

# SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

## Black-Brown Movement Building

Speaker 1 (00:00:18):

Lives, the whole damn nation looks like we always in do

Speaker 2 (00:00:40):

What

Speaker 1 (00:00:45):

House household, twisting children. I hate that hum that stinking mud make it real. But compared

Speaker 2 (00:01:16):

To what

Speaker 1 (00:01:20):

Set the president, he's got his more phone stone. Just what it's for. No one gives reason you have one down, they call it cheese. I said, we chicken about one good church on Sunday,

Speaker 2 (00:01:57):

Sleep

Speaker 1 (00:01:57):

Enough. The wrath of God we just been in us with right, but he must some cast of stupid nuts like me and where's honey. Where's my God. And wills my money, unreal values master win mother and a can hanging the

Speaker 3 (00:04:37):

Good afternoon or good morning, depending on where you are and a Hardy welcome to all of you who are attending S N's 60th anniversary conference. And this panel a model for black and brown movement building. I am gwendo Zara Simmons, and it is my pleasure to serve as the moderator for this panel. I am a SNCC veteran. I became a student activist with SNCC in 1962 as a student at Spelman college in Atlanta, Georgia. I joined the staff in 1964 during the Mississippi freedom summer project and was on SNCC staff until 1967. While our panel will focus on models of black and brown organizing, primarily in the us, we will also focus on both the history of black and brown organizing in the us, but also in this hemisphere, I want to thank one of our panelists Maria Varela for envisioning this panel and suggesting it to the SNCC 60th planning committee.

Speaker 3 (00:06:14):

She reminded us that in the mid sixties, SNCC was the first civil rights organization to provide critical support to Caesar Chavez and Dolores workers, United farm workers union in California in 1965, SNCC responded to the United farm workers request for training in nonviolence tactics, CB radios, cars, and funding for two staff to work full time on their union campaign. SNS support for the grape boycott was critical in the union's victory in achieving the contract. Maria ends with reminding us that this was an effective approach to coalition building, not through ideology, but through sharing of practical resources and support in many ways, black and brown coalition, building formal and informal historically, and contemporarily is the theme of this panel. So I'm pleased to introduce our three panelist. Uh, first I will introduce Dr. Paul Ortiz. Paul is an activist organizer and scholar. He is a professor of history and director of the Samuel

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Proctor oral history program at the university of Florida in Gainesville. Ortiz has written five books, one of which is an African American and Latinx history of the United States. That book was identified by fortune magazine as quote, one of the 10 books on American history that actually reflects the United States. End of quote, Paul is the recipient of numerous awards, only one of which I will mention here. He received the Caesar Chavez action and commitment award from the Florida education association, AFL CIO in 2013 for his outstanding leadership through engaging in activities, which dignify workers and by making notable contributions to the labor movement. Welcome Paul,

Speaker 4 (00:09:28):

Thank you so much. So far for that very kind introduction, and I wanna say the outset, how honored I am to have been invited by Maria to, to be on this panel and what a great, uh, event that this whole weekend has been. It's been so exciting. Um, I told, uh, Maria when we were doing one of our reorganizing meetings and she started introducing herself and I said, Marie, I know who you are. You're, you're one of my heroes and icons just like Sahara Simmons. And it's been an amazing pleasure to get to know Rachel and the great work that she's doing with the dream defenders. And I also wanna start by paying, uh, honor to one of our incredible, uh, ancestors in struggle. And as another SNCC veteran, Elizabeth Beita Martinez, who, as you all know, was another incredible SNCC organizer who I met many years later in the bay area because of course, uh, uh, Beita went from being a SNCC organizer and she even had an organizing life before that then moved out west.

Speaker 4 (00:10:34):

And I had the great pleasure of being able to introduce this amazing SNCC veteran to many of my students at UC Santa Cruz. And we read a book that, that she, she had, uh, written, uh, called da EAUs means all of us. And to me, this is a model of history writing where black and brown histories are at the center of the narrative of the story. Like they always have been. Um, when I wrote an African American Latin history United States, which is roughly history of the us from the time of the American revolution to, to present, it was so obvious to me that our histories have always been at the center, our histories of struggle and that everything we've gotten in this country, we owe to these struggles and that nothing that we've gotten has been given to us. But unfortunately we have a history system, uh, that, uh, makes us forget, makes us forget these incredible stories of coalition building, building an allyship.

Speaker 4 (00:11:33):

So in the few minutes I had this morning, I want to just give a quick run through of some of these key moments, uh, interracial transnational, internationalist solidarity in African American, Latin sister, United States. I really relied heavily on my own organizing experiences as an organizer with United farm workers during this chat Thomas show boycott and the strongest organizations that really supported our movement in the Northwest, which was eventually was successful, uh, ended in a union contract for farm workers, which is still enforce to this day. But our strongest supporters were in black communities in the NAACP, in the coalition of black trade unionists, uh, in black churches. Uh, they always stood up and stepped up for us. So I already knew about this history before I went to the academy, but see, the problem in the academy is that too much of academic writing is about supporting and defending and uplifting capitalism.

