

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Path Forward

Speaker 1 (00:04:53):

Welcome to the final day of the SNCC 60th anniversary conference. I am sure you'll agree that this conference has been insightful and energizing. Today's sessions will be some of the most important ones. We especially hope you will be with us until the closing plenary session, where we will discuss, where do we go from here? You will be able to visit this website until the first week in January. Be sure to visit book talks and on demand to view anything you may have missed. Our plenary session today starts with a look at the current environment to guide us. Our moderator is Charles Cobb Jr. Known widely as Charlie Cobb. Charlie came to SNCC when he stopped in Mississippi on a trip south and Bob Moses and others convinced him to join SNS voter registration campaign. He became a SNCC field secretary organizing voter campaigns and freedom schools. Charlie is a poet, a journalist, a co-founder of drum and spear bookstore in press a co-founder of the national association of black journalist in a BJ. And the first black writer employed as a staff writer for national geographic magazine. He is also an award-winning author with over five published works and a new book currently underway. And now here's Charlie Cobb.

Speaker 2 (00:06:34):

We believe in, we will believe. And until the killing the black man black mother son is as important as the killing a white man. We, that which touches me most is that I had a chance to work with people passing onto us, that which was passed on me. We believe in singing witches, come on. We, to me, young people comfort. They have the courage where we fail and, but carry us through who the we in freedom. We, the older I get the better. I know that the, of my going on is when the rains are in the, of the young, against the, we here believe we not needing to clutch for power, not needing the light, just to shine me. I need to be one in the number as we

Speaker 3 (00:10:24):

Welcome. I'm Charlie Cobb. And I'm a SNCC veteran who primarily worked in the Mississippi Delta. Since those years, I've spent the bulk of my life as a journalist, an author, not, but I am not here to describe or discuss myself the panel whose members I will introduce in a minute or minute or so is titled the path forward. A look at the 21st century racial environment. Now that is an impossibly large subject for a one hour panel. But in my view, it is essential to at least begin grappling with some of the issues implied by that title in a moment. Um, I'll introduce you to the panelists and let me say in advance that this is a powerful panel that needs to be paid careful attention to, but before I do so let me also say that briefly the black community has used protest and legal actions to power movement, struggle for freedom and liberation.

Speaker 3 (00:11:33):

Some of this struggle has been highly visible, less visible has been the organizing work that underlay this, this combination of work and struggle, direct action, protest and community organizing has led to important victories. Desegregation of course, black elected officials hold, uh, important positions. Now there has been an enormous expansion of the black middle class there, however remains much to do and important questions as to where do we go from here exist? Not only for example, has the black middle class expanded, but the gap between those who have and have not, has also widened, not just black and white disparity, but within the black community, our young police violence that seems determined to exterminate them. Schools continue to fail many black and brown students. The country itself teeters on the precipice of what can only be term fascist rule as powerful forces seek to subvert and suppress hard one

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voting rights, the window into what the future might look like, seems cloudy and discussion about it.

Speaker 3 (00:12:48):

Essential. Can we use the levers of power? For instance, we have achieved to make necessary change. What are those necessary changes? What is the black community anyhow, the growth of the Latin community and the discrimination. It faces suggests suggests the possibility of unity can it be achieved? And this is just the starting point having, uh, outlined the starting point. Now I'll throw everything over to the panelists. And first, uh, with an introduction, um, Mount per Princeton university is a faculty associate with the programs in law and public affairs. She is the author of six books, her books, maybe her book may forever stand a history of the black national Anthem won the 2019 American studies association. John hope Franklin book award for the best book in American studies, her forth forthcoming book is a narrative journey through the south, arguing that for better or for worse, it is the nation's Heartland.

Speaker 3 (00:14:03):

Derek Johnson is president and CEO of the NAACP and brings a new energy in new arenas to the organization in 2018. For example, uh, the NAACP held a, uh, logout Facebook campaign pressuring Facebook after reports of Russian hackers targeting African Americans. He's a graduate of Tuvalu. College is Jackson, Mississippi lawyer. He was regional organizer of Southern echo founded by SNS Hollis Watkins and is provided legal, technical and training support to communities across the south. Judith Brown deans is executive director of the advancement, which using innovative tools and strategies is committing to is committed to the strengthening of social movements with the aim of achieving high impact policy change. She pioneered efforts to challenge the school to prison pipeline and partnered with various civic engagement nonprofits to re to resist voter suppression. She's been awarded the prime mover movers fellowship given to trail blazing leaders. These three have a lot to offer. We unfortunately do not have a time to get everything they have, uh, to offer, but let's begin with short statements from each one of them starting, uh, with you Iani

Speaker 4 (00:15:43):

Well, thank you. I am, I am honored to be a part of this discussion with such, um, with, with panel so hill in such high regard. Um, and it's wonderful to see you. I think, you know, the first thing I'd I'd wanna say is that we're at this really interesting intersection historically. So on the one hand, um, we've seen this enormous groundswell of activism, particularly from young people, um, is kind of, re-energizing an energy of protest. And at the same time, in addition to all of the issues that you so powerfully, um, outlined Charlie, we have COVID and climate crisis that are both affecting black communities, um, most dramatically. Um, and so I, you know, I, I think so to the extent that I think there's some things we should do in terms of going forward. I wanna say that with the kind of humility that there's a lot of people doing really important work, um, but you know, I there's, there's two primary things.

