diaspora. And yet others encompassing both perspectives. Uh, I hope that as we listen to these women and read their writing, we can put to rest the notion of a negatively based emotional black nationalism. The idea that such of you had to be based in something like disappointment, disillusion, anger related to the faith of the Mississippi freedom, democratic party, Atlantic city, or an overarching fear of a white take over SNCC, be lies a very logical and considered reasons why some black people might think it makes sense for black people and black people alone to be in charge of their own struggle. This, uh, uh, view of nationalist also ignores a tremendous positive achievement that came about as a result of black pride, African American studies and a widespread Panafric African Congressman a consciousness.

Speaker 6 (00:52:58):

I don't know what philosophies and strategies are going to best serve this generation and succeeding ones. But I do know that it's important that we understand and know what's been understood in the past. It seems to me that one of the most profound and useful ideas to come out

of SNCC is what I understand to be miss Baker's notion of bottom up organizing and widespread and democratic leadership, which I think turned earlier notions. Uh, I, that I referred to upside down. This was a concept that basically allowed a movement to develop in the deep south where the stakes of the struggle were so high using high school and college students, young men and women as organizers, and placing them in inside black communities and expecting us to join hands with people in these communities on the basis of equality. It seems to me allowed the movement to tap into a wellspring of tremendous courage and familiarity with struggle that people in these communities had.

Speaker 6 (00:53:57):

These are the things that allowed the civil rights movement to take hold and to be fought at the highest levels Southern participants expected to put all on the line for freedom, risking their economic and physical security and even their line <inaudible> hall in her contribution to hands, um, Hass titled freedom fake the local people. She said writes had the wisdom of the elders, or perhaps the wisdom of the ages to share with us. They had lived under that system of domination and brutality for generations. Everyone knew someone whose loved one had been beaten or killed by its violence. They also knew about life and how to live life without surrendering, surrendering, humanity, or dignity to those who sought to crush them. It was an exchange of mutual learning. Some of the most important lessons I've learned in my life were learned from those people in the rural south, the primary lesson, which I received from those black sages was that of faith for living in life threatening circumstances.

Speaker 6 (00:55:03):

It was a faith that was first made manifest by our slave four parents who defied the teachings of the slaveocracy, which distorted the Bible and declared their slavery had been ordained by God. These profoundly spiritual women and men developed their own moral critique of the slave holder's oppressive brand of religion and expressed the slave's absolute conviction that slavery was contract contrary to the will of God. And that God definitely intended them to be free. These sons and daughters of those enslaved ancestors continued to hold onto that freedom, faith, the freedom, faith fired and fueled the fight by that faith. And in that faith, they finally stood up in the meetings and announced I'm afraid it could cost me my job. It could cost me my life, but I want to be free. So I'm going to the courthouse. I'm going to trust God to take me there and I'm gonna trust God to bring me back.

Speaker 6 (00:56:01):

We did walk hand in hand side by side with local black Southern women. This kind of organizing brought us together with women like Fannie Lou Hama, viciously, beaten, and were known to jail for her activism. And then returning to the struggle before her wounds were healed and Mrs. Victoria Gray Adams, who made her church open its doors to SNCC workers in Hattiesburg in the early sixties and was still organizing various programs in three different cities. When she died a few years ago and Mrs. Carol Daniels who housed SNCC workers in her home in Terrell county, after the, after the son beat her, the sheriff beat her 16 year old son, Roy for bringing people to the courthouse to register to vote. She remained active after her home was shot into twice. Then the third time her house was shot up, she was alone. A bomb was thrown in and landed right beside her, where she was hiding under the bed.

Speaker 6 (00:56:56):

When the bomb rolled next to her, she thought, what is my son going to do? Uh, without me, uh, but the bomb didn't go off. And she went to the hospital and when she came back, the her house had been totally destroyed. The bomb waited <laugh> and, uh, she writes in hand, um, they never found to bomb my house or shot into it after it was fixed Sherad and the SNCC workers continued to use my house and we just kept going. We kept going this kind of, uh, militant determination was also, uh, visible in the writings of Gloria Richardson. She said, we laughed a lot, but we stayed at a high level of rage. In addition, there was a constant level of fear that we

learned to live with that rage and fear came with the territory. Once I made the commitment to be active, I couldn't stop because I was afraid.