Speaker 4 (00:12:36):

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And capitalism is all about competition, not just between individuals, but between groups. We have a very flawed immigration history, uh, scholarship in this country now. And, and I'm a part of that comrades and that immigration history has been built upon a model of competition. The, the polls compete with the Jewish immigrants, compete with the laughing immigrants, compete with everyone. And so it is basically a story of, of UN kind of a war of all against all, but that's not really how it happened. If we start by thinking about the Mexican war of independence, which breaks out in 1810, this is a war that at the outset was, was a war against slavery and war against the oppression of the indigenous people. In addition to being a war against the Spanish empire. And if you wanna talk about coalition building, I would suggest the Mexican war independence as this incredible example of black and brown people coming together and fighting what at that point was one of the most powerful empires in history of the planet and offering sanctuary to African American slaves who could escape to Mexico even before Mexico achieves its independence, hundreds, perhaps even thousands of African Americans are finding sanctuary in Mexico and the great black abolitionist like Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet over and over and over again, thanked the Mexican people.

Speaker 4 (00:14:04):

They say that well, we don't have much to say about the, the, the American people, but the Mexican people. We wanna express our gratitude and you see this over and over again in the writings of black abolitionist. I don't know how historians miss that. We talk about the Haitian revolution and the Haitian revolution is the first successful slavery, uh, revolution in human history. And for those of us from Latin America, myself, my parents, uh, were refugees from the Mexican revolution. In 1914, we owe the Haitian revolution in tremendous debt of gratitude because it wasn't just that the Haitians crushed and defeated slavery, uh, in 1804, finally, but that every generation, since that time, the Haitians have provided sanctuary to our freedom fighters from, from Latin America. People like sum Boulevard, people like Jose montet, people like max Sumo Gomez, people like Antonio Mao, and the list goes on and on and on.

Speaker 4 (00:15:05):

If you wanna talk about black and brown coalition building, you have to have Haiti at the center of the history of the Americas because Haiti provides again, generations of sanctuary to our freedom fighters from Mexico, from what's now Venezuela or Columbia and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. It's the Haitians who provide sanctuary for, for the freedom fighters from the mainland. If you will, to get refitted, uh, to get ammunition arms, um, the Haitians even provide military advisors. Y'all, I mean, that's really an amazing story of coalition building at the expense of their own, um, uh, uh, freedom, if you will, because, because Haiti is an ally of the Latin American liberation wars in the early 19th century, she is enemy number one of the imperialist powers, the United States, rape Britain collude with France to put an indemnity on the Haitian people that robs them of generations of resources.

Speaker 4 (00:16:08):

In other words, Haiti has to pay reverse reparations to France, and it has to do that for more than a century for the fact that Haiti ends slavery. It has to, it has to pay that that money back. Um, so that's kind of an early 19th century examples, just a couple of many different types of examples we could point to. Now let me fast forward of a black and brown coalition building. Let me fast forward to the end of slavery and reconstruction in the United States. And what I say about this in an African American Atlantic history United States is that for African Americans, emancipate emancipation in one country was not enough. And instead of dismantling their anti-slavery

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organizations, people like Henry Highland, Garrett and others keep those organizations going and they retool them and they create what I call in the middle of my book, the Cuban solidarity movement.

Speaker 4 (00:17:05):

They actually organize a national campaign to try to press the administration of Uly USS grant to support the Cuban war of liberation. And they garner as far as we can tell about 500,000 signatures on petitions nationally to support the Cuban war of liberation. And they go to the grand administration and they make it and, and they make these alliances with Cuban freedom fighters who are refugees in Tampa and New York and Newark and other cities. So this is a great example of black and brown, um, coalition building during reconstruction that I didn't know about before I, I did this research at the same time. If you look at, at cities like key west and Tampa, the black and brown working class coalitions are really quite incredible. The takeaway here is that when black people make forward progress, we all progress. And that is a universal rule.

Speaker 4 (00:18:05):

And it's so different than when I was taught. When I was growing up, I was taught a zero sum. Uh, the, the zero sum theory of, of us citizenship that is when one group gets something, another group loses something. I hate to say that academics still reinforce that really flawed mindset, but when African Americans win the right to vote during reconstruction, guess what else happens? They fight for a system called declarant alien voting, which essentially allows you to come directly from Cuba or The Bahamas, or anywhere, anywhere in the world and become, become a voter within a matter of days. That's what alien declarant voting was all about. And this allows the, the, uh, Cubans who were followers of say, host Sam Monart to become active in key west and Tampa inform these incredible black brown working class alliances, uh, under the rubric of groups, like the Knights of labor and during reconstruction, and the first act of the so-called redemption against black reconstruction by the way, is to end alien declarant voting.

Speaker 4 (00:19:12):

So when black people make the step forward, it opens these great democratic opportunities at large. But when whites sees the power and white business supremacists sees the power in the south alien declarant voting is lost during the 1880s, but, but the, the story doesn't end there, you fast forward it, early 20th century. And one of the remarkable, uh, organizations in the history of this entire country, the universal Negro improvement association makes its its concern. We, we often think about uni as a black nationalist organization and in many ways it was, but uni always was concerned about the freedom of people in Latin America and the Caribbean had hundreds of Spanish and other language chapters throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and UNIA was a fierce critic of the role of United fruit in, uh, creating the banana republics of central America. And if you look at the writings of Amy Garvey, she was very consistent on this point.

Speaker 4 (00:20:15):

You have to connect black and, and Latino and African American, uh, and, and, uh, freedom with what's happening in Latin America. The last example, I wanna read you a quote that comes out of the 1928 NAACP convention. And this was a, this was a convention platform that w E B the boys wrote and, or a speech he was asked to talk about. Why should the Negro risk our lives to regain the right to vote? And this is what he responded to or responded with in 1928, the American ballot must be reestablished on a real basis of intelligence and character only in such

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way. Can this nation face the tremendous problems before it, the problem of free speech and unsubsidized press and civil Liberty for all people, the problem of imperialism and the emancipation of Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii from the government of American banks, the overshadowing problem of peace among the nations and of decent and intelligent cooperation in the real advancement of the natives of Africa and Asia together with freedom for China, India, and Egypt.