Speaker 4 (00:16:41):

I think one, we really do need to work on developing political education across the board so that people can understand the relationships between these varying threats and crises, um, on both a local level, but also on a national and even international level, the sort of trying to, um, establish practices of political education that can be, you know, circulated on digital arenas, but happen in sort of in the flesh on the ground as much as possible. And then I think the other piece, and we've

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seen this has been, I've been reminded of this with the, with also the growth of mutual aid programs in the last couple of years is it's really, really important for people to have institutional memberships to belong to organizations, um, that that can work systematically towards an issue, um, yeah. Is the way to move forward. Thank you.

Speaker 3 (00:17:31):

Uh, and Derek,

Speaker 5 (00:17:35):

Well, uh, first of all, I wanna thank the SNCC veterans, my camera I'm on. I wanna thank the SNCC veterans for continuing the legacy of movement work. It was really important for all of us to understand the continuum, uh, that we have inherited, uh, and to understand that it's through a Lance of community centric, activities organizing and work that we all should succeed. The thing that I take most, uh, from all of the many veterans that I seek mentorship input from is the understanding that this isn't about an individual. It's not about one's ego. It is about the legacy, uh, around the fight for freedom and is, is incumbent upon all of us, uh, to add value to that legacy. So we can leave to all the activists that's coming behind us. Uh, the success or track records necessary for them to continue that legacy. Uh, I appreciate Dr. Perry's comment that affiliating with organizations really important because it's about the collective whole, uh, while at the exact same time being the presidency of the largest and oldest supervisor organization, I'm not an organizational elitist. I tell, I tell people, get in where you really can add value that social justice isn't a competition. And it gives all of us an opportunity to add voice, uh, to our advocacy work

Speaker 3 (00:19:12):

And Judith Brown Davis. Dianas

Speaker 6 (00:19:16):

Sure. Thank you, Charlie. Um, I also wanna just lift up S Nick and be so appreciative for not only this conference, but also for the legacy, because when I think about this moment, I think that we are, um, I, I ask the question about where we go with thinking about what would Bob say? What would Diane say? What would Judy say? What would Charlie say? What would Courtland say? What would Ella say? Um, because we are in this moment where there is a resistance movement on both sides of the equation that white supremacy, um, and those who uplift it believe that they are in their last stand. And I believe they're in their last stand, but they, that means that they're holding on for dear life, to the structures of power that will keep them in the Supreme spot in this country. And so for us, this is a moment of thinking about how we continue to build power.

Speaker 6 (00:20:27):

Uh, what we saw last summer is what we learned from SNCC is that young people will lead the way and that we have to support young people, but we're also up against this incredible effort around disinformation and misinformation that is undermining the movements that we are building. And at the same time, there is this beautiful thing that is happening, where people of color are coming into power, where people of color are, uh, in positions of being elected, that we are the rising majority, that we have the opportunity to move into power in ways that we have not had before. And so while we have this resistance, we also have the promise of what is to come.

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And I agree with Amani, that part of our work is around connecting the dots for our people and engaging our people in freedom, dreaming

Speaker 3 (00:21:43):

In terms of what you said. Let me just ask a follow up question to you. Uh, Judith, uh, one of your colleagues, um, uh, professor, uh, Ang Yama Taylor, uh, wrote in her 2016, uh, book, uh, this, and, and it directly relates to what you just said across the United States. Thousands of black elected officials are governing many of the nations, cities and suburbs yet, despite this unprecedented access to political power, little has changed for the vast majority of African Americans. How do you see that? And what's your reaction to that kind of statement?

Speaker 6 (00:22:33):

You know, I think that we have not quite figured out the sweet spot of electing our people and then holding them accountable. Right. I think it happens in some places, but there's a, there is a tension there, right around protecting those that we elect and making sure that they did the job that we elected them to do. <laugh>. And so sometimes those two things are not in sync. And I think we have got to figure this out because we are, we are the rising majority, right. And we're going to have more of our people elected. And some of them are doing the work that we sent them to those offices to do. But, um, you know, I think about this moment around the, the border crisis with black people at the border <laugh>, um, with white and other men on horses, um, with using their lats as weapons and saying that's black bodies being treated by the cops in this way. And we have a president Biden and a vice president Harris. And so in this moment, what do we have to do? We still have to call them out. We still have to call them in too to say, this is unacceptable. And so I think Charlie, we have to learn that balance around having our people inside and being able to call them out at the same time and push them to do the things that we elected them to do.

Speaker 3 (00:24:19):

Uh, uh, anybody else can react if, if, if they want, before we move on,

Speaker 5 (00:24:26):

I, I, I do want to respond. So it's easy to say, what's not happening. If you are sitting in your chair, just being a spectator mm-hmm, <affirmative>,

Speaker 5 (00:24:37):

Uh, understanding that power. Isn't something that just conceded itself. And all of a sudden you have it, it's an ongoing process. And so look at the work you, Charlie and others did in Mississippi as a result of that, PERCA we have more black elected officials than any other state. And people say, well, would all these black elected officials why't anything changed? It's a poor state. We rely on the federal, uh, uh, uh, tax dollars. And the ultimate question is how do we get control of state governance? So we can redirect those resources to the necessary places, but that's on top of the structural barriers that still exist, whether you are the mayor or the county supervisor or whatever position, because we're not, this fight is never about an neglected positions or being in elected office. This is the fight has always been about how structural barriers racism have put, put in place to devalue black folks in this country. Whether we are elected, whether we own a home or whether or not we are struggling to get a quality education for our children, it is not a single shot. Victory. Freedom is a constant struggle and getting someone elected is only a part of the battle, but the war continues.

