SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference
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Transcript Video Recording #24
(Raw, unedited, no annotation)

Speaker 1 (00:00:17):

Uh, ed Hamlet, Margaret Harring, candy, Carolyn and guy, guys over there. <laugh> uh, and Charlene Krantz, Charlene. Uh, once again, I am Bob Zelner and I want to just lay a little bit of groundwork for what we're gonna try to do today. We'd like to hold our comments, uh, to about 10 minutes each. And, uh, so we'll have plenty of time for discussion and, uh, reflection the description of the, um, where this workshop is Highlander, sock, um, and white community organizing. We're gonna add a few more things to that, uh, Southern conference, Fu welfare SC. Uh, and what else did we decide at our brief meeting? Anything that I left out? So, uh, okay. And also, whatever else you want to bring up, I'd like to delay just a little bit of background and say that one of the things we're gonna be talking about today is the movement, the civil rights movement as a movement of peoples of all colors, races, et cetera.

Speaker 1 (00:01:36):

Um, one of the important things about one of the first things in the, uh, agenda on Highlander is Highlander was one of the movement centers that help prepare the way for the civil rights movement, Highlander, folk school, uh, founded by miles Horton and Don west, um, believed in experiential learning. And when I began to teach at the university, I found that the miles Horton was considered a great, um, leader of pedagogy, I think, is that the way you say that? I have no idea <laugh>, uh, along with the Pere and others, who said you learned by making you make the path by walking, you learn by doing, they believed that the people themselves had more, more energy and more knowledge together than, uh, people who would stand up and teach. So we all learned to be teachers and students at the same time, it was very important that the people who manned Highlander who formed the Southern conference for human welfare and later SC had the dedication to stand up against the, um, terror of the south and against the oppression of the United States, because through their courage, they laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement, whatever the problem was, that's what they dealt with.

Speaker 1 (00:02:59):

It was the labor problems, which they were originally organized around. They went into the communities, they didn't believe in, uh, an academic approach to it. You went to where the workers were, you worked with the workers. So you conferred with them before you, uh, began to do any kind of work. And you did it on the basis of what they needed and what direction they were going in. So we're gonna talk about Highlander and we're gonna talk about SNCC in the early period. SNCC was, uh, an organization that dared to violate the taboo in the deep south of white and black together. And we took sang about white and black together. We violated those taboos and we stood up against the terror, the state terror that was directed against, uh, the movement. I often say that I was raised in a police state and people say, what country I say, Alabama. Um, I was raised in a, uh, fundamentalist Christian tradition. And since my dad was in the KU Klux Klan, and my granddaddy was in the KU Klux Klan, I said, I come from a fundamentalist terrorist background.

Speaker 1 (00:04:12):

Um, we have all, uh, participated in the movement and various senses each one of us as we go, we're gonna talk about our particular role. Then we'll have a little sum up and we'll invite, uh, discussions about white community organizing its importance. And especially I'd like for everybody to keep in mind, Harry Belafonte's challenge to us, are we simply nostalgically recalling the past, or are we using those treasures of the past to form sharp weapons of advance?

My theory is that the civil rights movement in 1964 with the public accommodations act and in the 65 voter rights act fulfilled the liberal consensus in this country, that segregation as a Des your situation had to end. That was when the liberals consensus ended and nothing beyond that was a consensus in this United States because it involved a direct challenge to capitalism. And to imperialism, there was no consensus around that.

Speaker 1 (00:05:18):

And we have been in that struggle ever since we're continuing to be in it. And every time we make advances, the other side pushes back and I'll finish with this at the end of the, uh, civil war during reconstruction, there were black sheriffs justice to the peace governors representatives, et cetera, in the national government, black officers, all over the south. And many people as that reconstruction unfolded said, we will never go back to white, only politics in this country. How long did it take them to get back by the end of the 18 hundreds, every one of those offices were wiped out. The women's movement says we have gotten so strong. We will never go back. They are still intent on pushing your movement back, destroying your right to choose. And they're definitely continuing to push back against the civil rights gains and don't think they can't win it back.

Speaker 1 (00:06:20):

Uh, we are looking at a part of, of, of the approach, if not the victory may, they may have already been victorious of a, uh, corporate fascism in this country. These are the forces that are in this room and in this conference who maybe can forge the weapons that will keep us from going there. First, we have Sue Thrasher and Sue. I'd like for you to, uh, talk about whatever you want to talk about. But I wanna say that Sue was very there from the very beginning. And in terms of going into sock was, uh, instrumental. There are also a tremendous number of people here from so and other great organizers all through this, uh, audience. I hope you'll seek them out and talk to them. Sue Thrasher. Thank you. Would you please? You

Speaker 2 (00:07:04):

Want me to, oh,

Speaker 1 (00:07:05):

You can. There

Speaker 2 (00:07:07):

So people can see you.

Speaker 1 (00:07:14):

So Racher from UMass.

Speaker 2 (00:07:16):

No.

Speaker 1 (00:07:17):

Oh, I got the wrong, uh, university. Okay.

Speaker 2 (00:07:20):

Um, I currently work at the five college consortium and Amherst mass, which represents five, five institutions, not one, but that's not really who I am. Uh, and this morning Vincent Harding started. It's a good,

Speaker 1 (00:07:34):

Don't let it intimidate. You get right up there in holler.

Speaker 2 (00:07:38):

Uh, this morning, Vincent Harding started the morning session by insisting that all of the people on the panel say where they were from, uh, what their name was and where they were from. <laugh>. Uh, I absolutely agree with Vincent that that is a very important part of who I am. So my name is, um, Sue Racher. I'm now known as Martha through Martha Sue Racher, as Taylor branch said, Homeland security gave me my first name back. And, um, I grew up in a little town called Savannah Tennessee, which is just north of Mississippi, uh, and rural west Tennessee. My father was a carpenter and a farmer. He was a farmer because he loved the land and loved farming, and he was a carpenter because he needed to do that to get some money during the off season. My mother worked in a shoe factory. Um, I fortunately came of sort of political age in the early sixties and was fortunate enough to find myself in Nashville, Tennessee, which was, uh, I came to Nashville in 1961 and was in college there from 61 until 63.

Speaker 2 (00:08:44):

And that was just at the tail end of the, the very activist, uh, what wasn't at the tail end, but the, the sitin movement, uh, had changed the, the early leaders of the Nashville movement. Diane Nash be, um, John Lewis, well, John Lewis was still there. There were some people had left. Uh, Jim Lawson was no longer there and Diane Nash had left, but, uh, people who were still there was Bernard Lafayette, um, and John Lewis and Lester McKinney and others. So I was fortunate enough to be able to get involved in that early SNCC chapter in Nashville, which was really absolutely key in terms of who I became and in terms of getting my attention and shifting, uh, my values and, uh, what I wanted to do in life. Really. So I'm going to talk to you about two things today. I'm going to talk a little bit about the early years of the Highlander center.

Speaker 2 (00:09:36):

Uh, I worked at Highlander from 1978 until 1986. Uh, and I left Highlander only because I had, um, Highlander had been a place that had encouraged me to get interested in education and how people change the whole, um, way that education and critical consciousness comes together. And I, uh, after about 25 years of feeling I had been working and the movement I wanted to go away and what I called read, write and think. And so I took some time off, but I did at Highlander when I was there, I work on the archives of the Highlander center. So I became very familiar with the, the great history of this institution, which, uh, just several years ago celebrated its 75th anniversary. So we have an institution that has been working on interracial justice issues for 75 years and continues in that tradition. And I hope that while you're here, you will find some of the Highlander staff, Pam McMichael, who's the current director. Would you just raise your hand? Pam is here. Uh, this is an institution that is very vibrant. Yes.

Speaker 2 (00:10:49):

This is an institution that is very vibrant, very engaged and very involved in the organizing issues of the day. Uh, candy will talk a little bit more about that, but, uh, please check in with those people, but I came to Highlander, um, and immediately began looking at these archival papers, which were really quite amazing. And, um, one of my early mentors, Anne Braden had told me quite early that, um, I really didn't know anything about the history of radicalism in the south that I thought, um, like most people in my generation that activism started with me. And then if I wanted to go out and find out about people before me, especially white people, white southerners before me who had been involved in the Southern conference for human welfare and SC organizing the early labor movement that I should go and find those people and talk to them.

Speaker 2 (00:11:41):

And so, um, I did, and I've always been grateful to Anne Braden for that, but Highlander had a, a virtual treasure trove of letters, uh, um, some interviews at that time, historical fabulous historical photo collection. Uh, and I began to learn about this institution and for a long time, I thought that Highlander really had three lives. Um, I would add more to that now, but it definitely had from 1932 until the early 1950s, I think it's fair to characterize Highlander as a labor school, a place where people came together to organize the early labor movement crucial

during the early 1930s, there certainly were some other things that went on during that time. Um, but labor was a very important factor during that time miles Horton was accused of very early of, um, by a small town, a small, uh, town in, in east Tennessee of coming into a community ed, educating people and then going away and, and many ways that's exactly what Highlander, what the role of Highlander did.