Speaker 4 (00:21:33):

So it's a breathtaking freedom vision. This is on the Eve of the great depression. This comes within the African American tradition of again, what we call emancipatory internationalism. This idea that I might think I'm free, but unless my neighbor across the street or next door, or in the next country, or anywhere in the world is not free, then I'm not really free. Am I, this is a long part of a long, you know, what Charles Payne referred to as organizing tradition. It's very internationalist. Uh, we could talk about it for, for hours and hours Zhara. Uh, but I know we, we have to move on. Uh, but I do want us to think about what it's like to be writing about this history in a capitalist nation, which is constantly trying to put us at odds with each other on a daily basis. And yet we have so many examples of interracial coalition building. We could go on to talk about Afro Asian coalition building. We could talk about the role of Latinos in the anti PARID movement in the 1980s. Um, and so, um, I will go ahead and see the rest of my time. And, and thank you again. Uh, it's such an honor to, to be here.

Speaker 3 (00:22:50):

Thank you so much, Paul. I'm so happy for you to give us some of that history, uh, of, you know, from the 19th century forward, uh, that shows us that there has been this kind of collaboration and cooperation between black and brown people and how that has been erased from the history that is taught to us. Uh, next speaker is Maria Varela. And as I mentioned in my opening comments, this I, this panel was her idea, and I'm so happy, uh, to be introducing my SNCC comrade of some 50 plus years. Maria Vare is a community organizer, a writer photographer, and an occasional adjunct, uh, professor who lives in New Mexico. She was a staff member of SNCC from 1963 to 1967. Working primarily in Alabama and Mississippi Varela created film strips and photo books utilized by SNCC and local community organizers for various organizing campaigns. She took up the camera because of the lack of reading materials, showing black people, taking leadership to change their communities. VA's job as a SNCC staffer also including included photographing marches as the presence of cameras, often protected marchers from violence. Varela is the first Latino woman to document the 1960s civil rights STR uh, struggle in the black belt. South in 1990 Varela was awarded a Mac Arthur fellowship for her work in 2005. She was among the 1000 women nominated for the Nobel peace prize. Welcome Maria.

Speaker 3 (00:25:47):

I'm not hearing Maria, please. Uh, I'm sorry, Maria. For some reason we can see you, but not hear you. I don't know what happened. I see that you're talking. Adam, are you able to one, uh, trying to get your sound, Maria? Uh, I'm going to introduce Rachel Giler our third, uh, panelist. And then we will, after Rachel, uh, talks, we will all come on camera, hopefully to have our discussion. Rachel Giler is co-director of the dream defenders, a membership based organization of diverse youth, young adults, and students fighting for a better future across the state of Florida. Rachel has over 10 years experience in grassroots organizing and social change. She has worked in a variety of settings, including community organizations, schools, prisons, and government prior to the dream defenders. Rachel served as the associate director of the African

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American policy forum under the leadership of the acclaimed legal scholar, Kimberly Crenshaw there, Rachel developed various campaigns, including the, say her name focused on sharing the experiences of black women and police violence and girl black girls matter focused on raising awareness of the specific ways black girls experienced the school to prison pipeline. Welcome.

Speaker 5 (00:28:37):

Uh, thank you so much for having me what an honor it is to be here. I really hope we can figure out Maria's sound because she was such, she's such an important part of this history and was such an important part of bringing us together. So hopefully we'll get that, um, just fixed so that y'all can get a chance to hear from all our wisdom and experience, um, to start off, I just wanted to bring forward a quote that is, um, in dream defender's membership handbook. So every member who goes to the organization gets his handbook and it opens with this quote, if you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is bound up in mind, then let us work together. Um, and you know, I think this quote's so, uh, just, uh, undergirds like that we are in this together and the importance of us having a common fate and all the divide and conquer that Paul talked about.

Speaker 5 (00:29:31):

Um, so much of what we are doing in dream defenders is trying to get communities to see their common fate. And, you know, like we're living in a time where 50 million people live in poverty in this country where 10 million people plus lost their jobs because of the pandemic while us billionaires got way richer. Um, so what I've been trying to do is wake up every morning with that 50 million number in mind. And remember, that's my job as an organizer to bring people together, to see that the only way we're going to cha make change happen. And the only way change has ever happened is through solidarity. So I'm gonna share a little bit about some of dream defenders, just experiences and kind of our evolution over the years, um, around black and brown organizing, which is very much at the foundation of who the organization is, and really are, um, you know, really in the rich legacy of the, um, black radical tradition, which is also, um, a history of solidarity.

Speaker 5 (00:30:28):

So a little bit about dream defenders founding in 2006, um, a young man named Martin Lee Anderson, um, who was a teenager who was a joy riding, his grandma's car got arrested and ended up in a juvenile boot camp in Florida. And this is a boot camp where they basically forced young people into labor. And he, um, collapsed while he was being forced to run around a track. And he, and he was killed and, um, young people in Tallahassee across three college campuses, Tallahassee community college FMU, and Florida state university all came together to put their heads around what they were gonna do about it, and started an organization called the coalition for Martin Lee Anderson. And this was very much in the spirit of the civil rights movement that is so alive in Tallahassee. There were lunch counter sit-ins in Tallahassee. There was a student bus, there was a bus boycott in Tallahassee and all these young people came together and basically occupied Jeb Bush's office.