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Speaker 4 (00:26:00):

Okay.

Speaker 3 (00:26:02):

Imani, Imani,

Speaker 4 (00:26:05):

I don't know. Yeah. I, I really appreciate what both, um, Judith, Derek just said. Um, and I, I also just wanted to add one of the thing in that, in that section of the book, part of what Kaga is trying to talk about. And I think this resonates with SNCC history is that there are also real, we have a wide range of political perspectives, different ideas about how we solve the challenges facing black people. And that, that is not a weakness. I think, I think it's actually a strength. If we can engage faith with one another to bow, what, what, how do, um, address all of the various form of suffering, but also have ation mattering? And so for me, your, in your work in particular, Charlie, is I, part of what I feel about it is that about the difficulty right. Of certain between organizations, it varies between strategies, um, as long I think, you know, and this is especially important in this era, because so often we kind of turn, I think now turn away from each other absolute rejection, as opposed to trying to rapidly each other really D political difficulties. Um, and so that's just a, a quick summary

Speaker 3 (00:27:22):

Mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah. Okay. I want to, uh, in, in a, in a minute or two, dig a little deeper into what kind of levers we have to pull and, and how do we pull them to effect the kind of changes that we want. But I feel, uh, before pursuing that, uh, we should grapple with, what do we mean today when we say the black community for a project not related to this another project I was doing, I was rereading, uh, the book disintegration written by, uh, Eugene Robinson, a writer for the Washington post. And he, he, he early on in the book begins to talk about how different, uh, the black community today is from the community he grew up with in Orangeburg, South Carolina, in the 1950s and sixties. And I, he, uh, finally, uh, places, people in the black community, in four categories. And, and I, and I just wanna read 'em to you.

Speaker 3 (00:28:34):

Uh, one is a mainstream middle class majority with a full ownership stake in American society. Then a large abandoned minority with less hope of escaping poverty and, uh, than, uh, at any time since reconstructions crushing in I'm quoting him, thirdly, a small transcendent elite with such enormous wealth, power, and influence that even white folks have to Jule. And lastly, uh, two newly emergent groups, individuals of mixed race, heritage, and communities of recent black immigrants that makes us even wonder what black is even supposed to me. I'm particularly interested in your response. I want everybody to respond to these categorizations B, but because of the broad base of the N a C P in, in so many communities, I'm particularly interested in, uh, your response Derek,

Speaker 5 (00:29:42):

But, you know, uh, that book, I love that book and for our leadership, uh, program, that is one of the eight books is a required reading. Uh, what Eugene Robinson did for me in that book is to really try to break down and understand the diversity of the African American experience, uh, how dynamic we are as a people, and to really uplift that we have never been, nor will we ever

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be a mono this. And so, in, in that, as sitting in this seat, I have to really be attuned to that reality because I have Haitian members in Miami and, and in new Orleans, I have Sudan these members in Minneapolis. In fact, Omar was first vice president of the Minneapolis NAACP before she got elected to Congress. I have Muslims who are members of the Islam in Philadelphia, uh, who with the president brother, uh, Rodney Muhammad just stepped down as president.

Speaker 5 (00:30:42):

Uh, and I have good old grit, Eden country folks in Alabama, right? All of which bring forth a really rich experience, uh, being in organization where we have members in 47 states. I see that as a beautiful theme, not a negative. I see that as our ability to really stretch and understand the value that we bring to this experience in this country. But more importantly, I see that as an opportunity for us to have ears to the ground, to understand the, the pressing policy issues, as people are confronting them on the ground, whether in the low country, South Carolina, Gullah and Geechee, Georgia, South Carolina, or Creole speaking in new Orleans, that's a beautiful thing. And what Eugene Robinson did in that book is forced in the readers. Particularly those of us who are African Americans to others to, to really embrace how dynamic of people we are as we forge solutions for to perfect this thing, we call democracy to meet the needs and interests of our communities and our constituents.

Speaker 3 (00:31:52):

Yoani Judith, either one, both <laugh>.

Speaker 4 (00:31:56):

I mean, I, I'll just add, um, and I haven't read the book, so I just wanna say that as a <laugh> as a preference, I think it's, I agree it is. I it's important for us to acknowledge that there are communities, plural, uh, in black America, and also to keep in mind that race functions, irrespective of the distinctions between those comu. So for example, with middle class African Americans, that's a very fragile status, and it's largely based on income as opposed to wealth, but once you get to wealth, you know, we're pretty much almost all working in class, right? I mean, cuz because it's very hard to reproduce social class for black middle class people, for example, second generation, you know, most other, uh, racial groups, ethnic groups, they keep continue, they stabilize or they can move up in terms of class and that doesn't happen. So, so I think we have to under, we have to understand the cultural and the situation, situational distinctions, and also keep in mind that we have some, we really still do have linked faith, right? Um, across the board and have to, and, and I think to the, to Derek's point, that is part of the reason why it's really important to understand each other, speaking as a grit eating person born in Alabama, that's

Speaker 5 (00:33:15):

At one, one component to that. If you look at Andre Perry's book nor your, uh, value, he talk about this, this eluding concept of wealth versus income mm-hmm <affirmative>. And that we now have, uh, more, many more people who are high income earners, where they are low in wealth. And many of them are still struggling. 20 years later with their high income, with two loans. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, which is a huge impediment because as well, for those student loans, they don't qualify for quality housing stock. And when they get quality housing stock, and if it's too many in a particular community, the value of the house go down, therefore they, they lose the wealth that they accumulate through equity because the valuation of their property is, is, is, is, is, is, is looser. So, you know, yeah, this is the type of conversation we have. We need to have more up.