Speaker 2 (00:12:48):

It would go into communities, educate people and then leave something there. This was in Wilder, Tennessee and an early labor strike and Wilder. So I would say in around 19, in 1953 Highlander had what was a very crucial workshop. Uh, it was 1953 people in the south predicted that the 1954 Supreme court decision on school desegregation would be made soon. They didn't know the exact date that it would be made, but in 1953, the staff at Highlander pulled together a workshop with people from across the south to talk about the coming of school integration and how communities could organize around that. And I believe, um, it was either at that workshop or a later one that rose Ms. Rosa parks was there, but I was, and there were three series. There were three workshops in this series of workshops about how to prepare for the coming of school desegregation in the south.

Speaker 2 (00:13:46):

What always amazed me when I was looking at the papers and talking with people, is that no one at that point predicted the massive resistance, um, that would come out of the south, come outta the Southern states, uh, to this phenomena. And people thought that they could do organizing and work in communities and ease the way and this would happen. But that workshop in 53, really, uh, I, to me, has been, was sort of a dividing line for Highlander moving forward into another period of ex its existence. And I would say from 1953, right up until the late sixties, when it participated in the poor people's campaign in Washington, DC, that Highlander was really, uh, a civil rights institution. That it, it was a, it was a gathering place for civil rights. Activists, N people came there, many other people came there. Uh, we came there, uh, the white organizing project in Mississippi came there in the summer of 64 for a week of training and then went on into, uh, Mississippi summer.

Speaker 2 (00:14:45):

So it was a gathering place and a place where people could come and talk about their issues and then go away and go back to their communities and do work. Uh, one of the things that always amazed me when I was reading miles is early papers, uh, from Denmark, cuz he had traveled in Denmark for a year before he came back to set up Highlander. He had, uh, he'd written on little index cards and one of them said, find a place and start because he had been doing all of this thinking about what kind of folk school he wanted to create. And he finally came to the realization that he had to find a place, move into a community and let that community define what he was going to build. And that's exactly what he did. The one thing I learned from miles and the staff that I worked with at Highlander, because it's a very two minutes, a very, um, collaborative, uh, educational team there is that you really do pay attention to, um, people's own experience as Bob said.

Speaker 2 (00:15:49):

Um, and I thought it was too simple in the beginning. I thought miles that this, this can't be how simple educational change really is, but miles always believed that if you started with people's experience and worked out from there, that people had the answers and that if they could talk about their problems together, they would share answers and come up with even more ways to attack those problems. Now what's really important in that mix, I think, is to understand how you begin to analyze those problems and move from the storytelling phase of what your problems are to actually coming to a more critical consciousness about how to attack those problems and that, but that's the role that Highlander has played. Um, one minute I think I have left, um, in 1960, uh, four in spring of 1964, I, along with Jean Guerrero, who's in this room in Archie Allens over

here somewhere, uh, was, and Walter Tillo who's in this room, I think as well, um, called together were some of the people who called together a meeting in Nashville to talk about the white organizing that was going on on campuses across the south.

Speaker 2 (00:16:58):

And you could read in the Southern Patriot. And literally that was the research that we did. Where if you read in the Southern Patriot about a student organization at duke or somewhere else, then you knew where there was little pockets of campus activism on white college campuses. And so we pulled together this organization with the only purpose, which was to build work on white campuses to support the civil rights movement in the south. And I think we were, and it was, uh, SOC, uh, was alive until 1969 over its, uh, lifetime. It had at least three different lives in much the same way that Highlander did. Uh, but in those early years it was very much related, uh, to the student movement. What was happening in NA, especially the SNCC movement in Nashville and to the, uh, what was going on across the south with the civil rights movement later became involved in peace and, and other things. And I think I have to stop there. Thank you,

Speaker 3 (00:18:02):

Ed Hamlet, the two teas ed Hamlet. Well, it's a rich that gets the glory and it's a poor that gets blame. And it's the same the whole world over, over, over now, ain't that a dirty crime shame. All right. That was, uh, that was the, that was the Anthem. And, um, it has some verses that are pretty interesting. Uh, we sang, uh, you know, we sang, we shall overcome and, and everything that we learned from SNCC to sing, um, there wouldn't have been any sock if it hadn't been for SNCC. Um, when I was a student at the university of Tennessee in 1962, I met Marion Barry who was a, who was a graduate student at the university of Tennessee. And just before that, the first group of, of black undergraduates had come to Knoxville to the university of Tennessee. And, um, and we were horrified that, uh, the only place I could eat was a school cafeteria now.

Speaker 3 (00:19:05):

I mean, that's a fake, worse than dead. And so we had got a group together called students equal treatment. Marion was really the chair, but, you know, we had black and white together. So I was the co-chair and, um, but Marion was the, the leader of that group. And we had a group good group, and I noticed that there were, there were other Penans other white southerners there, uh, who, uh, believed the same way that I did that things weren't right. That we were not free. Um, and, and so when sock got going, I was, I was really interested in that. What is, so by the way, and so is a Southern student organizing committee, Southern student organizing committee. When I, uh, when, um, uh, I went, I went to my first Nick meeting, uh, at Marion's insistence and that was in, in November of 1962 at Fisk. And then there, I met Anne Braden. Okay. Um, probably no other person, uh, had much influence than I, uh, on me that as Anne Braden did incidentally, Martha, would you pay attention to the time and let me know when, how many, many minutes have I used thus far? Uh, two. Two. Okay. Would you let me know when I have four, uh, two, two minutes left. Alright. Time, I've got eight minutes left. Yeah, it said Bob's now talked through five of them. So

Speaker 2 (00:20:41):

<laugh>

Speaker 3 (00:20:42):

We have the two minute one. All right. Okay. Let me know when, when I have have four minutes left then. Okay. <laugh> all right. Um,

Speaker 3 (00:20:53):

I went to this next meeting and, uh, and, and, uh, I remember the people were late getting in from Mississippi and people were worried about them. Uh, but I was just tremendously enthused by

that. And then in 63, I went to the meeting in Atlanta and then in the fall of 63, I went to the meeting at Howard and, and at that meeting was, uh, Byard Rustin. And the thing that I remember that Byard Rustin said was white people go organized in the white community. Well, at that meeting, there was a guy named Sam Shara also from lower Alabama, uh, a friend of Bob's, uh, the second person on the staff to work on the white Southern student project. I met Sam there. Uh, and, uh, and when I, uh, said to Marion, listen, I want to come work, you know, do this work, let me come do this work.

Speaker 3 (00:21:41):

Uh, by then I was a, a student at Southern Illinois university where I'd met Chuck NBK and Chico Ned, but, and, and John O'Neil and, and, uh, those people in the SNCC support group at SIU. Um, so Marion arranged for me to get on that project, which SNCC, which SC funded. Um, so, um, I gotta get on to Mississippi. So, so we got going and, and, uh, and Sam, Sam said, well, let's have a, let's have a white folks project in the summer of 64. That was, that was mainly Sam's idea, but other people were talking about it. So I helped organize the project in Biloxi, uh, in the white community, Biloxi and Jackson, we had 25 people on that project. And before I said, because there was a SNCC, there was a sock. And because there was a Bob Zelner who took the licks and kept on proving that whites could take it because, because of Bob I'm here on this platform today part partly because, because of Sam and partly because of Anne, but probably we wouldn't have this panel, had it not been for Bob's work in SNIC. And because there was Sam sh there was a white folks project and a consciousness about white community organizing. And I think that's a really important piece. And, and maybe why most of you're here, uh, at this panel today, uh, Biloxi and Jackson were the sites. We had 25 volunteers, um, and two staff, Sam and myself,

Speaker 3 (00:23:20):

All of these were white most from the south. We had Savannah, Georgia, Sue. Uh, we had Savannah, I'm sorry, Savannah, Tennessee, Sue, Savannah, Georgia. Um, new Iberia, Louisiana Howard romaine Howard, um, at, we had people from Atlanta, Atlanta, gene Guerrero, Gainesville, Georgia, Austin, Del Rio, Texas Newport, Arkansas Jackson, Tennessee, where my folks moved. I, um, I was born in Kentucky, moved to Tennessee and grew up. My father was a railroad man, Illinois central railroad runs right up through Mississippi and on, in up to Chicago. Um, and my mother worked in a factory, um, made cigars and made, uh, pants for Henry. I Siegel the, his label. So, so that's where I was coming from, but I knew, I think it's most important. We knew that we were not free and it was so important for us to, to do that work because we were not free. The question that we ask, I think, is an interracial movement of the poor. A good idea. I think that everybody's answer was yes, there was a question as to whether that summer in Mississippi, uh, was the best place to be doing that. But as Sue said, that's where the action was. The, the project had been proposed. It had been organized. It had been announced, my stick, people were recruited.

Speaker 3 (00:24:50):

So we said, okay, we're gonna go ahead.