Speaker 5 (00:31:27):

And as a result of that, um, Jeb Bush was forced to basically close all the juvenile boot camps in Florida. So I think this experience very early on, um, just showed the power of a small group to get a small group of people coming together, across difference, bringing more people together and the power and possibility of that. So all the students kinda went about their ways. You know,

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people graduated, moved outta state, went on to jobs, and then, um, Trayvon Martin was murdered and basically a group of them got back on the phone and said, you know, what are we gonna do about this? And so we planned a big March from Baton Rouge university, um, to the Sanford police department to demand George Zimmerman be, be arrested in the days after Trayvon was murdered. And, um, on that March, um, one of our founders AME Booz made, um, who's Palestinian war Kaia, and, um, you know, very early on, on that March, he talked about the fact that, you know, he grew up between south Florida and east Jerusalem.

Speaker 5 (00:32:28):

And, you know, from a very young age, saw the connections between what his people were experiencing in Palestine and what black people were experiencing in south Florida. And so he wore that CAIA. And I think that so much just, um, you know, created a spark in the organization around just the fact that we are in this together. And, um, you know, P black, Palestinian solidarity has been a big part of the organization's history and it, it, it didn't didn't even necessarily come from this place of like analysis or, uh, you know, uh, tradition, but really just came from the fact that like we knew ed and Aman knew us and just the basics of humans wanting to be a fight for each other. Um, so that was just really foundational to the organization's history. Um, and then a year after that, we took over the Florida capital and, um, for 31 days and 30 nights, um, when we were pushing forward, this was after George Zimmerman had been acquitted, trying to push for something called Trayvon's law, which was a suite of legislation to demand that, um, you know, to, to, to address racism in the state of Florida and people from across Florida came together, people from across the country came together and it was a really big moment.

Speaker 5 (00:33:44):

Um, and, you know, despite us sort of having this huge moment of people coming together and as clearly being on the right side, morally, you know, we were in the halls of the capital of Florida. And we saw that the people who did have power in Florida, um, we saw people like the private prison industry. You know, we have Florida politicians take more money from private prisons than anywhere else in the country. And we saw, you know, Marion hammer, who's one of the most notorious NRA lobbyists. And so at the end of those 30 days, we realized that we didn't have the power we needed to win the things we were trying to win. We didn't have the power to pass Trayvon law. Um, and you know, Florida is like Republican trifecta control. It is run by all these big corporations it's really run by the far right in the billionaire class.

Speaker 5 (00:34:32):

And so that sort of experience really cemented in us the need to do deep community organizing that mobilization wasn't enough to make the change happen, that we wanted to happen. That, um, we couldn't be like a flashpoint in the pan that we needed to do deep, deep, deep, deep community organizing. And so we went out across the state and we all started chapters really across the state of Florida, focus on how do we, um, bring our communities together around these issues. It can't just be a small group of us at the Capitol. It has to be thousands of us at the Capitol. And so we really went out with this mission of how do we bring more people along with us. And, and right after the capital, we went, many of us went back to Miami and a young man named REFA Hernandez was murdered, um, by the police.

Speaker 5 (00:35:18):

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And he's, he's a, his family, he's Columbia immigrant, and his, so, you know, again, this just moment of the ways that all of our communities are impacted by these issues. And I think going back and organizing in Miami, you know, we saw that so many, despite so many of the, uh, of our communities being impacted by so many of the same issues that our communities are not United the Jamaican community. Doesn't talk to the Haitian community, doesn't talk to the black American community, doesn't talk to the Latino communities. And so we really set about, of like, how do we, our job is to unite all these communities around a shared vision because so many of us are, um, up against the same challenges. And so in the same systems of oppression. And so we went a bar, um, a couple of years later of really building a political vision that we, that would unite, um, our communities.

Speaker 5 (00:36:06):

And so through deep conversations across the state of Florida, we even did, you know, a organizing plant, uh, organizing program inside of a prison in south Florida. We built this political vision called the freedom papers. And it really is about this, this idea of that. There is abundance is possible that, you know, they, they tell us that there's not enough money, um, for this community. There's not enough money to both, you know, allow immigrants to come into this country and for, um, uh, you know, uh, for, uh, poor people in this country to still get their needs met. And so the freedom papers is really about pushing back past that idea and the fact that there is enough resources for all of us. And what would it look like if we lived in a country that actually made sure that people had a home to live in food to eat was able to go to the doctor when they need to access to education.

Speaker 5 (00:37:01):

And that all of that is possible, but that our soci our government spends money instead locking people up waging war abroad and deporting immigrants, and the freedom papers I'll end on this is really the, the organizing tool that we use P we use to bring people into the movement around, um, you know, so many young people might be politicized around a particular thing that they experienced in their family, and how do we get them when they join the organization to see that they're a part of a bigger fight and that, um, our liberation is bounded up in one another. So very excited again, to be on the panel today and to get into discussion with you all. Thank you again for having me.

Speaker 3 (00:37:42):

Thank you so much, Rachel and I live here in Florida and I have had the great pleasure of working with dream defenders. Uh, a number of your members were students of mine and of Paul's at the university of Florida. And we, I was so excited, uh, when they started marching after Trayvon Martin, uh, was so brutally killed and I saw them just, you know, really take off very much reminded me needless to say of how we in SNCC took off with the sit-ins, et cetera. So can we all be, uh, brought together on the screen? Uh, and I don't know if Maria, I can hear us yet. Yes. And oh, thank goodness, Maria. <laugh> oh, finally. Yes,

Speaker 6 (00:38:43):

My microphone was Xed out and it finally is where it should be. <laugh>.