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Speaker 6 (00:34:11):

The only thing I, I would add to this is that part of the work that we need to do is having people see black people see themselves as part of this continuum that we're talking about because too often, um, we see that there is a divide that could be around national origin. It could be around income. Um, but that we have to understand when, for example, low income, black people win. We all win when Haitians win, we all win. Um, so that we are not, uh, throwing each other under the bus when it comes to some of the political decisions that have to be made about moving forward for our community.

Speaker 3 (00:35:07):

Mm-hmm <affirmative> well, with you saying that let's drill down a little bit then into how, how is this diversity, uh, this presence in both political arenas and, and academic arenas and industrial arenas utilize to, to use the current phrase, make lacked lives better, and anyone can speak on that. I mean, is it important? How important is it to have as we have today, a black vice president or as we had just a few years ago, uh, a black president, uh, how important is it to have, uh, uh, black people with money and position and presumably some power, uh, that their, for bearers did not have?

Speaker 6 (00:36:04):

Well, I'll, I'll jump in to talk about the courts. <laugh> okay. I guess I'm a lawyer

Speaker 3 (00:36:10):

Ask you about schools, but that's okay.

Speaker 6 (00:36:12):

Since I'm a lawyer sometimes and about schools, right? So, so I can, I can combine this is that, um, it's important, but we know that all skin folk and can folk, right. And so we say that in the, in the education system where we have majority black school districts who could have black administrators and black teachers, but black children are still not doing well in school and the outcomes are bad for them. Um, you know, in the courts, um, the same thing, right? We have that justice Thomas who, who has been sitting there, um, who we know was no replacement for Thurgood Marshall. And so, you know, I think it is important, but it is important to delve down, right. Another level, right. To see whether or not those folks have our interests at heart. Um, we're seeing now the Biden administration has been appointing black people to the courts, black women in particular, I'm excited about many of those black women who are gonna be on the courts because we do know that, um, and this is kind of like how we get to critical race theory, right? Is that having black judges who have had the experience of being black people in America can make a difference in a court decision, um, can, they can bring either a powerful dissent, cuz right now we know the courts are tilted against us, right. Or they can make a powerful opinion where they are considering things that white folks can't consider about how race and the law plays out

Speaker 3 (00:38:08):

Imani, you look like you're about to say something <laugh>.

Speaker 4 (00:38:10):

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Yeah. Um, you know, I think here's what here's the I'm try to be concise. So I think that it's important to understand that we are all to some extent implicated in an unjust system, right. In terms of the political economy, at least we all are. And obviously, I mean, so for example, you know, somebody who's working at Walmart is both being exploited by Walmart, Walmart, and also, um, part of the engine, what Walmart is doing <inaudible> um, but that person is in a much more vulnerable position than someone who is powerful and implicated the system. And I think for me, this sort of goes back to the point that Derek was making that, um, this is why we have to think in terms of collectives. I don't, I don't think that it's possible to have entirely clean hands. I certainly given, you know, my job at Princeton university, I don't think it's possible to have given their investments and the priorities.

Speaker 4 (00:39:04):

Right. So I think that the, the question is less sort of, for me about representation, but thinking about given where I am situated and where we're all situated, how do we think critically in ways that are not just about, um, justifying our own position right. Or, or, um, needing to sort of feel innocent and actually thinking about, okay, well, how do we, within the framework that we exist function in ways that move us towards justice period. Right. And I think that the question is always the question of collected, right? That's the priority? What is happening to black folks for at large? What can I do? What, how am I implicate? What can I do positive? How can I implicated and how we think about, um, what matters most? You know, so I am much more interested, um, in sort of I'm much less interested in representation. People who are, who power representatives might do really important work. That's great. I'm much more interested in the conditions of black America at large <affirmative>

Speaker 3 (00:40:08):

Well, Derek and, uh, and juth again too. Why don't you take a shot at answering the questions that, uh, Imani has posed in her last response?

Speaker 5 (00:40:19):

Well, I, I agree, uh, black representation will not, and does not automatically mean equity opportunity and fairness. Uh, you know, I could give you multiple examples of having a school district superintendent who believed in, believed in corporate punishment, uh, and it was unfairly delivered or a school super, actually Judy and I was working on a situation where we had a school superintendent who, who was referring, uh, elementary and middle school kids to the court system who then assign them to do manual labor. Geez. All right. And this was Judy correct me somewhat 20 years ago. And we were there, we in this huge community meeting with the superintendent basically say, have you lost your damn mind? I mean, that's, that's, that's what came out of that. And we was able to turn that around. So, you know, a, a black face and a plays, isn't the victory

Speaker 5 (00:41:21):

Really removing and tearing down structural barriers. That's racist at its nature is the goal. And that can be done with the right people in the seat. And we've seen people who come from our community get in the position who refuse to acknowledge, lack the, understanding, the skill of the ability to address the structural barriers. And that's why we are up against that. If we walk into the same seats of people who create those seats to, uh, uh, prevent us from advancing and all we do, uh, become stewards over their policies, their procedures, their rules, without changing the policies, rules, procedures, or, uh, providing opportunities for those, with the skills to come

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in, that's not success. That's actually, uh, a worse and failure. That's colonialism with a different face. And we have to address that.