Speaker 3 (00:24:56):

We arrived in Biloxi on June the 30th, the first item in the, in this, in the, uh, Watts line report was that the apartment that we had had rented when we got there, we found out that it was no longer available because they found out what we were doing. We moved over to a place called the RERA hotel. It was actually spelled Riviera, but they pronounced it Rivera in bucks. And we were able to stay there for, for the entire summer, some of the things that happened. Okay, good. Thank you with we lost, uh, we lost our apartments. We rented a house. We lost that. The guy, we put a hundred dollars deposit down and went back to get the deposit and the guy put a gun to Robert Cardone's head. Um, Robert Parone who wrote, uh,

Speaker 3 (00:25:46):

This book? No. Well, another book on, on, uh, it's called, it's called, uh, it's called Prairie radical. Um, and he talks about, about having the gun put to his head. This is another book called the summer that didn't end by Lynn Holt. It has a chapter on the, on the white folks project. Um, but this guy put a, a gun to his head and said, look you in lover, you get outta here, I'll shoot you. Uh, the guy finally gave us 50 of the hundred back, but he said, count yourself. Lucky. Um, so we lost that. We lost jobs because of being identified as, uh, being COFO workers. Uh, we were banned from a restaurant where the, from the jobs were lost from, um, we had a hoot nanny plan to be at Keesler air force base, um, and, uh, which is another part of that community there. And, uh, because Sam wouldn't, uh, take off his jeans and, and put on regular dress pants, they thought hoot nanny ought to be better dress than that. So they canceled the hoot nanny that we had lined up.

Speaker 3 (00:26:53):

We had accomplishments, there were three white delegates on the MFD P uh, convention, uh, to the MF. The MFD delegation to Atlantic city had three white delegates. One was in this room, at least he was ed king back there. Another was Dr. Vital from, uh, from, uh, uh, what's that called Tulu. And, and the third was Robert Williams, who was pretty much Sam's, but was our recruit, uh, from the point cadet community in Biloxi, he was the only working class, white person in the delegation. He went all the way to Atlantic city. Uh, he, he it's doubtful that that Bob is still living, but if he were, I would sure like to find out what's happened to him. Um, we had, uh, let's say we had, uh, five or six staff canvased in poor and working class neighborhoods. Um, we had, uh, hundreds of contacts in the community.

Speaker 3 (00:27:52):

Thank you, Bob. Uh, no one was injured or arrested. Uh, three staff went to other projects to work on white community things that was Macomb, Vicksburg and Hattiesburg. Um, incidentally, when the civil rights act was, was passed and when was implemented on July the fourth, 1964, Julius Lester and Lynn Chandler came to the Rivera hotel, spent the night with us and thus integrated the RRA hotel Lynn Chandler, who will be singing here tomorrow night, wrote songs all night in the John. At least when I got up at two o'clock to pee, he was writing songs in the John. He was too afraid to sleep. He's too afraid, too afraid to sleep. I say, well, he might, he might challenge that Bob, um, keeping the, uh, torch a flame within the, about white organizing in the community of SNCC and the greater movement, I think was another accomplishment that came out of what, uh, of what we did.

Speaker 3 (00:28:52):

Bob will tell you about the work that he did while organizing in the, in the white, uh, community, uh, people, Jean Guerrero worked in, in organizing in, in mills, he and his wife who was on the, so staff in, in North Carolina, the Casey Hayden went up and worked with whites in, uh, in Chicago. Um, Emmy Schrader, uh, worked some in Mississippi on white organizing. There were lots of other people and, and a crucial thing was keeping the idea that whites could be organized into an interracial interracial movement of the poor, which was SDSs phrase. I just want say that, uh, if you're want to know about more about SOC Tom Gardner, the last chairman of SOC, no, the next to the LA anyway, he's here. He'll sell you one of these books for three bucks. He's in the back and he'll toss in a brochure about this Southern student organizing committee. Amen. Preach all. Go. Thank

Speaker 1 (00:30:00):

Well. That's the first concrete evidence that the white project in 64 was a success. So instead of killing the guy, he gave him $50 refund <laugh> I think that's, uh, that's great. Margaret makes har Haring, uh, Harron is going to, um, speak about the mountain organizing. And, um, Al was

Al uh, MC maturely was supposed to speak, but, uh, he has a very serious illness in the family and he couldn't make it. So Margaret MC maturely, thank you.

Speaker 4 (00:30:42):

Um, my name is Margaret Herring now,

Speaker 4 (00:30:47):

And, uh, I was raised in Winston-Salem and my father was the pastor of the first Baptist church there in 1964. I went south and worked with SNCC after the democratic convention. And, um, when it became inappropriate for white people to be working in SNCC, I took seriously the challenge that we should go home to the white community and organize poor and working class white people with the same goals that SNCC had so that in the future we could form coalitions and have a true working movement. So, um, Al and I moved to Pikeville, Kentucky, and I went to work for SC. Let me explain that SC stands for the Southern conference educational fund, and they had a mountain project there and Al and I joined, um, the staff there.

Speaker 4 (00:31:57):

When we came, there was already a very strong local movement against the practice of strip mining. I don't know if you realize it, but the coal companies, uh, many years earlier had bought the mineral rights to the land underneath the people of east Kentucky. And they extracted billions and billions of dollars of coal without paying any taxes on that coal to put it back into the local economy. And then when the deep mines were running out, they started strip mining, which means that they pushed the tops of the mountains off and got the coal, the narrow sea of coal. And then they left with a big mess and the dirt would fall down into the streams and fill up the silt would fill up the streams and there'd be flooding. They'd push people's houses over, they'd push graveyards over. And the people were very upset by this and they were running this movement.

Speaker 4 (00:33:03):

Now, many of them, uh, the other thing about east Kentucky, it has a strong union tradition, black and white in the union and the United mine workers. Anyway. So we moved there in the spring of 67 and we were just getting to know people and getting to know how, what they thought and learning about strip mining and what was going on. And in August of 67, 1 afternoon, I looked out in the kitchen window and I saw about 15 men kind of walking Pring through the tall grasses, up up the mountain. And at the same time, there was a knock on the door and Sheriff's deputies came in and they said, where's Al MC Shirley. Well, Al had opened the door. And he said, well, I'm right here. And the, uh, they came in the kitchen. Other men came in the kitchen door and they arrested us and charged us with sedition.

Speaker 4 (00:34:08):

And I had to ask, uh, Al what that meant. And he said, it means teaching people how to overthrow the government <laugh> anyway, uh, we, we sat there very docile and the man who arrested us was running for Lieutenant governor of Kentucky. And he proceeded to go through every bookcase, all of our files, uh, everything in the house. And he took truckloads of papers to the jail to go through them. And what he got was all of our address lists from SNCC, all the SNCC position, papers, this, uh, SNCC button, when they saw this, they got really angry. Uh, anyway, we were in jail for about a week. Of course, we called the Braden's. And I knew when we were arrested that we would be okay if we could make it through the night, because they would call in, uh, Arthur Kao, bill, counselor, and Morton Davis.

Speaker 4 (00:35:12):

And they would also call the press. So, uh, that happened and our counselor had the case removed from state court to federal court. The law was thrown out and during the time we were waiting to get our papers back, they were turned over to Senator McClellan, chairman of the

Senate, permanent subcommittee on investigations. Um, when we finally got our papers back, the next year, our house was dynamite and we had to leave. But during that year, it was very difficult to work because people were afraid of us, the terrible repression that came down on this project, but we persevered <laugh> our philosophy when we moved there was to, was similar to, we tried to do what was similarly done in Lowes county, Alabama with the Lowes county freedom organization, which was to form a political movement to tax the coal, uh, that was being shipped out with no, you know, to elect a tax assessor judges, justice of the peace and representatives so that we could pass laws to tax the coal and some money could come back into the community. Anyway, if you want to read more about, uh, our sedation case, that's been written about, I won't go into too many details, uh, anyway, uh, that's about it.

Speaker 1 (00:36:53):

Thank you.

Speaker 1 (00:36:54):

Uh, next is, uh, candy car. And she's gonna talk about for one thing, the, uh, very strong nexus between the civil rights center in Nashville, Tennessee, and Highlander, uh, the music, the art that came out of that, the fact that we shall overcome Springs from that area you want it's, uh, and Highlander and, and Nashville and guy in candy. And, um, it's known all over the world. So the, um, what she's gonna talk about is a really good example of about these, uh, civil rights centers, being seed beds of, of, um, opportunity and learning that exploded and went worldwide. Thank you. Come in. And she's also gonna tell you about the judge went, uh, crazy over one day,

Speaker 5 (00:37:45):

Andy Carolyn

Speaker 6 (00:37:48):

Say, did you see him going? It was early this morning. He passed by your houses on his way to the cold. He was tall. He was slender and his dark eyes. So tender. His occupation was mining west, Virginia, his home. I bring that song because I know you all know that 29 miners were killed in West Virginia very recently. And when Jim Lawson talked about plantation capitalism, the Massy coal and energy group that owns that mine as a perfect example, they don't mind, you know, they'll sacrifice their workers to get the profits. Highlander's done a lot of work in the coal fields. And I felt like that was the way I wanted to begin. <laugh>, um, guy and I <laugh>,

Speaker 6 (00:38:48):

Uh, I met guy at Highlander on April 1st, 1960, and we live next door to Highlander now. So we have a long <laugh> connection to the Highlander, uh, center, and we've learned a great deal and enjoyed every bit of it. Uh, I wanted to say that when the challenge came from the civil rights movement, SNCC and S SCLC and others, two organizations like Highlander that were in a position to do so to work in white communities, really, for two reasons, one to begin to organize where racism lives and the second is to build allies for the movement in the south. Because just like we know now to really bring the kind of change we need in this country, it's gonna take a massive movement with people coming from many, many different places. So that was the challenge to Highlander and Highlander took that very seriously and, um, began a new set of working relationships with people.