Speaker 3 (00:38:47):

Thank you. So, would you please go ahead with your opening, uh, comments?

Speaker 6 (00:38:55):



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Well, well, thank you. Who are attending this session? It's it is our future. Um, we really can't be solo anymore in terms of trying to change those things, which crushed us, crush our children and will be crushing their children. So we just kind of have to get over what might be some of the, the issues and that then that that's done with good, solid organiz organizing. And I think to use, um, one of the examples I wanted to talk, talk about today, which was SNS relationship to the United farm workers. Um, we were, we were both organizing, um, built around, organizing in a collaborative way, which meant listening to the community and what it was that they needed. And while we each had our charismatic leaders, um, what was more important was the kind of ordinary folks that were, that were there, um, pulling this together. The west coast is really interesting in terms of doing interracial intercultural kinds of, um, organizing, I think in some ways, because we're more neighbors to each other, or maybe there's, you know, more intermarriage or whatever it is. There's a lot of openness, um, to these kinds of coalitions for SNCC. I think that, um,

Speaker 6 (00:40:30):

It, it was, let me just back up and tell you a story. I first learned about what was going on on the west coast, because, you know, we didn't have the internet and we did have our movement newspaper, um, because the regular press isn't covering anything that we're doing except right. For, um, so at one of the staff meetings, I think it was late 1964. Um, Marshall GS and Mike Miller approached me and said, we'd really want to create this program where SNCC supports the farm workers, um, union, uh, Cesar Chavez is very interested in nonviolent training for his, um, staff and feels that it would be much more effective in some of the campaigns that they're doing.

Speaker 6 (00:41:27):

So that, that intrigued me. And when they presented this to the, to the full SNCC staff, there was a lot of support. So as was noted before, there were some two-way radios that went over to, um, the farm workers and a couple of valance, which are really good when you're being chased, because they're a very solid little six cylinder car that will hold the road really well. And they were known for us in the south in many ways, saving people's lives. So we had some surplus, um, and that went to the farm workers. But more importantly was that, that my, and, um, they asked if SNCC would support the salaries now understand this is \$9 and 76 cents a week of SNCC staff, um, to work full time with the union in terms of doing whatever the union wanted them to do. And that was approved as well, which was really interesting.

Speaker 6 (00:42:28):

Um, so they said about helping, uh, the, the farm workers, um, in their organizing campaigns. And I think it wasn't always roses and, and, um, champagne, there were people who did resent people coming in from the outside to teach them how to be quote nonviolent. Um, but I think because these folks were coming from the position of, we worked in Mississippi, um, we we've done these kinds of campaigns and, uh, what is it that you wanna do and how can we help? That's a different kind of approach to organizing. So to one, I was approached by some of our organizers in SNCC who were working up in the Mississippi Delta. This was like early 1965, and this was a two, two way street between the union and SNCC, because there were people who wanted to help farm workers in Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia farm unions.

Speaker 6 (00:43:39):

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Um, and we didn't know how to do that, but the farm workers did. So these folks came to me one day and said, would you do a film strip on how the union organized itself, um, and was successful in some of their campaigns? Um, so I didn't know about that. So of course, I went to California, um, and started learning about this amazing approach to supporting people, everything from having a credit union, to funeral insurance, to healthcare clinics, um, the very practical way that you support people so that when they make the decision to go out on strike, they're not just dropped off a cliff. Their families are taken care of their food banks, their clothing banks. Um, so I, I did this strip and I did actually did a three part film strip and brought it back to the deep south and was asked at one point to present this film strip to some farm workers from across the south that had been thrown off their plantations because they were working on voter red, or they tried to go down and register to vote and got fired.

Speaker 6 (00:44:56):

And if you get fired, that means you're outta your house. So they were basically homeless. Um, and I showed this film strip, um, to them. And when I was done with it, there was like this long silence. And I thought, well, that, I guess that didn't work. And then this older man got up and he had tears in his eyes. And he said, you don't know what it's like to feel that we are not the only ones. And this is what this kind of interracial intercultural exchange is about. We change our perspectives. We understand things from a different point of view and, and, and it's energizing and it's more sustainable than kind of fold into ourselves and only our history and only our kinds of needs, because we're not gonna win anything that way. And if you wanna see one of those sections of the film strip go to the SNCC digital gateway, and there's a section called learning from experience. And part four, there is actually part of that. I don't know how they did it. They put that film strip up and you can actually go through it and, and watch the way it was made. And those photos are mostly by George Ballas because at that time I was a novice and my stuff was pretty bad. So George George kind of saved the day by helping with create a lot of the images.

Speaker 6 (00:46:32):

I think

Speaker 6 (00:46:35):

One of the things I wanted to say today was that at heart building, these coalitions is nothing but good sound, sustainable organizing. And if you look at these approaches in the sixties, um, they, they did start out that way, but often they were male dominated. And that at that point, you know, made it work to a degree. But later on, as these attempts were made in the seventies and eighties, it didn't work so well. You really needed women as a part of this and their kinds of leadership assets to be speaking to each other. And, um, in involving families in this cuz that is a sustainable way to keep it going through generations. So that is one of my critiques of what was going on. I hope if you all get the chance that you look at the first rainbow coalition, it's a movie that's on our film Fest and it really shows you the, the, almost the nuts and bolts that went into bringing, uh, the young Patriots, which was basically a white southerner transplanted to Chicago organization of pride that flew under the Confederate flag, the young Lords who, who flew under their Puerto Rican flag, but were also activists and the black Panthers and with Fred Hampton at their leadership at I'm sorry at, uh, as their leader, but the person who put this together was Bobby Lee.