Speaker 6 (00:42:15):

And I think Charlie, so if I think about this, like the, one of the reasons we started advancement project was because we wanted to, we knew that the courts were moving to the right and we were losing everything. And, um, at the same time, people were not centering organizing. And so what we wanted to do was to center organizing because we could have all the representation in the world, but if the people aren't resisting and the people aren't pushing through organizing, we're gonna get outcomes that we aren't the outcomes that we necessarily wanted. And so I think that centering of organizing to me means that you, you have the ability to also push the courts in the right direction, right? If you're using communications and organizing and protests, it sets a different context for the courts to rule in. It sets a different culture and moment to which our elected officials and our courts have to respond. And that, that has to be a 365 day engagement of our communities. Um, because we could have all the, we could have a lot of black faces sitting on, on courts and in, you know, and in chambers of Congress and state legislatures who aren't doing anything, unless our people are forcing their hand to do the things that we need them to do for our communities.

Speaker 3 (00:43:49):

And that implies kind of the, on the ground organizing grassroots organizing for, for lack of a better phrase at this particular moment. Do you see signs of that into that?

Speaker 6 (00:44:02):

Yeah, so I think so. I feel like we are in, you know, advanced product's been around now for 21 years or so. And I would say that black organizing in particular has become much stronger in the last 20 years. I'd say that it's come with fits and starts that after the murder of Mike Brown, um, and the murder of Trayvon, we saw an, we saw a broadening and a deepening of organizing in black communities, especially with young people at the helm. Um, and that we're winning some things. I mean, we're winning some of these defund campaigns with black people being at the forefront of that. Um, the work we do at advancement project, young people, and I'm talking about high school students are winning police free schools. Uh, and so there's now I would say this though, that we need to do more, and this was Amani's first point about, we need to do more political education and we have to deepen and broaden the bench in organizing so that we're not just relying on social media, right. We're not just relying on emails to people, but we're doing what y'all did. We're gonna be in relationship to our people.

Speaker 3 (00:45:27):

See, uh, Derek, I, I, I feel compelled to ask you this question, uh, because I have, uh, such vivid memories of, of what the NAACP was, uh, in the 1960s at how changed it is, uh, under your leadership. Uh, I mean, do you, I guess I'm asking you, if you are envisioning a different kind of role for the NAACP,

Speaker 5 (00:45:58):

You know, uh, that NACP has always been the eyes and ears in local communities across the country and what the national and ACP was in the sixties, based on my, uh, response to your, your, your statement compared to what the role they were in local communities. Mm-hmm, <affirmative>, uh, that's two different dynamics, right? When you got to Mississippi per hottest,

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cause hottest tells me everything right. Per hottest, right? <laugh>, you know, you had the Vernon dams, you had the Hartman turbo and you had the Amey Moore, uh, the CC brains to step to who really took in students and was a part of that, that, uh, intergenerational model of organizing, you know, one generation will not carry us forward. It has to be intergenerational. We always need to lean to the wisdom with the energy and the continuity young old, and those who are between age, that is the magic ingredients.

Speaker 5 (00:46:53):

And so I come out of that experience, that understanding. And so my goal now is to make sure at a national level, we amplified that as the model, as opposed to work, uh, to suppress it, uh, because that's what was going on in six sixties, you had people nationally trying to suppress local movement. And, and fortunately, at least what Bob called the Mississippi theater of the movement. Uh, those men and women were strong enough to say national, stay out of our state. We're gonna do this our way. And fortunately they did it successfully. And I ventured a say, uh, of all of the theaters as Bob would say, Mississippi was the most successful because it demonstrated a level of local deep organizing, not mobilization, but organizing that had that still, uh, we can see the tangible outcomes from whether it's the four areas that that was the focus of freedom summer, uh, of the right to vote, Mississippi freedom, democratic party, uh, healthcare is a true access to community health centers that came out of that.

Speaker 5 (00:47:57):

The work you was doing at leading Charlie around, uh, the, uh, share carpent strike and Leland and, and some of the org collective bargaining organizing work work there, or the, the, the legal strategy around school in, uh, integration, which was led by, uh, gibber Mason, um, uh, Winston hu Aaron Henry, all of those things were tangible, but it came out of the reality that when you all left the March on Washington, you was going back to the same hell you was working in. And that the March was only an event. And we, we gotta move away from protests as if it's the outcome and go to power and power is about organizing out mobilization. And it really is our ability to control the narrative in a way in which we are not planning ourself by holding up individuals saying, well, this was the leader of the civil rights movement. That was no leader of the civil rights movement. There were plural leaders of the civil rights movement. And my fear today, as I see a much more intense, uh, ground game taking place, we don't allow our, our young people or ourselves to go be held captive by social media celebrities. They're not talking to anybody other than likes and, and retweets. They're not on the ground. They're just amplifying conversations, but they're not getting their hands dirty. We have to go deeper than that.