Speaker 6 (00:39:48):

And one thing I wanted to mention was that implied a big change in staff at Highlander. And Bob said that Highlander's been going for 77 years. And I think this is one of the reasons we've been able to move through time. We've always felt like the people on the staff should reflect the constituencies that we're working with. So while we'd had Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson and very strong black people on the staff up until the mid 1960s, there was a massive change in the staff as we went forward, uh, after that. And some young Appalachians came onto the staff.

Um, the other approach that Highlander takes is to go into communities and listen to what's really on people's mind. And one thing I learned from miles, he always said, you looked where people are angry, but where there's hope, because that's when you're gonna get the possibility for some action.

Speaker 6 (00:40:41):

So the first people up into the Appalachian region, that's what they were looking for. What's on people's minds. What do they care about? What are they angry about? And is there hope that something could happen? And, uh, um, I think guy and I were lucky enough to be invited, to be some of the people to go up into Appalachia. We just happened to go to pike county, became neighbors to Allen, Margaret, and Joe, and Karen Malloy, and worked with a very, uh, powerful local woman there, Edith Sterling. And it was a very, um, it was just an amazing educational experience for us. I, I have to say I was nervous having just been in the deep south, working in black communities, cuz I thought of poor white people as kind of the enemy <laugh>, you know, I mean, those are the people that don't believe in civil rights and when we'd gone out in sit-ins and that kind of thing, those were the people that were kind of calling us names.

Speaker 6 (00:41:32):

And so I had my trepidation about going up into the mountains, but it didn't take long living up there to understand what an oppressive situation that was as Margaret has just described and how people there were just hoping for the same things that people in the deep south were. They just wanted safety in their work conditions. They wanted education for their kids. They wanted healthcare. So it didn't take long to begin to feel some solidarity with the people in the Appalachian region for guy and me. I think it was a challenge around the cultural piece cuz as most of, you know, a lot of the work we did in the black south was around the music and this powerful singing movement of the most powerful singing movement we've ever had in this country. And you know, we were just really curious as we went into the mountains, well, what is gonna be the cultural sustenance there?

Speaker 6 (00:42:20):

What's gonna sustain people as they struggle with issues. And it's a totally different tradition for one thing in the black south, you know, the church provided so much of the music and also the place where people met and the, you know, the underpinning and bedrock really of the movement to be lifted up. And in Appalachia, I can tell you that is not the case. <laugh> a lot of the churches there, uh, were really under the thumb of the coal industry. I mean, coal industry controlled everything in the mountain communities and there wasn't an activist tradition in those churches and there wasn't gonna be the powerful singing coming from that source. But there are exceedingly strong traditions in the mountains, wonderful string music ball traditions, where people spin out long stories and really tell you what's going on. Great humor, great food, dance traditions. So, you know, again, that's where, where guy and I began to try to figure out what we would do.

Speaker 6 (00:43:17):

And eventually we did the same kind of documentary work that we had done in the deep south. We put out some recordings, the, a long tradition of people really writing about the problems and what to do about 'em Sarah Ogan, gunning and aunt Molly Jackson and Nim rider Workman and George Tucker and people like this. And then a lot of younger people. So we, we got some of those things recorded and did a book voices from the mountains that really shows strip mining and shows the problems and shows people resisting and fighting back. Um, yeah, I just, um, and the one other thing about that too, as we did in the deep south, we liked the idea of doing specifically cultural workshops. I've always said at Highlander, people are working on the hardest problems and we got to work in the fun part of working on those hard problems because we would do workshops for the song leaders and the dance scholars and the people who were part of the movement, but also using the culture as an important part of that.

Speaker 6 (00:44:16):

And so, uh, for a number of years, we did that with people from coal mining communities. Uh, just wanna end up by saying a little bit about Highlander today, cuz a lot of people think that Highlander when miles died, it ended when we got shut down by the state, it ended when the civil rights movement was over, it ended, but Highlander has steadily moved forward and is definitely moving forward now. And I think the basic, um, goal of the school is what it always was. We wanna see a massive movement in this country that makes it a more democratic place with equality for everybody. Uh, and the work that's going on there now is really trying to do that in a very multiracial and intergenerational way. We have two very strong programs. One is called threads and it's a leadership training program that brings people together for several, uh, workshops.

Speaker 6 (00:45:09):

And it's got black people, white people, new immigrants to the region, young people and old people. You can bet it's challenging work, but it's a very, very strong program. And then our youth program is the same. It's got, it's at least a tri-racial group. And um, it's helping people find their common ground and trying to work against the way we've always been divided and set apart each other. So I encourage you look at the Highlander website and we have a wonderful homecoming every fall and just know that Highlander is still going. We still determine to see real change in this country and we'd love for you all to be a part of it. Thank you.

Speaker 1 (00:45:53):

I think she's yielding the balance of her time. So, um, we

Speaker 6 (00:45:57):

Use all my time. We

Speaker 1 (00:45:58):

Really sing some more, sing it on the show. Charlene, uh, Kran is our next, uh, person to talk about her experience, uh, in the white community organizing. But uh, her most recent experience is organizing this conference. I think we all ought to give her a tremendous vote of confidence and a great you've been working on a day and night for an awful long time. Charlene, thank you.

Speaker 4 (00:46:30):

Well, when SNCC was founded on this campus in 1960, I was 13 years old. Um, and then I followed the civil rights movement very, very closely. Um, as a young teenager, when I got to be 16 and got a driver's license, um, I lived in Washington D D DC still do. I started going to meetings at Howard university of the SNCC affiliate, uh, which was the nonviolent action group nag. Um, and you may know that a lot of the later leadership of SNCC came out of NAC. So I'm 11th grade 12th grade. I'm going to these meetings at, uh, at Howard university back at my high school, which was very predominantly white. I organized a group called students against discrimination. And the first thing we did in 63 was to bring clothes and canned goods to the SNCC office in downtown DC to be put on trucks, to take to the Mississippi Delta.

Speaker 4 (00:47:27):

And for any of you were with SNCC in 63, you remember the food and clothing drive where we sent hundreds of truckloads, um, of food and canned goods. So I remember in the SNCC office in 63, the mountains of clothing that had been donated and we would wa Wade into the piles and sort it and fold it and pack it. Well then 1964 came around. Um, I worked in DC in the Mississippi freedom democratic party office as a prelude to the summer challenge in Atlantic city in 1964 and worked in Atlantic city. And by then I had turned 17 and uh, went off to New York to work in the New York friends of SNCC office at 18, came back to DC. Um, and at 19 worked in the DC SNCC office and my boss was Mary and Barry and John Lewis signed my paychecks. Um, then there came a time in about 1966 when, as, uh, someone said the

conversation changed and the idea came that the white, since SNCC should work in the white community.

Speaker 4 (00:48:35):

And that sounded very reasonable to me. It sounded like a good idea. And so some like-minded people in DC, we started talking about what did that mean and what could we do for social justice as whites in our own community? So my life, um, took two paths at that point in 66, 1 was a group of white suburbanites, um, organized a group called access action coordinating committee to end the segregation in the suburbs. And we took on housing discrimination in the DC suburbs as our cause at that time, while DC was well integrated in housing, the Maryland and Virginia suburbs was extremely hard for non-whites to find apartments to rent. They were white, only apartments. And so our group, this was my first arrest. Actually our group began to sit in the rental offices of white only apartment complexes. And that's how we started that project. Um, we had access while the membership was all white. We hired an executive director, um, a black Howard law student who's here. And our first success was that Charlie Jones

Speaker 7 (00:49:48):

<laugh>.

Speaker 4 (00:49:53):

I was on the committee that hired Charlie Jones, 1966, um, Fort Meyer, which is a very large army base in Arlington Virginia, right over the river from DC, the black soldiers who were at that time pouring into Fort Myers because it was the build up of the Vietnam war. Couldn't find apartments for their families, uh, near Fort Meyer. Um, the apartments complexes in Arlington were white only, and Charlie and a group from our organization went and negotiated at the Pentagon. And the result was an executive order, which said that the Pentagon, the army would not pay the housing allotments for its soldiers in segregated buildings. My goodness. Wow. And this was huge. Oh right. This was huge because it wasn't just for Arlington. It was for the United States army. Wow. Which meant wherever there were soldiers using their housing allotment, the apartments had to be open for everyone. This is before we had federal fair housing laws and Charlie Jones negotiated that agreement with the Pentagon and our organization.