Speaker 6 (00:57:52):

Otherwise the racist would win and would be a waste of people's energies to stop, um, some women in the movement. And I, I am winding out, joined both the struggle for freedom and the struggle for equal rights for women after telling of her effort to catch a sexual predator prey on women at Albany state college, Bernice Johnson, Reagan reflected. When I think about my journey as a fighter for justice, there are signpost events that happened in my life that helped me to understand more clearly where I was in reality as a person living within the larger American society. These experiences, let me know that being black made a difference. And if I were going to be effective, I had to Revis revise the way I myself visualize my current status, or I would have no chance of effectively choosing strategies to transform that status. This was an experience that chattered the facade of civic school lessons, the highway patrol, the lone ranger TV and radio shows that influenced my culture.

Speaker 6 (00:59:02):

Also, there was this tiny, but growing awareness, that being female was different. It was something you knew. And you had ingrained in you as a girl. It was something you lived with. It was like the floor you walked on the walls of your house. It, it was just there. If you were a girl, some really bad things could happen to you. And often there was not one thing you could do about it. It seemed to come with being female. I mean, it was there when I first knew I was a girl, I knew I was prey. And that protection for me was weak or non-existent. I also knew at the same time I must go on. Anyway. I still remember the instructions received about rape in high school. If someone tries to rape you don't struggle and maybe he won't kill you.

Speaker 6 (00:59:58):

There was a little light peeking through the crack created by my efforts to stop this white man at that time. And it was shining on a place in me that said, this doesn't have to be a given. There might be another way to be black and female in this universe. And as I review this particular event, the fact that females were being preyed upon by white men, loos large. Sometimes when people interview me about the movement they ask about sex, what they are asking is did we, the activists had sex. Was there cross racial sex? How were white women treated if they had sex with black men? Thinking through this story, I'm aware that no one has asked me about the sexual practices that were a constant thread through too many black women and girls' lives in the south. My experience was not an isolated case.

Speaker 6 (01:00:48):

I came through this experience, understanding that the officials of Albany state college would not protect me against white men would often not stand and be counted in the movement. Sweeping the south. My trusted faculty advisor would not be able to deliver the police to bring justice or protect me. My boyfriend did not like what I did. My family did not like what I did. I came out knowing that when I was really pressed up against white men and sex, I was not going to be protected by the system. It's been 40 more, 40 years since this happened. And I still feel the loss of innocence that made me know as a black female sexual life. I was in trouble everywhere in this society with nowhere to hide nowhere, to run so uncovered without shelter with every ounce of strength I had in my heart and soul. I joined this movement for freedom.

Speaker 7 (01:02:07):

Yeah, let me,

Speaker 1 (01:02:10):

Let me just do it this way. Um, I actually came into sneak in this latter period in the black horror stage of the movement. Although, uh, I had been living in France at the time, had my two

children had been born there. And, uh, it actually was the first initiation of me into a kind of an international arena. Cuz I grew up in a small town, upstate New York, they hated blacks. My father was black. They hated Jews. My mother was Jewish and they hated Democrats because they thought they were pinkos and my mother was practically a red. So in any case, um, when I, I came back to the United, uh, the United States for good SNCC was my natural, uh, home. And I was essentially recruited by who else, but Jim foreman and, uh, I went to work in the international affairs commission of SNCC and there was an organization called Embudo that we had formed the national black anti-war anti-D draft union and Gwen Patton sitting right over there has, was the head of that organization.

Speaker 1 (01:03:20):

And we're doing anti-war anti-D draft work in the, uh, New York and around, uh, the country. Many people don't know this, that some of the, uh, first people in the south to go to war because they protested, uh, to go to prison because they protested the war were SNCC members. The one name that comes to mind was Donald Stone. If I'm not, uh, mistaken, he was the first southerner to actually go to in any case, um, the founding of the SNCC black women's liberation committee took place at the last, uh, SNCC, um, um, national staff meeting that took place in New York. I think there was one or two later in new in Atlanta. Um, and what led up to that were a couple of things, both external factors and internal factors. So let me just paint a little bit of a picture. Um, one of the major political, um, incidents, I don't know what incidents factors was the issuance of the Monahan report in 1965, the Monahan report was, uh, something presented by then assistant Le uh, secretary of labor, Daniel, Patrick Monahan, who went on to become the Senator of the state of New York.