Speaker 3 (00:49:20):

And how do you plan to go deeper than that?

Speaker 5 (00:49:23):

Well, for us multiple ways, one to recognize that the experts of communities are those who live in the community, that, that we need to follow them, not to say, Hey, come follow us two for us through our next year program, organizing and training the next group of individuals. Now I'm looking at this differently. Based on my experience, we missed the ball on this age group, 25 to 55 years old. There are containers for them when they are and high schools. In many cases, there are containers for them in college in many cases. But once you hit 25 outta college, between age of 55, what do you do? Where do you go? And how do you get engaged? And that's the missing component. We even see young people who were like the stars doing the Ferguson event now

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that they are tipping at 30 and over 30. They're trying to figure out where do I fit in this space? And we have to, as an organization, as a community, it's not only in ACP, figure out how do we keep people engaged when real life problems start hitting them like family mortgages through loan payments. You know, that's when it becomes critical to capture and create a funneling opportunity where people can deal with personal, real life issues, but stay engaged with social justice movements.

Speaker 3 (00:50:43):

I can't resist saying, in saying at this particular moment, a comment recently from a young activist on his 35th birthday. And he said, he told me he was wondering how much he might change now that he was getting old <laugh>. So, uh, and, uh, around this subject, I mean money, I'm curious because you're on a college campus or a university campus, what you hear in this regard and see in this regard.

Speaker 4 (00:51:20):

Yeah. Um, well, I'll say one of the things I see, and I really, I love the way that, um, the way that Judith laid this out is that it is really true that power concedes nothing without a demand, as Douglas said, and that students are learning that, right. That they're learning that in order to shift anything, including what happens at the local level requires, uh, a demand that actually makes them quite vulnerable. Right? So I'm seeing this sort of, I see the students in, in positions where they are willing to be vulnerable as students in the service of what they think is just good. So that, and I also think, um, that, and this is consistent with what Derek just said, you know, was talking about the history, uh, in, in Mississippi NA's local history and SN, and those were like something different happens once they get access to a detailed movement history.

Speaker 4 (00:52:20):

Right? So that's part of what we try to do in African American studies. And, but that's not widely accessible young people dunno before you wanna in general. Right. So this is a very rarefied experience. Tiny number of students even have access to robust African American studies programs, for example, never nevermind the fact that you shouldn't have to have access to the university to get that education. So for, so to me, I think, you know, um, yes, I, I absolutely think there need, we need to actually work with developing structures for people to enter into institutions, kind of organically at any stage of life. I also think they need to understand sophisticated human history to even imagine where they might fit in. Um, and, and, and I'm not, you know, I think that they're, you know, people write books, but I'm, I really do feel like we still have to figure that piece out where you can get it anywhere. Right. Um,

Speaker 3 (00:53:18):

Can I ask all three of you be because I'm, you know, uh, we're witnessing at this time sort of a, a growth of fascistic tendencies in the United States, state legislatures, for instance, it's not all racial. I mean, uh, in Texas, you know, it's okay now to put a bounty on a woman who is getting an abortion or someone who helps, we're seeing these tendencies threaded through more than just the Texas state legislature, but in different kinds of ways in different parts of the country, what will it take? How will that get turned around, I guess, um, I'm saying, uh, how, how optimistic are you about the future of the country in the first place? Hmm. And I'd like each of you to respond to that and given these powerful, I mean, Donald Trump, the former president, you, knowlet a Lynch mob, uh, into the us capital. That's unprecedented. I mean, and I, and

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Speaker 5 (00:54:30):

Yeah, so, so I, I'll start, uh, I think this democracy is in a fragile state. Uh, you know, I've said a long time, the most brainwashed population in this country have always been working class whites. Cause they've been sold this proposition of white supremacy that never existed to justify their exploitation. And we've seen that accelerated, uh, with the past administration, Trump and his ability to communicate directly to their fears, to motivate them, to operate in a way that's, that's beyond outside of their own interest. But more importantly, for them to take, uh, a level of action that's treasonous, you know, an insurrection, isn't a, a light thing. And, and for them to be so brainwashed, I think they're doing a patriotic thing and doing so <laugh>, uh, so we in a fragile state, secondly, this is all about money, power. Uh, that's why I'm always concerned with protests for protest sake, because it, it takes the eye off the true ball. This is about power. And I, I reduce it to here. That is who gets taxed. Who's not taxed and how that those are tax dollars are spent. And what we are seeing is invisible hands of ultra rich individuals, and possibly corporations seeking to prevent a, a realignment around the role of government and how tax dollars are spent, therefore, how they are attacked in loopholes are closed. And so they are willing to deal with a, a future that may not look like the social contract we have called the constitution in exchange for more profit.

Speaker 6 (00:56:27):

So I, I would add to that. Um, I, I mean, this part about democracy, the democracy being fragile is clear, right? There is a power ground that is going on, whether it's through the voter suppression laws that are passing or through, um, and, and getting rid of election officials who <laugh>, who they say are not doing the right thing, right. Um, to redistricting that we're gonna see to all of the other laws that are passing like the abortion ban, et cetera. And I think we're, I'm still hopeful, but my hope is tied to the idea of this, of the rising majority and the work that we ha, but we're gonna have a lot of work to do to make that rising majority coalesce around the future that we want. Right. And that it is important that, you know, people say demographics are not destiny. I think what we need to be doing is to figure out how demographics do become destiny and that how we make sure that this rising majority is working for all of us, that it doesn't have anti-blackness in it. In fact, it centers black people and the success of black people. Um, and that, that is going to be the thing that will push back and win against fascism

Speaker 3 (00:57:58):

Imani.