Speaker 4 (00:51:01):

Um, the white suburbanites of access built, built the, uh, the drive, the energy that enabled him to do that at the same time, a subgroup of access, a subgroup of young Jewish people who had been interested and active in the, in SNCC. We became a subgroup of a subgroup and organized a group called Jews United for justice, J U J. And we also took on fair housing as our cause. And we found that the owner of the largest garden apartment complex in Arlington Virginia was a Jewish woman named Ali fried. And we ally freed and we found out the synagogue that she belonged to. And we went, I can't believe these words are about to come out of my mouth. We went and picketed ally freed at her synagogue on the high holy days. Oh

Speaker 8 (00:51:54):

My goodness.

Speaker 4 (00:51:58):

Being 20 and very young. So there was Jews for urban justice picketing. This lady, synagogue, as people were coming in for Rahan and yum Kipper services, looking back, this is not what you would call, how to win allies in the Jewish community, but there we were. And of course we were on the front page of the Jewish week. Um, well, I have to tell you, ally Fried's building was the first one to open up. So there you were my first arrest and our first big success. So Jews for urban justice, um, actually has continued. And there is the third generation of Jews for urban justice still in Washington, DC. And I am on the board of it. Um, and it's a, a group of young

Jews, even though I'm on the board of it. Um, that works for social justice issues, much of the same kinds of issues that we worked on in the 1960s.

Speaker 4 (00:52:57):

Um, for example, last year, our theme was voting rights for the district of Columbia. And I hope everybody knows that DC does not have a vote in Congress. We don't have a voting Congressman or Senator this year. Our theme is a day, day laborer center and rights for day laborers. And how much time do I have? Go ahead in a minute. Uh, yeah, actually one minute, oh one minute. Our, our, our latest victory is a day laborers found that because they don't have a written work contract with the people that pick them up at the job site. They often work their eight or 10 hour days get dropped back at the job site and don't get paid. And it was, they often didn't know who to go to, to get paid because they'd work for a third party. The owner of the building never showed up and, um, DC was not very good about enforcing their wage and labor, um, rights.

Speaker 4 (00:53:50):

So we have been working with the wage and labor board in DC to beef up their staff so that they can handle the complaints from day laborers who are screwed out of their wages. Um, and we have had several really good victories on that. And our new mayor has come forward and actually increased the budget for the wage and labor department for next year, which he's done for no other department across the city. And so, um, we feel that we are, are getting better rights for day laborers. And the other thing that we do is, uh, every year we have a labor ser, which we talk about, uh, workers' rights. And every year, the Friday and Saturday of labor day, we have labor on the Bema, which we send speakers to all the synagogues in the Washington area and talk about these labor issues and get the rabbis to include those issues in their sermons that year. And this year we were of 46 of the 48 synagogues. Wow. In the Washington area.

Speaker 1 (00:54:54):

Thank you much, very much, Charlene. Uh, and that was Jews for now Jews for every justice. Thanks very much for everybody. We're going to, um, I'm going to just do a little, uh, wrap up here and say that, uh, I, I hope, uh, Donnie Zelner is still here because I want to thank her and, uh, mention her when we got together to do the grow project after the SNCC gears, because, uh, what so had done was to show that, uh, organizing could be done in the white community. And many of us were a little bit reluctant to leave the comfort of the black community, but by the middle sixties, it became very important and necessary for us to use the skills that we had learned in the civil rights movement and began to move in an organized way into white organizing in the south. Uh, if there are any graduate students here, any, uh, teachers of civil rights history, I'll give you a very unworked field.

Speaker 1 (00:55:56):

And that is the work that many of the people, white people who had worked in and around SNCC, what they did after 19 67, 66 and 67, our approach was to continue to work in the white community. And it was arguable that you could work in the black community with all black groupings, but nobody thought you could work in the deep south with all white groupings. That would necessarily be a racist, uh, formation, whatever came out of it. So we had to do our work in an interracial manner. We begin everything that we did in terms of labor organizing women's organizing union organizing was done in an interracial way. The grow project stood for grassroots organizing work.

Speaker 1 (00:56:46):

We also called it get rid of Wallace <laugh>. We went into the worst areas of the deep south keeping the SNCC tradition. They said you can't organize white people, poor white people and working class people in Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia, the grow project targeted those areas that were the very worst areas of clan infestation. The very first project that the grow

project began was in a Laurel Mississippi, Laurel Mississippi was the home of, of the, of the Klansmen who killed our civil rights workers. In 64. We knew if we could work at the Masonite plant and with wood cutters across the deep south, we could transfer our skills that we had learned in the civil rights movement to, uh, the interracial movement in the south. There's a definite necessity to go back to that kind of organizing now, because in my state of Alabama in the Obama campaign, 11% of the white vote went for Obama.

Speaker 1 (00:57:47):

What does that mean to you? Of course, racism is alive and well state terror in some ways is still alive and well in the south because the Republican party, I wanna be partisan here a little bit has entrenched itself in the pockets of poison that are left in the deep south and some of the backward states of the west, that's their stronghold. And we have to rebuild number one, the democratic party in the south. And we certainly have to hope that the Republican party rebuilds itself as a national party and does not continue its direction into the FA fascist, uh, uh, formation. Um, I want to, uh, direct our thinking please, in our, uh, questions. And I'd like to invite you now to move to that microphone is the only one that will be, uh, recognized hands. Won't be recognized unless you have a handicap and you can't get there.

Speaker 1 (00:58:43):

Please let me know. And you'll wave your hand like that and I'll call on you. Otherwise, you'll be behind that microphone. What I'm asking is that people, uh, would address a couple of things. One is, uh, was the movement only a black struggle as some of our narrow nationalists insisted was. Yeah. I don't know how many people here by the way, have written or read the SNCC list or the sock list in the last 12 months, would you please raise your hand if you can admit that you've been lurking on the SNCC list? Okay. That's probably a Tempest in a tea party, but, uh, there is still a resurgence of the exact, uh, narrow nationalist struggle that we had in SNCC in the middle to the late sixties. And that was that black people did not need or want any allies. They were gonna do it on their own.

Speaker 1 (00:59:34):

When you strip all yourself of allies, then you weaken the movement. Everybody needs allies, the black Panther party, which was one of the wor uh, one of the strongest, uh, nationalist groupings said that everybody in the black national, in the black Panther party would be black, but they would work with all revolutionaries going in the same direction, regardless of the, um, of the direction SNCC ironically had that had been inclusive all the time. At the same time, the great black prince of nationalism, Malcolm X, as he was moving to a more revolutionary and international, uh, struggle, SNCC moved then to become all black. Now, the question that I would like to ask is what are the good parts of the nationalism and fact is that it was a tremendous Bo to the movement. Black power, black, black is beautiful. Black has a great history of struggle.

Speaker 1 (01:00:35):

The huge struggle of the black, uh, people in this country is not known in our history. So if we know that in our schools, there's a pride that will not allow us to go and shoot one another, between black, Latino, black, and black, black, and white and so forth, we need to regroup as a, as a United front. And I'm asking you, do you think that the organizing that has been done in the black, in the white community has been, um, effective? Do you think that it has done more to draw us together? And is it a powerful force that we can re uh, up, we can renew our weapons? I would like for you to ask you also, and I'll end with this, there's a new plan to have an economic development zone declared in the south so that we can have federal funds to train 100 organizers to go primarily into the white community, the south, but really we have to do it interracially to address those 11%, the, those voters and so forth who refuse to vote for a black president because of racial issues. So that's one of the proposals that's on the table. Reverend barber here

in, uh, uh, North Carolina is advancing that. And so what are the practical proposals that we have for addressing our problems today, the cradle to prison, all of those issues, first a questionnaire.

Speaker 9 (01:02:00):

Um, hi. I actually got up here to make an announcement <laugh> okay. So let me do that first. That's good. No, first I wanna say it's an honor to finally meet you, Bob Zelner and Braden used to talk about you all the time. Okay. Thank you. Yes. We are inducting Anne into the national voting rights museum, and we wanna invite all of you to come. It's gonna be the first weekend in March, uh, in 2011, uh, in Selma, Alabama, uh, in regards to your questions, we need you in Alabama. No, there has not been enough work. Uh, Alabama com remains to one of the most, uh, conservative, uh, states, uh, in the, in the United States. And it has a very active, uh, Confederate, uh, states movement effort. In fact, uh, we just, uh, our new mayor pro Tim is, uh, a, uh, Confederate and he ISI with people who at least say that they are publicly, uh, racist and have criticized the movement, the voting rights movement publicly and Selma said a lot of racist things about it. So we really still need you to do what's Nick called you to do, and that is to organize in white communities. All

Speaker 1 (01:03:24):

Right. Thank you. Yes, very much. And, uh, we are very definitely getting back to Alabama. The, uh, my book, I'll give you a quick plug on that, that talks about the grow project is going to be filmed by, uh, spike Lee. And we're doing most of the filming in Alabama. So we're looking back at the past, but we're hoping to reach a lot of young people with this story and, uh, hopefully, uh, help move forward with the struggle Armen der.