Speaker 1 (01:04:41):

He argued that African American families, uh, suffered from alarmingly high rates of female headed households. And that this was basically the reason why we continued to have racism because this was a distortion. Now let me just give you one statistic at the time that this report was issued, 30% of African Ary families were headed by females. So right there means that 70% were not. So they took a 30% figure, which was twice the rate of, of whites, which shows the racism involved, but then said, that is the reason why racism continues to present. We have this kind of dislocation in the black family because so many females, uh, are there. So that was one of the things that was happened. And this had a big impact. Any of you have read the black woman, the anthology pulled together by Tony K Gobar knows that you know, of all of the essays, everybody in that essay mentioned that cuz it was a dramatic impact on the status of women and black women.

Speaker 1 (01:05:51):

Cuz what happened as a result of that was that, uh, in this correspond to a rise of nationalism and the influence of nationalism within SNCC. So what was happening is after 64 and 1965, in the sense SNCC was a victim of its own success. It had achieved what it set out to achieve, which was the Le, which was the destruction of Jim Crow in this country legally. And that, of course there was another 20 years to, you know, kind of try to implement that. But in so far as the unifying political program that had held, excuse me, held Nick together out to that point. It was a little unclear what the political program of an organization like SNCC would be. And the fact that a number of us were growing older and we're no longer students. So there was a lot of debate going on in the organization.

Speaker 1 (01:06:53):

A lot of ideological influences going on, but among some of the nationalist force, uh, forces they came up with, they began to develop ideas about women. Based on the 15th century view of Africa, they looked back to Africa and they saw futile relations in Africa. And I'm not one to idealize Africa prior to colonialism. And neither was se to the head of Guinea. He talked about the Ru the, the need to take a look at, uh, not only the colonial oppression of women in Africa,

but what kind of traditional relations socializations relations existed that a revolutionary government had to destroy. So it was a very nuanced thing. And these were some of the people that we began to re read. Um, I think it's interesting there wasn't like we, all of a sudden started to think, oh, we need a line on women. It was that other people, mostly men came up with this reactionary line and we reacted by beginning to talk about, well, what is the role of women?

Speaker 1 (01:08:04):

It's not what these guys are saying. So we looked Africa limo, which is Dree deliberation, both Nique and Angola of the liberation of Angola and Guinea Baal. And we see women not standing behind their men, but standing beside that, in the struggle against colonialism. And these became our new, our new sheroes, you know, that these were the ones. So part of the debate also came down around the question of abortion rights. Now for us, the question of reproductive rights had already been put on our agenda by the Southern experiences. We were told very privately by a number of the black women in the south, that they had been sterilized when they had gone into hospitals.

Speaker 8 (01:08:55):

I get that.

Speaker 1 (01:09:02):

So we began to think of that and think of abortion rights. I, myself had a personal experience, a friend of mine from high school. Uh, her first year in college, unfortunately got pregnant. Uh, she went to, um, back street abortionist and she was slaughtered and died. So when people began to talk about abortion as genocide, I thought of my friend cardia and said the lack of access to proper healthcare was also genocide. And we began to take up that question in that, in that context. Now, some of the arguments that we were getting from some of our brothers in, uh, SN were pretty backwards. Number one, this women's liberation crap is a white thing, and that we are undermining the anti-racist struggle to which after a lot of debate discussion, we said, no, it's the existence of the oppression of women within the organization that creates the division within the organization. And to raise the question of inequality is not the disruptive thing. It's the existence of the inequality, which in fact is the, is the problem. So I just want to, you know, say though that the explicit impetus for the founding of the SN black women's liberation committee was foreman coming back, um, from a visit to the Panthers and promoting Cleaver's book. So on. So in the Alada collective, which happened to be all made up of women, Gwen Patton is sitting right over there. May Jackson is some place in here. And I said, okay, we trust for, and let's read this book.