Speaker 6 (00:48:14):

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Okay. The ultimate organizer that built trust did follow through didn't drop things through the crack and kept on going until he hammered out a relationship between those three groups, which really threatened the political machine in Chicago to the point where they assassinated Fred Hampton. And that really drove everybody white, Puerto Rican and black underground, because that's the other issues about this kind of success as you really get successful, you are going to get payback yeah. Uh, from state sponsored terrorism to try and drive you into the ground. So I think my final point is that this is the long haul. You know, Fred Hampton was assassinated in 1972 in 1983, Harold Washington was elected as mayor of Chicago broke the back of that political syndicate. And he, he really got elected because of Latino and black and white support for him. So these are not short term things.

Speaker 6 (00:49:31):

They take a long time in SNCC. We thought we failed in 1964 when we didn't get the Mississippi delegation, the all white Mississippi delegation displaced and the freedom democratic party take their seats. But there were some measures passed that by 1972, there never was again, an all white, all male, mostly, uh, democratic party convention because the rules did not permit it. And that led eventually to the election, uh, for better or for worse of Barack Obama. So I guess what I wanna say for those of you that are in this and passionate about what you're doing, just, um, and the phone rings in the middle of my best point. <laugh> just remember it's for the long haul and that what you need to do is bring younger people along so that what you're doing is sustainable through generations.

Speaker 3 (00:50:32):

Thank you so much. Um, I, uh, had put together a few questions myself in case we didn't get any from our audience. And thank you so much, Maria, for telling us about those stories. And I too encourage everyone to look at the film you just mentioned, which is on demand on our conference site. I looked at it last night, uh, for the first time, I certainly knew a little bit about that rainbow coalition in Chicago and was aware that one of the reasons Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated, uh, had to do with the organizing that they were doing with blacks, whites, and Latinos. And I really think everyone should look at that film. Um, the, I did get one question, Maria, what's the importance of documentation written, uh, and visual to movement and coalition building.

Speaker 6 (00:51:51):

You know, we <laugh>, we weren't always the best documentarians. If you go through back through old SNCC correspondence, you will not find a date on any letter. We just weren't thinking that way. You know, we were just putting one foot in front of the other and we weren't saving very many things. Um, I will tell you though, that when I helped with putting together the, this SNCC digital gateway thing, it was so important to be able to use original documents, primary sources, um, to really see the context and the thinking. I think we have to thank Jim foreman for this who was our executive director. He was always saying, write it down, put a date. This is history. You have to understand this is history. And he wanted it documented in both writing and photography. We were the only civil rights group that had full-time staff photographers.

Speaker 6 (00:52:50):

There were nine of us. At one point we had two, at least two dark rooms that I know of, one in Atlanta and one right down the block for me in my house in two blue, Mississippi. And we, we

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just kept shooting and shooting. Nobody really, uh, in the mainstream media wanted our stuff, but Jim, he didn't care. He said, this, we need for future generations. And now look, what's come out of it. We've had exhibits, we have this digital gateway that has these great photographs. So I will say we weren't the best if we didn't have, uh, Mr. Foreman prodding us, we probably, would've not done much of this at all. And for those of you coming up, you wanna think about those coming after you? Yes. So you really have to do something about your documentation, visual and, uh, written, um, written

Speaker 3 (00:53:47):

I, yes. And, um, I think that, uh, Rachel, maybe you can tell us, are you guys in the dream defenders? And I know you're an integral part of, of the movement for black lives is this happening now, documentation of everything

Speaker 5 (00:54:05):

I related to Maria's point about one foot in front of the other, um, and how much we haven't documented. And we're actually turning 10 this year and I'm realizing like, wow, I wish I had kept a journal all of this time. I wish we all had. Um, but we are actually very grateful to be, I think gonna get some support from SNCC to try to document the last 10 years as we head into our 10 year anniversary next year. So I feel very grateful for that, but I just wanna say that, um, the, the small, I mean, obviously we all could do better at documentation, but what you all did document has been so foundational for us. I mean, when dream defenders started doing delegations to Palestine, and then when we contributed to the movement for black lives platform, that took a stance around Palestine, we got so much backlash, um, funders who wanted to stop funding us all sorts of critiques from the right wing Zionist media.

Speaker 5 (00:55:02):

And it really caused, I think, us to start to question ourselves, like, did we overstep, were we doing the right thing and being able to go back and like, read the stick statement on Palestine and then read all of the documentation about the backlash you all got when you took a stance against Imperial imperialism was like very grounding for us to know that actually we're a part of a rich legacy of solidarity. We're a part of a rich legacy of black Palestinian solidarity. And no, we didn't misstep actually, anytime black people have been outspoken around Palestine or imperialism abroad, there's been backlash because they see the power in that. Yes. Um, and so I just wanna say how grateful I am for what you all, just how intentional y'all have been about writing down the history and passing down things, because it's been really integral, um, for dream defenders and us just kind of knowing our place and feeling grounded and feeling connected to the history.

Speaker 6 (00:55:59):

Wow. That is so good to hear. Thank

Speaker 3 (00:56:02):

You. It is. Yes. Yes. Um, we had another question, uh, again, directed at you Maria, any suggestions on translating the successful audio visual tools for the okra co-op and others into current organizing amongst the youth. Are you familiar with this okra co-op

Speaker 6 (00:56:30):

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<laugh> that was my first, um, film strip, and, oh, it was actually a set of two booklets. Um, we had a very different approach to how we were going to do these kinds of materials instead of sitting down with our great college writing skills, some of us better than others, and writing out these tones about how to organize an okra co-op I took a tape recorder and in those days you're talking about a big honky tape recorder, real to real, up to Pinola county, where a group of farmers, black farmers had organized themselves into a marketing co-op for their okra, cuz they were getting bad prices for what they were raising. So what I did was I said to them, if you wanted to talk to somebody in bogus, Louisiana or Gainesville floor, wherever about how you did this, how would you explain it? So they, they just went at a book chapter and verse and they told about where they made their mistakes and how they learned about, you know, what you have to do to keep this going.