Speaker 10 (01:03:50):

Was there any connection between a relationship between SOC and SDS?

Speaker 3 (01:03:56):

Uh, there was always a Southern token, uh, on the SDS national council. I was that Southern token, uh, for a year, but we were fraternal, uh, we were fraternal organizations until, uh, SDS, uh, in order to satisfy some tendencies, kicked us out, uh, kick sock out,

Speaker 5 (01:04:16):

Anybody else on

Speaker 11 (01:04:17):

For the sake of clarity in people that don't know what is asking

Speaker 1 (01:04:21):

S SDS is the SU uh, the students for democratic society. Uh, now we call 'em Cile. Uh, I'm see now, uh, people for democratic society or seniors for democratic society, but there are a lot of, uh, successor groups to SDS and SOC did have relationships

Speaker 5 (01:04:40):

Survivors for democratic <laugh>.

Speaker 1 (01:04:42):

Yes. And one of the things that gonna be doing by the way Al Haber is here, who was the founder of SDS, and they're going to be getting a Mayday reception together for our president who is going to, uh, Ann Arbor actually to, uh, on Mayday. And there's a huge, uh, immigrant rights, uh, uh, uh, for, uh, demonstration there and protest, uh, trying to pressure the, uh, the president and say to the country, we want him to do more progressive things. He's not nearly a socialist Chuck Charles Jones,

Speaker 12 (01:05:14):

A most gracious, loving, good evening to each of you. Let me bring the ancestors in for a moment so that we can keep in the context where we are. We did not get here by our efforts alone. I've been blessing to everybody on that panel pretty much. Yes. And just to make sure you understand in the continuum of things, we are all a part of God's beautiful human family. Y amen. So let's God get in the way you, I mean, getting around this crap and this garbage, this notion that we are different outta crap, please. Now, now that I've gotten that out of the way,

Speaker 1 (01:05:56):

Did you get that off your chest?

Speaker 12 (01:05:58):

Okay. Yes. Now, but let me just make couple of couple balls phases. 1 61 62 SNCC was at a point where the direct action people were. I insisting that Satyagraha was the only truthful way to do community organization. Uh, some of the rest of us said voter registrations was critical. So we met at Highlander. Ella baker helped the Ja that she was us to develop a process where we talked, we prayed, we thought, and we would reach a consensus, not one more than 50, but we stayed at it until we reached a consensus about what was a collected best interest. So of the things I will share with you, make sure you go beyond this notion that if you got one more than 50, I'm gonna keep your keep at it until you find a common

Speaker 1 (01:06:59):

Ground there, question in there. Uh,

Speaker 12 (01:07:01):

The other thing was that Charlene, you were very gracious, but it was because we walked around together, used the tactic of saying to the Pentagon, we were gonna have a press conference and go to Vietnam to talk to the husbands or the women who couldn't get accommodations. Yeah. And let the Pentagon explain why. So when I went up in there, I mean, she made me sound like I was all of that, but we had the potential of embarrassing the Pentagon on the pentagons about why it was not doing more for black soldiers. So my question is this, can we continue to build a beautiful garden with all the textures and colors so that we will have a community of a beloved place where we all embrace and get rid of all of this garbage and cesspool stuff? Can we do

Speaker 1 (01:07:57):

That? Just pull your microphone, or if who ever wants to respond, pull your microphone up. And, uh, and anybody who wants to take that question, can we get rid of all this? Yes. <laugh> yes. <laugh>

Speaker 12 (01:08:11):

In every one of

Speaker 1 (01:08:12):

Them. Thank you. Thank you. There, Ellen. Me.

Speaker 13 (01:08:16):

Yeah. Thank you, Bob. I really appreciate your openness and honesty around raising questions of nationalism, black nationalism. And as you say, narrow nationalism, uh, but from my point of view, I think one of the most difficult things for white allies to understand is the concept of black self determination of the self determination of African descendants of enslavement. And as much as it is, um, an Alliance that we absolutely must bill, uh, because white allies have to begin to approach, are you listening to me? Bob white allies have to begin to approach, uh, the white working class. Cause when Bob mentions that 11% of white folks who voted for Obama, I can tell you, it was very similar here in North Carolina, but the 11%, I think more reflected people who were overwhelmingly well educated and well off. So in terms of what the white working

class has done consistently, and this is a question that I have been really grappling with. And as Bob, as you know, you came to Durham for the reliable white allies,

Speaker 1 (01:09:23):

Reliable white allies,

Speaker 13 (01:09:24):

Reliable white allies, which is my big issue. And so in terms of how people become reliable, uh, allies in the struggle to end white supremacy, uh, living in the spirit of Anne Braden, I think there has to be, uh, that kind of clarity on what needs to be done. And I think as many steps have gone forward, there have been quite a few steps backward. And we certainly see that today in the tea party movement and the other expressions, uh, since Obama has become president. So there is much work to be done. And I just like to hear what you're thinking is now about how that work should be approached.

Speaker 1 (01:09:57):

Okay. And, uh, while we are thinking about that on the panel, uh, Hollis, who is one of our greatest song leaders, and one of our greatest leaders period works in Mississippi has always been there. And he has a thought about some of the organizing that we did in the grow project. And many times we don't get feedback from the kinds of grassroots organizing that we do. Hollis has a good point, Hollis, please.

Speaker 12 (01:10:22):

I was trying to give it to Bob for him to make, but he wouldn't fall for it. <laugh> but, um, you know, we didn't sneak, we didn't fall for too many things <laugh>, but what I wanted to to say is that he mentioned coming into Mississippi and he mentioned the wood cutters. I just wanted it to be known that working with the wood cutters, from what I saw as a Mississippian, working in Mississippi and still continues to work in Mississippi, that project became one of the most successful events and efforts that I have seen in Mississippi was when the wood cutters came together and they decided that they would not be just a white organization. They reached out to the black community and they went after that, those enemies, both black and white, they organized, and they had co-chairs one black and one white and wherever they were having a meeting, be it in a predominantly black community or a predominantly white community. Those co-chairs went together and spoke with one voice. And I just wanted folks to know that that was one of the most successful organizing events that I've seen in Mississippi. Thank you for indulging me to improve.

Speaker 1 (01:11:59):

Thank you. Ho I'll pay you later on for that, um, that plug, uh, is, does someone have the, a response to that or, or what Theresa was talking about? We're about running another question. Okay. Another question, sir.

Speaker 14 (01:12:13):

Oh, hi, good afternoon. I'm Chris Crom. I'm with the Institute for Southern studies and we're another, I guess, descendant, um, of, of the, uh, so SSC and SNCC era. Um, it's great to see people like Sue Thrasher who helped bring that to being in the 19 in 1970. Um, and we're still here too, but a couple things that one is that I heard the name, Anne Braden come up at least, uh, four or five times. And it was so interesting to hear that name because I remember when she would get me on the phone <laugh>, you know, she didn't just take the next generation of activists, but then she would take future generations of activists. And I was just so amazing for her. And she would, you know, just keep you on the phone for about two hours and just kind of probe every part of your psyche, you know, but it was just astounding, her patience and her, uh, commitment to working with people.

Speaker 14 (01:12:58):

And I was wondering if anybody else could talk about that and either Ann or other similar mentors. Um, but also second, um, one thing that I wanted to hear a little more about are the panel were any kind of lessons you feel you learned out of the wide organizing experiments, and there seemed to be some cracks here and there that, you know, uh, not summing it up as a success or, you know, not feeling like you did enough, which I'm, I'm sure like every organizer feels that way, but I'm sure you learned a lot too about some of the things that you felt worked and I'd, I'd love to hear about that too.

Speaker 1 (01:13:25):

Pull your microphone over and speak loudly. Yes.

Speaker 2 (01:13:28):

Well, uh, I, I, I'm sure there are many people in the room who are familiar with Anne Braden, but yes, you're absolutely right. She was one of the most, um, important mentors and a movement, um, in a movement that, um, actually has many, uh, heroines that we can, uh, look to. Uh, for instance, when I talked about the history of Highlander and talked specifically about miles Horton, it's impossible to think about Highlander without women like Septima Clark and Bernie Robinson, uh, and candy Karavan and all of the other, uh, great people who have staffed that institution over the past 75 years and was a particular mentor to me. And I think to other people, because she was a white southerner, I mean, she'd grown up in, um, um, Annison Alabama and had, uh, worked on a paper there. And at one point had, had to make the decision about which side she was on.