Speaker 8 (01:10:57):

Oh my God.

Speaker 1 (01:10:59):

So we to big alone story. Sure. But take a long story short. What we got out this book is that this man was practicing to raping black women to get up his nerve, to rape white women and Gwen proposed that rewrite a response. And we did do a first draft and call it soul on fire. Unfortunately, in the course of history, that document has been, has been lost, but it showed that we needed to put up another kind of view in terms of women. There was, um, anyway, the, uh, the, I, I just wanna make a couple of comments of what the implications of the nationalist view was relative to the Monohan report, because there was a coalescence there of thought and ideology as it came to women. So what we did was to challenge it based on, uh, our, we didn't think all men, for example, were, um, approachable on this question. Some of them were just not, but there was a wing of SNCC men who purported to be revolutionary. And it was those men that we concentrated our arguments and our ideas on,

Speaker 1 (01:12:26):

Because what we said was that the notion, let me just do this real course, the, the discourse that was going on relative to black women, um, actually hid a number of different political ideas and constructs, which were, which were defining the relationship between black men and black women in ways that restricted black women's positions and participation in the black power movement. And some of those were the notion that concentration should be placed on black male suffering because they are victimized to a greater degree than women contributed to the tendency, to allude women as agents of political change. Secondly, the idea that black women were already liberated was a part of that discourse and saying Barbara Smith, for example, explains that this myth confuses liberation with the fact that black women have had to take on responsibilities, that our oppression gives us no choice, but to handle and ability to cope on the worst conditions is not liberation.

Speaker 1 (01:13:39):

Thirdly, the call for black women to subordinate their gendered concerns to those of the race black women should put their racial identity and struggle first, by not doing this, they are diluting, abandoning or betraying the black struggle and concerns about sexism and gender oppression threatened black unity. The notion that women's role in political struggle was different from, and inevitably subordinate to that of men that we were told at that point to remain in the background, play supportive roles to black men, perform prescribed tasks, such as clerical duties assume a submissive domestic role in organizations that personal relationships. And even some people saying our role should be having babies for the revolution. Now you've heard everything that was said today about the objective reality of what women had been doing in SNCC ever since is saying what that is, what we were responding to. There was a disjuncture between these kind of ideological postulations that were going on that were being promoted within the organization.

Speaker 1 (01:14:56):

And what was actually the material reality of what women in SNCC had been doing and developing. So this was the, do, this was the context within which the SNCC black women's liberation committee, uh, actually came into being one minute. Okay. Okay. Let me just say <laugh> let me just say one thing is we developed two things happened that I wanna mention. One is that, um, we, uh, we were, it was a SNCC staff meeting, which had majority men in it that voted to form the SNCC black women's liberation committee. And, um, the people that were involved in that were Gwen may, myself and Diane Jenkins, who we've more or less lost track of in all, uh, that time. But one of the concepts that, excuse me, one of the concepts that we took into the formation of this was not just that we had to put gender oppression first.

Speaker 1 (01:16:01):

We were very cognizant of the fact that there was an intersection of race and gender that we had to try to figure out. We had already been trained because the discussions and debates that were going on in SNIC at the time dealt with, oh, okay, race is just a skin analysis, no it's skin and race. And there was a debate going on. And I was of the sector of the movement that was led by foreman, who was talking about the intersection. So from a ideological and a theoretical point of view, we were already primed to try to figure out intersectionality. And one of the things that a theoretical political and even an organizational level that the SNCC black women's liberation committee did was to project the idea of race, class, and gender and its intersectionality as the basis for understanding black women's liberation. In any case, we go on to form the third world women's lives.

Speaker 1 (01:17:04):

Cause we are approached by a number of women from, uh, Puerto Rico. And after a big debate, we have a vote and we decide that our unity are more important than the differences. And we become the third wall women's Alliance. The other thing that happened was very revolutionary at the time, because we were approached by a couple that was a lesbian couple. And they said to

us, we believe in the orientation that you are putting forward in terms of your organization. And, but we wanna be upfront with you. We are lesbians. How do you guys feel about that? Well, this caused another big debate within the organization and what happened. I'm very proud of because first of all, we were already being accused of being lesbians for raising the question. So I personally took the position in for a penny and for a pound. And we actually wrote into our program, what today might seem a very liberal position, but it was a breakthrough in terms of recognition that our lesbian sisters are a part of the overall women's movement.