Speaker 6 (00:57:42):

And so I just took that and transcribed it and I just used their words and took pictures. Well, that's where I first had to, I kept bugging SN photographers to go with me up to Batesville to take pictures. And they said, no, you do it. And I said, well, I don't know how. And they said, well, learn and here we'll tell you how to learn. So that's started my so-called photography career, which I really never thought I had one, but that's what we did was we used people's words because they, they cut straight to the quick they got, they did it in a, such an accessible way that somebody reading this in Georgia or Alabama could relate to it because it was in their language and in their kind of life's history experience. I'm not sure I answered the question but about this, but, um, I think that that's how you reach people. You, you reach them where they are and if you these days, I mean, why would you, you know, I'm not no, Rachel, I mean, would you guys ever need like a printed booklet or would you, or would you end up doing a video? I mean, what would be your communication approach to people in the community, if you needed to share information to, for certain kinds of campaigns,

Speaker 5 (00:59:04):

We do both. We're like we gotta meet people online cuz there's a lot of people online. So how do we do, and the right is organizing so much online. So we're like, how do we do videos and graphics that help reach people on the internet? And we know that that is not a substitute for the in person organizing, which is really the bread, like the bread and butter of what we do and what else's power. And so yeah, we have pamphlets and all sorts of things we hand out to people in person and like, yeah. Um, the freedom papers, which are political vision is a, is a book we hand out. So, um, yeah, we, we try to do both

Speaker 3 (00:59:41):

Well, I'm getting the word that we've got about five minutes. Uh, I did have, uh, one great question and maybe I'll read it and you can each, uh, integrate this into your closing. Uh, what are three key moments in the movement history that brought black and brown people together that we can learn from? And maybe we can start with you Paul and integrate that into your closing statement.

Speaker 4 (01:00:13):

Thank you. The 2006 general strike in the United States was the greatest general strike in the history of this hemisphere. It was black and brown people organizing together. I mean, many of my former students who are now, you know, moving up the ranks and the labor movement, especially actually Latino, uh, women organizers, uh, were integral to that 2006, that general

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strike changed everything. And yet again, we've all, we've forgotten it. Sometimes when I get talks, I'll, I'll ask what's the largest general strike in, in us American history and people will say, oh, the hay market or something happened in the 19th century. Well, I was wonderful, but I mean, we just did this y'all yes. In my I'm just kind of beginning my Hispanic Latinx heritage month now lasts well into mid-November and it's getting closer every year to my black history month. And in my household, the joke is black history month is the busiest day in Paul's year or Latinx history month.

Speaker 4 (01:01:09):

Now they kind of go together. And so the exciting thing is that community organizations, especially at Latino organizations in cities like Chicago, east Los Angeles, the Bronx Queens, Seattle increasingly asked me to begin by talking about anti-black racism within Latino communities and that the, the racist history of the Spanish and Portuguese and Dutch empires, which had such a big impact on our lives, vice versa with black history month talks increasingly the charge I get from black community organizations and black students is talk about the connections between black and brown organizing. Um, and so increasingly people are moving in this direction, but again, it's, I wanna thank S Nick for really getting us on the right track and the dream defenders for keeping us moving forward. Always right. Ante.

Speaker 3 (01:02:03):

Yes. Thank you. Paul closing remarks, uh, RA Rachel,

Speaker 5 (01:02:12):

Um, Hmm. I mean, I just wanna reiterate what, um, Maria said about this is just honestly good organizing and meeting communities where they're at building coalitions around common, around common fight. That's just good organizing. And I think, I don't know. I, I, I think my, my generation at times, you know, we, um, have had impatience for one another and, um, have, um, done like the oppression Olympics thing where we're all like sometimes I think, uh, seeing each other as the enemy, as opposed to like finding solidarity, recognizing that that solidarity is gonna come with struggle, but that we're the enemy is out there. And so I just think it's important for us to remember to be patient with one another, know that we're all coming from different backgrounds and experiences. So that's inevitably gonna lead to some sort of struggle as we're like getting to know and see outside of the bubble of our own experience. Um, but that what is on the other side of that struggle is like actual power that can, um, win real changes in our communities. And so there's no shortcut to that. It's gonna be messy, but it's the absolute necessary work to organizing, to build the type of power that's needed to actually change things.

Speaker 3 (01:03:38):

Thank you so much. Uh, Maria,

Speaker 6 (01:03:44):

I think I was reflecting back on was what Ms. Baker used to tell us. And she, I remember one time she said, you might be book learned, but you need to shut up and she didn't use the word shut up. She was much too much of a lady to do that, but you, you need to be quiet and listen to the people who are life learned because from them you will learn. And I think that that's an important thing as we encourage, we know we can mobilize hundreds of thousands of people don't we, we know that social media can be used to do that. There are tools that we never had, but you know, what, if we can't get out of the streets into the community, all of that is not really

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going to, um, make the kind of change, the fundamental changes that are needed. So that's kind of like my ending <laugh> and thank you all of you. And so ho for, for you putting this together and, and for you who are attending, we appreciate

Speaker 3 (01:04:50):

You. Um, well, you know, I, I keep looking at this chat and I thought we were finished and I just have gotten the note that we have nine minutes <laugh> uh, so, you know, I I'm, I'm happy that we still have some more time to talk. Uh, I had a question, uh, to all of us cuz I'm, I know we are all still organizers, Maria and I, uh, have not stopped organizing. And of course Paul and Rachel are, uh, absolute organizers. But my question was in light of the looming 20, 22 elections, what can we do to, uh, educate and mobilize black and brown voters to unify around progressive agendas and counter the right wing?