Speaker 4 (00:58:00):

Uh, I would say I'm, I, I admit, I wanna admit I'm not particularly hopeful, but I believe in the work. And I think the alternative to doing the work is unthinkable. We cannot lay down and let this go. Um, so, you know, so I think so for me, um, you know, the, the possibility exists, um, in the work. And I also think, and this is not a fair aspect of history, but it is true that black people organizing are always the moral conscience of the nation and the beacons for deeper possibility. It's not fair, but it is the case. So we see every time there's organizing, uh, on even primarily, even on behalf of our own communities, cause of presenting a vision of a society and world that is more just, it ignites the imaginations of other communities. And so, uh, you know, we are, we are the nation's best hope still. I believe that

Speaker 5 (00:59:04):

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Mm-hmm <affirmative>

Speaker 3 (00:59:06):

Are we at the start of change or in the middle of the process? Or where are we?

Speaker 5 (00:59:16):

I think we are in the messy middle. I think the messy middle is concerning. Uh, it can go either way that when you have legislative bodies to so openly and notoriously undermine the rights of, of people, whether, uh, you talk about women or, or our right to vote, or you name it, uh, is messy. Uh, cause the demographic shifts are so profound that it is, is alarming to those who are anti, uh, progress. Uh, and I think Georgia really signaled how things have accelerated and that if, if a state like Georgia can go in a different direction, Texas is like the 800 pound gorilla. Uh, and if it shift it's, it is, you know, Katie barter it's done right. Not to mention the trending we're seeing in North Carolina, in Mississippi and in, and in South Carolina for that matter. Uh, I think so this messy middle will really define the future.

Speaker 3 (01:00:26):

I agree with that. Okay. What are the next steps ahead? How you envision and, and, and I'm trying to go from the broad in general to the, to the very concrete, you know, we, you know, we, there's certain things that stand out yeah. Visibly.

Speaker 5 (01:00:52):

So

Speaker 3 (01:00:53):

State legislature

Speaker 5 (01:00:55):

I'm running out.

Speaker 3 (01:00:56):

Huh?

Speaker 5 (01:00:57):

Yeah. I'm trying not to talk too much cause I'm running out my notes, Judy gave to me to say, so for us, <laugh>

Speaker 5 (01:01:04):

This position four years ago with a five year plan around civic engagement, because I think increasing, uh, voter voters at on election day is absolutely critical around next steps. So I'm four years to a five year strategy. Uh, uh, and that five year strategy was absolutely inclusive of the redistricting process because someone who would draw maps, I know for a fact, you can draw a plan that lock in who gets elected for the next 10 years. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, I think it's in this moment, particularly in, in November of next year, 20, 20 two's election really would define the what next. And so for us, for the next 13 months, it is all about November 20, 22. If you say, we want to take this action. My, my response is what impact can this have Willis have on getting out the vote in November of next year? So for what's next for us is all about the ground game, making sure our people show up despite the, the suppress of nature, the measures the bears put in

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front of them so that we can define public policy moving forward, as opposed to being victims of government, be positioned to be owners of our destiny.

Speaker 3 (01:02:21):

I'm struck by, um, how low the turnout is in so many black communities. Uh, you know, I live in Florida, uh, and, uh, certainly, and I live in a black working class community, uh, and the turnout was low. I think it was 30% in this particular wow. Uh, community. I, I asked for some people about that and, and, and it surpris what surprised me was a kind of cynical attitude. We don't hear from these politicians unless they want something mm-hmm, <affirmative> like our vote now <laugh>, uh, but I'm struck by it and wondering what to do about it. Cause I agree with you. I think, uh, uh, these upcoming elections are critically important and black and brown communities will make the difference.

Speaker 6 (01:03:33):

Yeah. I, I <affirmative>. Yeah. I, I think, I mean, that makes sense that the turnout is low because people, you know, people go to vote and they feel like it hasn't made a difference for them. I mean, that's for real. And so I don't think we can just focus on voting. Right? We got, as I wanna go back to this point about being in relationship to our people and hearing from them, right? Like we now, you know, organizations, we all have enough money to throw around, to do polling instead of talking to people directly and engaging them in 'em in being able to envision their own future. Right. When you get on the ground and you talk to folks, they have vision, they have freedom, visions, they have freedom dreams, they know the things that would help fix some of the conditions in their communities. Um, and the, the question is, do we have, um, the stomach and the, um, the patience to do that work right. To do? I mean, it, it is Charlie. It is what is old is new, right? It is like going back to what you all did to be in relationship with people and to have the conversations with them that we need to have so that they can see the road forward.

Speaker 3 (01:05:00):

I suspect that that's more difficult now than it was then, uh, the black America has become an urban population. And I tell young activists today, I can tell you anything you wanna know about organizing in sunflower county, Mississippi, or is a queen of ha county Mississippi. But once you ask me about organizing on, uh, the west side of Chicago or south central Los Angeles, I'm not sure how valuable, uh, what I have to say will be to you except for some broad general principles. I, my point is, and I'm wondering if you're think that along these same lines, that it's just harder in the 21st century to organize in communities and at the grassroots than it was in the middle sixties.