Speaker 1 (01:18:20):

And that was a very important thing for us to, uh, uh, to do two other points I'd like to make one is that we also recognize that our oppression was not individual. It was social. And there, we did a lot of discussions and consciousness raising question about women. Now, given the fact that at that time, women were perceived as, uh, not only just sexual but physical, uh, beings. The very idea of blonde and blue haired was a very oppressive, uh, uh, sociological, uh, reality for us. So we began to challenge the very, the idea that black, uh, was not beautiful. We wore Afros, but that was, that had actually come from Mississippi. And I know this from Gwen, she told me their hair, you know, you, you go down there and that sun and your hair is crimping up and you got work to do.

Speaker 1 (01:19:16):

You don't have time to be, you know, pressing your hair and doing what's necessary to get, to get it, to look like white people. Therefore what happens? The Afro is born in the course of struggle, not as a fashion state, but as a practical, uh, response to what was actually happening in relationship to the struggle that was going on. Uh, of course it later took on another, you know, uh, kind of aspect anyway, we developed program and, uh, which called for 24 hour daycare centers, a program that called for free education for women, uh, for a program. But what we actually, uh, the one thing amongst others that we did concretely was to take up the question of sterilization of abuse in the city of New York. And we United our Puerto Rican sisters who were the principal victims of this with us. And we were able to, we, we petitioned, we, uh, did testimony before the appropriate city council and we eventually got an appropriate new regulations that had to do with the hospitals in terms of informed consent around the question of, uh, sterilization abuse. So just one last question on this, cause I know the question of abortion is a touchy subject and remains a touchy subject in the African American, uh, uh, community. But let me just say that we never ever, and still do not promote abortion as the first line of defense when it comes to, um, birth control. It's the last line of defense, if all else fails, but if all else fails, women must have control over their bodies. That's the very minimum that we can do.

Speaker 1 (01:21:15):

And I just have one last point to make. And that is that while some of our brothers were talking about dying for the revolution, and I heard some of that today and in some ways it was Admiral, but as women and as mothers, we began to challenge some of the underpinnings of that. And we developed a slogan that says we wanna live for the revolution and that that's the women's contribution to the struggle for justice in this country. Thank you.

Speaker 3 (01:21:51):

Good afternoon. My name is Asur again, uh, real quickly. Thank all of my sisters from the movement. Really appreciate your work, Dr. Fleming, I did love your book and it continues to inspire. A lot of people look forward to your book too, sister. It it's it. I got three people on my list already, uh, real quickly. Um, given what all of you have said about your participation in the movement. What I'm wondering about is for example, when we have these high profile cases of sexual assault of black women, right? Megan Williams and West Virginia, and some others west, um, Dunbar village and west Palm beach, Florida three years ago, et cetera. The first people who are speaking to the media are men, the reverends, Reverend Al Sharpton, Reverend Jesse Jackson, et cetera, cetera, no one bothers to interview a Fran bill or Dr. Fleming or Angela Davis

or Billy Avery, et cetera, no one bothers to go to the women and men who work in domestic violence and sexual assault and run those hotlines. So given that type of response to our violation, how, how do you feel about that? And what can we say about that to younger women who are trying to work in those movements? Cause I do in DC and sister Fran, what you said earlier, there are some of our even younger brothers who still say that to be involved with sexual sexual assault movement or domestic violence movement is a white woman's thing. Even though I know this history of black women being involved in it and being the first set of hotlines. So thank you.