Speaker 2 (01:14:26):

And that particular day came for her when she said she overheard a conversation among other reporters talking about, uh, uh, murder in the black community. And, uh, in a way that indicated they weren't serious about trying to solve the crime because it was in the black community. And she realized at that point that she really had to decide, uh, who she was. And she became a great fighter, um, on behalf of human rights. And she was a, an absolutely wonderful role model. And you're right, Chris, that, uh, she did, she never stopped. I mean, my last image of Anne is, uh, at a conference and, uh, at UMass, uh, drinking bourbon, smoking cigarettes and talking until 1230 at night, about what telling people what we had to do to keep the work going on.

Speaker 1 (01:15:15):

I got a short end rating story, a short end Braden story. Well, you, you, you save it for a minute and let's get a couple of people and then I'll go back to, to, uh, Howard on a short story. Come on up. Yes. Now next, next questioner. Uh, and you have to be short now. Okay, please. Yes, sir. <laugh>

Speaker 15 (01:15:35):

Um, you mentioned crossover, I'd like to mention ed Clark, the great organizer of the MDs in new Orleans was that kind of person. And so some old friends of mine, I didn't know of, uh, until later, uh, Bruce, uh, and Doug TIS, I think were in Biloxi with you. And I passed through with, uh, Julius Lester, uh, time or two at various places. Um, I was one of the founders of temperatures for democratic union, and I was about the only member of the executive board who was a dock worker. So I represented mostly black and Mexican, uh, you know, with working with me, whereas most of the drivers were white and that did tend to be an issue. Uh, the Solensky model was a great model, except it had one fundamental flaw. It organized around precisely around local issues. And if it was only a white community, like back of the yards in Chicago, 20 years later be became the core of the races moving in Chicago. So even if, you know, you can work with, with majority or even only whites, only if you have bridge issues that connect it to the higher struggle and bring in allies and, and associations with other race of people who are involved in the same type of thing. And, okay. Is there a question the, the, the

question is, can you, uh, offer any tools or any, uh, philosophy on, on how to, how to make that bridge happen? Because Solinsky, didn't quite get it, although he was a great organizer.

Speaker 1 (01:17:15):

Okay. Thank youre. Uh, short story on, uh, on Anne

Speaker 16 (01:17:19):

Braden, my name's Howard Roma over 60, uh, uh, we had a reunion of the Southern student organizing committee, which ed Hamlet primarily put together and some other people at, at, uh, which in Nashville at scar Bennett, where, from which, uh, Archie Allen in the back and Sue Thrasher graduated. And, um, I was standing there, I think it was about nine o'clock at night, and we'd been there for a day or two. And then I hold, heard this soft voice behind me, Howard, what, how are you doing? And I looked, turned around, here's Anne Braden, you know, and she'd driven down from Louisville. I think she must have been late seventies then maybe even 80 years old. And, you know, it was just, and there she was, and she was smoking her cigarette and we talked anyway. That's a short story. I mean, she just, she just kept going.

Speaker 1 (01:18:05):

All right. Good. Okay. Thank you, Howard. Next question. And I want to be sure to get to Pam McNichols back there.

Speaker 14 (01:18:11):

Sure. I'll try. I'll try to make this a question as possible. I wanted to thank y'all for being, uh, good examples of white Southern races, Southern antiracist, excuse me.

Speaker 14 (01:18:22):

You know, being in front of people gets kind of nervous, uh, cuz as a white Southern boy, it's, it's hard to find people to look up to, uh, and to be able to identify and be a southerner and anti-racist. And so I wanna say that seems like all this tea party stuff in the south is, is the fault of white folks not organizing white folks in the south. Um, and a lot of the white anti-racism that I see in this country today is, is solidarity work. And so it's like throwing fundraisers for, uh, black folks organizing or, you know, throwing or doing this thing to support this group. And I'm, I'm wondering if y'all on the panel have like concrete places where you think white people can be organizing white people that is beneficial for the white working class, as well as all people like concrete things that we can be working on that will like challenge racism in the white community, but also like acknowledge that white working class people have their issues and need like, you know, they're poor. So like what are the, what are the concrete things though?

Speaker 3 (01:19:20):

Not the, one of the things that we haven't talked about is, uh, is the, uh, Alliance with the labor movement. And uh, and there are, there are good labor people, um, in this country. Um, SDS worked a lot with labor people in the early times. Uh, one of the important things that so did I think was to ha was to try to forge allies in the labor movement and, and gene, um, Jean and Nan, uh, worked over in North Carolina here in North Carolina. Um, and so, so had an active program of, of allies with labor. And so what you can do now is, uh, is, is work for labor unions wherever you are. If you're on college campus, support the people in your college, uh, who need to be unionized. And most of 'em still do need to be unionized work, work for, uh, work for, uh, what's that, that, uh, the wage thing, the living wage thing, and that'll help a lot of white, uh,

Speaker 1 (01:20:21):

And single payer help. Okay. Uh, Pam, uh, MC McMichael, who is the director of Highlander folk school, and always working to, uh, get white people involved in, um, struggle,

Speaker 6 (01:20:32):

Uh, a thank you panel and, and, you know, it's always, uh, uh, such an honor and privilege to all the stories we've heard this weekend and the learning from that as we take our work forward and I'm, I'm standing here, um, pretty moved and humbled from, uh, particularly Gwen Patton's comment yesterday and carrying those comments into this session today about, you know, just really calling us and challenging us. What are white people doing? And what have you been doing in terms of this tea party ments? She said, at least in my day, they were ashamed, ashamed enough to wear sheets. And so now you hear are these tea party, you know, tea partiers out here. I want, I want just wanna

Speaker 1 (01:21:11):

Hold back your true feelings. Now

Speaker 6 (01:21:13):

I want to say two quick things. Um, we have to be careful about the connections of the tea partiers and the writing that this resurgent racism is just coming from working class. People really encourage people to look at the studies of the demographics of the tea. Partiers. Those people are not hungry. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and, and CNN has done reports and there was just another one recently. So this one, this one's, we got to dig deeper, cuz this, this one is complicated and it, and we are called to figure it out. And one of the things there is a new national network of white people, white anti-racist activists, racial justice, activists who work with other white people as well is work in, um, in enter in multiracial coalitions and networks and organizations called us for all of us. There's a website us for all of us.org.

Speaker 6 (01:22:01):

There is a petition to sign people of all races are, are invited to sign that petition and to get involved. This is an effort that came out of the south recently and seeing the resurgent racism, what was happening, uh, you know, just the, what was happening with the, as the signs and the, the, you know, like you, you see these signs on TV of president Obama in these like witch doctors, skulls, and you see this, like you think about this eight year old white kid in rural Kentucky who, who voted, who was, you know, supportive of Obama. And that's the only image that though she's seen those kinds of images and she's not seeing the kind of images of the vision that we need to put forward about the world as much. So I just wanted to say Highlander was instrumental in, in, and had people in this room instrumental in getting that effort came outta the south. We encourage you to get it, you know, to go to that website. And just thanks for this chance to say

Speaker 1 (01:22:53):

That you thank you very much now just to be able to get through, uh, following the lead of some of the other sessions. Hopefully we can continue this, uh, we'll talk outside or up here at the end if we can, but everybody, please present your question all the way back. I think there's seven questions, real quick questions.

Speaker 17 (01:23:12):

I have a brief tribute and it's not a question I have never questioned this at all. Martha Livingston New York, the first time that I went south early in 65 or late in 64, I went to Vanderbilt and I was, you know, and, and remain a New York Jew red diaper baby left wing person and had my w B Dubois club button on. And the kids, some of whom would later become sock were all, Ooh, oo, aren't you great. You know, this lefty new Yorker. I said, come on, this is in my DNA. I could hardly do anything different. You guys are the real heroes because these kids were being turned out of their homes. Their parents were no longer speaking to them. Cetera. And I also wanted to pay a brief tribute to Highlander. I worked with SCLC in mayor, June 65. There was a poetry workshop that was really a respite for people from the movement from SNCC SCLC. You need to

Speaker 1 (01:24:16):

That tribute a little shorter. Now

Speaker 17 (01:24:18):

That was the end of it. Bob had you not cut me off.

Speaker 1 (01:24:21):

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you, Martha Livingston and make, make the short statements or questions please.