Speaker 5 (01:05:57):

You know, I don't know if it's harder, it may be different, but not necessarily harder, right? Because talking to peoples, talking to people, but more important listening to people is the key. And if you listen and you become a trusted, uh, partner with community, uh, they have that they're experts. Uh, our job oftentimes is just to facilitate when needed. And in many cases, you know, I recall straight outta law school working with Hollis. And we went to, I believe it was either drew, Mississippi or Montgomery county. It was in this meeting. It was fascinating. We leave, we left the meeting ho and ho say, you know, it is our job to get in the back of the room to listen and not be in the front of the room to direct because as we are in this car, going back home, they gotta live with the outcome. That's right.

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Speaker 3 (01:06:57):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>

Speaker 5 (01:06:58):

That's right. He said, that is the role of an organizer. And I've taken that to heart. It's about listening and at most facilitating

Speaker 3 (01:07:07):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>

Speaker 4 (01:07:10):

Can I say really quickly?

Speaker 3 (01:07:11):

Yeah, go ahead.

Speaker 4 (01:07:13):

Just, just two things that I think are challenges that, um, that are important to acknowledge. I think that, that in some ways they're Invis, I think that that, that black communities are much more transient now than they were so that you don't necessarily have a community where everybody has lived in that neighborhood, multiple generations and people been moving every couple of years cause of housing and security. And so the kind of interdependence of is made more vulnerable and also the loss of local news. So, you know, my grandmother is a person who would call elected officials about everything, right. But she knew who was accountable for what right. And, and knew who, you know, who you, who, who you could turn to. I have a hard time figuring out what the judges, when I go to vote where their, where their positions are, right. Like, you know, it's, there's a kind of capacity that to political engagement that I think makes it even harder to recognize how you can have as a citizen or as a constituent, how you can have make choices that, you know, need, you know, that, that affect the changes, you know, you need to happen.

Speaker 4 (01:08:22):

So I do think for me, that's a part of the political education equation too, um, is access to about who's represent like just literally what their positions are.

Speaker 3 (01:08:36):

Okay. We're, uh, almost out of time, I think. Um, so let me very quickly get a, um, concluding statement from each one of you.

Speaker 4 (01:09:03):

Okay. I'll just say really quickly. Um, I've been thinking a lot about, um, Bob Moses, since he passed and watching him all of my life. And I think that the model for me that is one to embrace broadly, that he laughed us with is a deep humility and a rigorous, um, intellectual commitment to figuring problems out and having a bold imagination beyond what people can say is possible. And so I sort of want, you know, and, and matching that with humility allows for people to be creative and resourceful and develop new visions. So that for me, I guess, is what I feel like we all need to, to embrace collectively.

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Speaker 5 (01:10:04):

So I wanna conclude by, uh, again, acknowledging stick veterans, uh, cause of many of you, it helped me understand the role that I must play in this moment. Uh, in addition to that, cause of many of you, uh, you continue to provide the type of support guidance as I include wherever possible. You know, last week I said with Danny Glover, before he left out to go to Bob's Memorial and we were talking about, you know, Bob Moses and Danny was, was saying that as he was a teenager looking at what was taking place, he was an eye. And I feel that same way, even when, you know, Dory, Ladner reach out and ask me to join her on something. And as I'm talking, she's always directed me to say, well, tell 'em this, I appreciate that. Or coing being firm with given directions, we call 'em command.

Speaker 5 (01:10:58):

Uh, I appreciate that, uh, Charlie, your calm, demeanor, and approach, uh, just your way you analyze, look at stuff. I appreciate that the mentorship I've received from Hollis, I appreciate that. And so I see this moment as an opportunity to really be a good steward as I'm only a part of a continuum as we help mentor support all of the activists that come behind and it's through your lessons to me, that I'm hoping I am also holding up with my lessons to all of the activists that's coming behind so that this continuum of social justice movement continue in our struggle fight for freedom.

Speaker 6 (01:11:47):

I wanna start off with, uh, SNCC also because I <affirmative>, I kind of learned to be a movement lawyer by being in rooms with Hollis Watkins and by being in rooms with Bob Moses and Judy Richardson. And I think that it is important for us to go back to the lessons learned and to continue them because we are in the same fight. <laugh> the fight and the enemy has not changed. And the way in which SNCC built relationships with black people so that black people were centered and listened to is what we have to continue to do. I think I take from, um, from learning from SNCC veterans, also that for lawyers like me, I have to know. And I tell any lawyer who starts at advancement project, the law is wrong. Your job when you come to advancement project is to know that and to rewrite the law because as far as I know, the law has not freed my people yet. And so until it is rewritten in that way, we have work to do. And so I think that from organizing to pushing the law, we're gonna win, but we're continuing the journey that you all were part of. And we hope we are doing the right thing by you

Speaker 3 (01:13:35):

Continuing the journey. I might say you're doing the right thing. <laugh> well, look, thank you all for, uh, for the time you've given, uh, in your very busy schedules. I know I enjoy listening to you. Uh, I wish we had another hour, but we don't. So that being said, uh, see you the next time.