Speaker 1 (01:23:43):

Well at obviously I think that sexual assault against women of any color is a horrendous power play that is not acceptable in terms of, of, um, of where we are at. Um, the question though of, um, I have to admit that I, at my age, I am more easily. Uh, I look at those things that society creates as a whole and as opposed to the individual act of violence against women. And the reason I say that is because, um, there is a level of misogyny in this country. Part of the racist dialogue that the Republicans have carried out over the last 20 years has had to do with the, um, misogyny as it relates to black women. So black women are sluts they're welfare Queens, and they are little value. This creates an atmosphere in which any kind of assault on this population is okay, because they're asking for it. Um, I, like I said, I'm not as much of an activist anymore. And I think it's you younger sisters who have to come up with some of the, uh, strategies to kind of deal with these, uh, questions. Uh, I think Corland was the one that said, oh no, it was, um,

Speaker 1 (01:25:20):

In the last workshop, one said, I'm not here to like resolve all the immediate types of questions, but I, I don't know if that's not a very satisfied answer, but

Speaker 9 (01:25:32):

Next

Speaker 1 (01:25:33):

Question. Next question. Yes. Next question. Okay.

Speaker 10 (01:25:36):

Um, hi, my name is stable Mensa. I'm from Bronx, New York and I go to Swarthmore college. And, um, recently I've been pushed to think about, um, well as a young black female organizer and activist, I feel a constant pull between self care and self-sacrifice, and that's something I'm thinking a lot about because I see all of you, uh, amazing women and how you've dedicated your lives to this. And I'm trying to think about what the balance between the two and what role that has in, I guess, longevity and how self-care is important because we should be a part of the vision we're fighting for. And it seems like a lot of women like Ms. Ella baker, Ms. Fannie Lu him or self sacrifice was a, also played a huge role, but it also did take a toll. So I was wondering if some of you could talk about that.

Speaker 5 (01:26:28):

Yeah. I'd like to speak to that because of the story of Ruby do Smith Robinson. I mentioned her birth date. What I did not mention was her death date. She died in October. I believe it was October 9th, 1967. She was 25 years old. And so that's something that all of the people in SNCC who I interviewed, who talked about her, talked about how hard she worked and excuse me, it was a constant thing. She never stopped. She never let up. She tried to balance family life. She got married, had a child, went back to school, finished college and kept working in the movement all the time. And by the time she was 25 years of age, she was dead of cancer. So I think that probably answers your question. It's essential to establish a balance. It is so important, difficult but important.

Speaker 11 (01:27:22):

Okay. My name is Janine Heron. I was involved with, uh, CDGM in Mississippi. Um, I am still strongly moved by the words of Harry Bani and I wanna challenge you beautiful women to carry out what he was talking about. We're talking a lot about what we've done and what the history is, but what are we gonna do next? Um, I was also moved by the words of a five year old child. Um, Harry really told an incredible story and what, how, how strongly it influenced his behavior after here, he heard the story about that child, um, in CDGM I was visiting, uh, one of the sites and, um, a five year old girl was sitting by herself and I went over and sat by her and I said, what do you think you're gonna do today in head start? And she was very thoughtful for a minute. And then she drew herself up and she said, I'm gonna learn how to read and write. And then I'm gonna go home and teach my daddy.

Speaker 11 (01:28:37):

And that changed my life. <laugh> um, I'm now an neuropsychologist. I pay a lot of attention to research that has to do with child development and the development of the brain. And we are failing our children from zero to five years old. That's when the brain is developing. And, um, there must be a lot of more talk among the women and the men here at this convention about what we're going to do about young children, because we're terribly failing them and it gets worse and worse. Every day, they're watching television seven or eight hours a day. We could set up daycare centers again, and we could have the, you know, these young people who are working with middle school students, the middle school students would work, could work with the little kids and read them stories. So there's lots of ways that you can do community organizing and help these kids.

Speaker 12 (01:29:36):

Breastfe

Speaker 13 (01:29:40):

I'll keep it quick. My name is SHA do from Morgan state university history major. And my question is about gender issues and gender studies and textbooks, not just books that college students read, but also going with children. There's not enough things about women in textbooks. So when the kids, they don't know anything about women, especially they don't know anything about themselves. And what I know you, you are the, um, historian on the panel. What are, what can we do to get more gender issues in textbooks? So her story can be told and not just his story.