Speaker 18 (01:24:31):

Uh, my name is Carl Davidson. Um, I was one of the people who left Mississippi in 1966 with the idea of, uh, taking the fight against racism into the white community. And, uh, I made a long journey in many different ways, but the thing that I found most important was most recently and this in a way, it's my, a comment and a question to all of you. And the thing that helped me the most was a man named Richard Truk. I

Speaker 1 (01:25:00):

United mind workers,

Speaker 18 (01:25:02):

United mind workers. Now the head of the AFL CIO. I moved back to where I came from about three years ago, which is beaver county, Western, Pennsylvania, a heart of the white worker. And believe me, they, uh, cling to their guns there and they cling to their religion to don't know what anybody fool you. And, uh, we got into the thick of, uh, the Obama campaign. And, uh, I can, I I'm in raccoon township, beaver county, and there are white people are all we have. And 95% of 'em are white workers who, so I don't have, if I'm gonna organize it all, that's who I have to organize with the best lead we got was when Truca said, tell people if they're prejudiced, sit on it,

Speaker 18 (01:25:46):

Sit on it and vote your interest, not your prejudices. And there's nothing like two union people knocking on a door, one on one, talking to people, giving them that message. We got 48% of RAC and construct to vote for Obama. We would've had much more, except that we've been exporting our youth, the youth vote, we got two to one to go for Obama. Okay. And that was the message that Trumper gave to us. And there's nothing like, you know, uh, going to a union hall with 50 guys in their pickup trucks, with the gun rocks in the back, wearing their Obama. T-shirts, <laugh> making that message sit on your prejudice

Speaker 1 (01:26:29):

Thing for Jesse as well. And then we

Speaker 18 (01:26:31):

Did before, and then we did it for Jesse before. Yeah. Anyway.

Speaker 1 (01:26:34):

Wow. Thank you.

Speaker 19 (01:26:38):

Hi, my name's Luba. I'm from Oakland. Um, before I ask my question, I actually wanna say a process observation that I have had, and that is that, um, our sister Theresa's question wasn't actually addressed at all. And I'll actually, I don't know what that is in my mind because I'm up here nervous, but, um, I'll even leave my question if folks would address hers.

Speaker 1 (01:27:01):

Okay. Thank you.

Speaker 13 (01:27:02):

And my issue is that why allies do seem to have a hard time understanding the concept of self-determination for African descendants of enslavement is a hard thing to wrap your brain around. I know, and people say I support self-determination, but in this kind of bio really should be doing this. And so to really be able to grasp that concept of self determination, that we have the right to organize, including into all black organizations, including into whatever.

Speaker 1 (01:27:29):

I think I made that clear that I thought it was definitely possible for people to organize in all black organizations, but not to organize white people in all white organizations, Theresa. That's what I was saying. We had to organize interracially and, uh, we couldn't, uh, organize nationalist groups in the white community. So that's all I'm saying and understand what you're saying that white people have a difficult time understanding black self-determination. I'm simply talking about narrow nationalism that some people still pushing that keeps, uh, the movement bereft of its allies. If you, we followed that view, I'm not talking about nationalism. That is international nationalism. Revolutionary nationalism is totally different from narrow nationalism. So I like to deal with the black self-determination because that was a key to the pride and the, uh, the advancement of the movement.

Speaker 20 (01:28:26):

My name is George. We, and I'm, I'm gonna take, I don't have a question mm-hmm <affirmative> but I do need a minute to make sense of myself.

Speaker 1 (01:28:37):

Okay. Take your time.

Speaker 20 (01:28:41):

I was very active in S during the period of black power. During that time, I was arrested in Nashville in charged with

Speaker 18 (01:28:50):

Sedition. Oh, that's

Speaker 20 (01:28:51):

Right, George. Now the MC Shirley's that's right. Anne and Carl Braden, uh, miles. All of those people were incredible resource and reinforcement to the struggle that I was engaged in there in Nashville, Tennessee, friendships formed and relationships that carried on for many, many years. I love those people, just like, I love all the white people who were in SNCC. That issue of nationalism should not be in this room after 20 something years of reflection and a little study of anthropology and cultural, uh, in tech, uh, integrity of people we shouldn't have. We shouldn't be with all the struggles we've been through. We shouldn't be at this space and time. I, I, for instance, a 100% supporter of black power voted for the white people to leave. And I am not a nationalist, not a internationalist nationalist or narrow nationalist or no kind of nationalist. I am simply a black person who asks for a moment to go in a corner to reflect on my identity and for my brothers who were white to get upset about that is a fucking insult.

Speaker 20 (01:30:16):

And it's a cultural act that needs to be reexamined in terms of the racial implications, to try to construct any kind of nationalist or any kind of self reflection on a part of black people is any kind of racism is a mistake. They are not equivalents. Write the sentence, black people. Don't like white people try to put something under it to explain why that is, write the sentence, white people. Don't like black people try to find a sentence to put under that. That would be easy. You can't put nothing under white. Why white people don't like black people because there is no reason. So don't make those equivalents and please respect the confusion that black people feel in

a search for identity self-respect and dignity. There's no need to come in on it. We are brothers and sisters. We fought together against forces that define race.

Speaker 20 (01:31:21):

As only all white people can be white people. Our definition is designed in an interracial society to send that group of people out of existence. So we know that there's only one race of people on earth and that's the human race and differences of color. And diversity are just a variety of the human experience. Now all of us in this room know that, and we couldn't have had that sign black and white together there. If we didn't know that, cause we had to tolerate a lot of stuff from this society to try to hold onto that black and white together. So don't let a little fluctuation create this kind of a divide. It, it is not worthy of the accomplishments that you have, uh, achieved. And it is certainly after years of reflection has no place in this gathering.

Speaker 1 (01:32:18):

Thank you. I agree with that. All. Yes. Uh, Lisa, let's talk about just the questions,

Speaker 21 (01:32:28):

Something, um, two quick questions. Um, you guys have made it sound real easy to go and organize and white communities we have. Um, <laugh>

Speaker 22 (01:32:38):

You

Speaker 21 (01:32:39):

Did that. It's sort of like, yeah, we just went and did it. Um, I'm wondering if you could give advice as to how you did it. Um, and the other half of this is I think that we all know that if, if there were certain people in this room, we would all be labeled radicals. Um, and I'm wondering how you have managed to walk that fine line when you're actually out organizing between seeming too radical and seeming too status.

Speaker 1 (01:33:11):

Those are, are good organizing questions and I'm sure we're gonna be able to take those up next question, just trying to get the questions and we don't need any more people getting along.

Speaker 23 (01:33:20):

Yes, I I'm sorry. I didn't have a question. I'm with the national civil rights museum in Memphis, Tennessee, I'm a tour guide. Uh, I'm also an actor. It's the best straight day job I've ever had. Uh, I'm an old, late sixties liberal. My father tried to kill me for being part of the civil rights movement for standing up for a, uh, for black people in my front yard. Um, and, and coming here, oh,

Speaker 1 (01:33:44):

Bus is six o'clock. So the next bus is at six o'clock. So you only got 20 minutes.

Speaker 23 (01:33:49):

I'm sorry. I just wanted to say thank you all. Okay. He, uh, this gentleman and I had a great conversation, he helped explain things to me about, you know, uh, the way he felt and everything, and y'all are just a wonderful, lovely group. And I am so grateful and so thankful to being in all of this.

Speaker 1 (01:34:06):

Thank you very much. We have to get down

Speaker 22 (01:34:09):

There. Don't

Speaker 1 (01:34:10):

We have 15 minutes. Yeah. I'm I'm letting everybody get their questions out anyway, please. You, you need to go over there. If you need to have a question,

Speaker 22 (01:34:18):

I'm glad. Well,

Speaker 1 (01:34:19):

You don't have to be responsible. Don't have go ahead Al.

Speaker 22 (01:34:22):

Okay. Alan Haber from, uh, Ann Arbor, uh, students for democratic society, seniors, whatever. I think organization is very important and SOC showed that regional organization, cuz all the parts of the country are really different. And my question is how can you get to the organizers of this and insurance that the people here are gonna have the list. So we can network with one another and carry on organization regionally and wherever we are. I think organization is important.

Speaker 1 (01:34:54):

All right, good. We'll take that. And people will address that the next, uh, question or short comment.

Speaker 24 (01:35:00):

Hi, my name is Sharon Martinez from San Francisco and I have a question that I would really like all of the panelists to respond to if that's won't

Speaker 1 (01:35:10):

Possible. You'll just make the question and we'll

Speaker 24 (01:35:12):

About it.

Speaker 1 (01:35:13):

You can talk to them as

Speaker 24 (01:35:14):

Well. Okay. That's fine. Um, my, my sister seal and I are involved in teaching a group of mostly twenties and early thirties, white activists, trying to inspire them to become white anti-racist organizers by studying the history and her story of the black freedom movement and the white anti-racist organizing that has come out of it. So my question to the panelists who want to answer it is what are some of the major lessons that you would like me to bring back to these young activists about how you think they might be best able to do their work today?

Speaker 1 (01:35:57):

Thank you. And you can, and last question or comment.

Speaker 25 (01:36:00):

Yes. My name's Lee Robson, David Richmond, Virginia. I'm just curious in terms of you, um, European left, how y'all view the role and the contribution of the brother stuck the carmic um, formally later alone as Quame Ray, how y'all viewed him, how y'all viewed the directions that he would take African people from black power back to Panafricanism. So I would just, just be in general. I'd like to hear y'all response.

Speaker 1 (01:36:25):

Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you everyone. Thank you for clearing out as quickly as possible, but ask everybody what you want to ask. Thanks very much.