Speaker 5 (01:30:10):

I've got one, three word answer for you. The school board, they make the decisions in various communities about what textbooks to adopt. Have you looked at what's happening in Texas? Most people are losing their minds down there. Um, people need to get active in municipal politics because things are written. Things are out there, but the school board is the gatekeeper that's who decides who, what books are chosen. So I can't stress enough. You need to be engaged in civic politics. That's very important.

Speaker 12 (01:30:45):

All right. 30 seconds, Allison GTU from New York. Thank you so much to the panel and for, and for having this, this, for having this panel, um, especially to, uh, the black women's liberation committee, um, I'm part of a group called national women's liberation. It's a newer group with old roots in Redstockings and Gainesville women's liberation. Um, I'm also part of a group, uh, called Malcolm X grassroots movement in New York, both the national women's liberation group. I mentioned because I, I read double jeopardy and third world's women's Alliance newsletters, uh, in that group and triple jeopardy. Um, and that's been inspiring for us. We've started a women of color caucus. Um, please talk to me afterwards. Um, also the Malcolm X grassroots movement has a women's caucus in the group. I'm part of both. And I would love to, you know, as we talk about what are, what is the current organizing going on today and the

legacy of SNCC. I am humbled to hope that, um, some of the work that we're doing is within the tradition of SNCC and within the tradition of the black women's, uh, liberation caucus.

Speaker 5 (01:31:49):

Yeah.

Speaker 14 (01:31:50):

I actually have have a question. My name is, is Margaret Prescott and yeah, thanks Martha cousin. Um, I came into the, um, women's movement that I've been working in for the last 30 years building a national and international network, I think right around the time of the third world liberation, um, movement in New York, which I, I sort of remember back that I was organizing something called the coalition of grassroots women. And I was the one whose mic was cut off in the 1977 conference in Houston for raising the issue of sterilization of third world women. And Bella Absec shut down my mic. I was a rep from New York state at the time, but my question has to do with the relationship between the group that you described in SNCC and the welfare rights movement, because we all know there was a huge class divide, still exists in the women's movement with those who put forward, getting a job outside the home as the answer to liberation, and those of us who looked to the welfare rights movement, um, and for women having that choice and the right to be able to raise our, our children and the right to choice as well as the right, not to be sterilized.

Speaker 14 (01:33:02):

So I really wanted to ask about that because the Mohan report was also first and foremost, an attack on that sector of women. That's correct. Single heads of households, who also said that the emasculated black men. Um, so I, I really don't know what the relationship was at the time I was, we had

Speaker 1 (01:33:19):

A very good relationship with them. Okay. First of all, we brought, we brought all of the things that we had learned in SNCC in terms of, you know, from the bottom up and who is the least of us, the third world women's li first of all, SNCC black women's liberatory committee. And then the third world women's Alliance always targeted the least of us because we felt that the, if we, we, uh, worked on those issues of the poorest of the poor, if we could advance that sector, the whole rest of the world would go up with them and Bule Saunders, who was the head of the NA welfare rights organization

Speaker 14 (01:33:59):

Work

Speaker 1 (01:33:59):

With BU right. And we, we had a good relationship with, uh, with her because we recognized, and this was another thing that we had done while many of our white, uh, um, people feminists were restricting the, uh, movement to only those who are dealing with, uh, female oppression in the most explicit manner. We saw the, uh, the need to reach out to organizations like the, uh, BU Los Sanders and the welfare rights organization. So we had a very good, uh, uh, relationship with them. We often met with them and we, uh, uh, we had offered whatever we could do in terms of communications and things of that kind. But if you remember that period of time, that was a massive amount of organizing going on. I went to speak one time to the Queen's chapter of the welfare rights organization and 300 women. Yeah. Were there now, I think the most we ever got at a third world women's Alliance, man, it was a hundred women. So, uh, there was just a lot of motion. Uh, like I said, going on at that particular time. And we recognized that the welfare rights org, any women's movement that do, did not include an organization like the welfare rights organization, uh, was not speaking to the issues of women.

Speaker 14 (01:35:27):

So they used, supported the, the call for women to be able to get support, to raise their children, cuz that's still a huge issue today. TANIF is up for reauthorization this year. Is your group still going? Okay.

Speaker 1 (01:35:44):

Thank you very much for coming. Thanks the panel. I think it was really excellent.