Speaker 4 (01:05:48):

Well, you know, one of the things Zara where I think movement history intersects with contemporary activism is, and, and I know a lot of people are working on this issue, but you know, getting people active just to echo what everyone is saying, that's the most important thing, getting us moving forward, getting us, cuz there's so much pessimism and cynicism, you know, the global pandemic right now has a mobilized. A lot of people it's put us in unfamiliar organizing settings where we have to use like zoom cloud like this. And yeah, it takes us many more hours to even have a face to face conversation. And, and I think one of the things I'm trying as I'm, as I'm kind of beginning to, to, um, close out my Hispanic, Latin I heritage month talks is I'm challenging. My audiences like upfront, I'm saying, what are we as so-called Hispanic or Chicano or Latino people doing about this disgraceful oppression of Haitian refugees, uh, in the us Mexico border.

Speaker 4 (01:06:49):

Yeah. When we owe so much every nation of Latin America owes its freedom and independence to the sacrifices of generations of Haitian people. I mean, heck even this country, even the us during the American revolution, the Haitian Senate volunteer regiment of freedom fighters to support the American revolution. And so what are we doing now, if we're not using Hispanic heritage month to argue in favor of the human rights of our comrades from Haiti, what are we doing? Uh, and so a lot of this is bearing witness refusing to forget refusing, to sweep things under the rug. But I really, uh, again, as I'm going around and giving these talks, I'm saying, what are we doing? I mean, why is it the mayor of Miami making a statement about what this disgraceful thing that's happening to Haitians in the us Mexico border when Haiti is such a central part of what Miami is and could be.

Speaker 4 (01:07:50):

And we, the last thing I mention is we gotta break through these facades and illusions. We have too many people who run around saying that, well, we don't have a problem with racism in our communities. Now I'm talking personally, I'm talking about the Latinx community. That I'm a part of. Uh, we say, oh, the Spanish were much more progressive than the Dutch or the British about race that's BS. Uh, anything, they even worse in many ways. So we we've got, I remember when I first moved down to Florida and I started giving talks to Miami dad and high schools and hi Lee in different places, I had a bunch of students tell me, well, we were told, uh, professor Ortiz by our teachers that the Spanish were kind conquerors and they had respect for indigenous and African cultures. And I said, who told you that that's a lie?

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Speaker 4 (01:08:40):

You know, I'm here to tell you let's get reeducated. You know? And so there's a lot of, um, a lot of people calling me for organizing workshops on this issue of coalition building. And the first thing I tell them is you can't form a coalition with people across the street from you, unless you know, your own history, especially who were your ancestors in struggle. When I talked to Cuban American audiences who was Antonio Maceo, who was Maximo Gomez, who were the women who fought during the Cuban world liberation in the, in the 1860s. And if you don't know those basic things about your own people's histories, it's very hard to ask you to then go across the street and form a coalition with other folks. So I'm biased. I'm a history professor. I admit it it's my it's a sin, but I think history is so critical. Zara.

Speaker 3 (01:09:32):

I agree. We had a wonderful last question. And maybe Maria, you might want to address this since you do work with indigenous people, uh, a question came in, how do indigenous people fit into this coalition building that we're talking about?

Speaker 6 (01:09:52):

Well, I don't think they just merely fit in. I mean, of course, you know, I live in the Southwest. Yes. And we, there is such a strong indigenous movement on a whole lot of areas. Um, the longest the group that has bought uranium mining, which has decimated families across New Mexico, Arizona have been native Americans. They've taken point on that the young folks are doing, uh, getting people out and registering them to vote and basically, um, to not involve native Americans. And of course, you know, it's all, what's the geography. There are places where, you know, that might be a moot point. There are other places where if you don't have native Americans is part of your coalition, then you don't have a coalition, right? So it is again like Paul was saying, you know, we need to learn each other's histories. We shouldn't assume that a coalition is going to make a big change.

Speaker 6 (01:10:57):

If we, if I can't learn Haitian history and Haitians can't learn, you know, the history of Mexicans in the Southwest, we have to find a way to do that. Mm-hmm <affirmative> because I have found that history can light a fire under people when they really know real history, it will often just light a fire under them and make them think critically so differently than before they found out about, you know, the real history such as what Paul Wright. So I don't know if I answered the question, but it's, it is geography that plays a large role in how we fashion these kinds of, uh, coalitions.

Speaker 3 (01:11:38):

And to you, Rachel, you know, we're down here in Florida and we have a very large Latinx population. Uh, we have the Cuban Americans, we have, uh, the Venezuelans and unfortunately they are often, uh, on the right and voting against all of the progressive issues. Uh, what are you and the dream defenders, uh, doing or thinking about doing with that community? Or is it just hopeless?

Speaker 5 (01:12:18):

Yeah, it's really scary because we're seeing that, um, you know, the right is trying to figure out despite the Browning of America and black and brown people becoming the majority in this country and white men, their out days being their days being numbered, they're trying to figure



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out how to maintain control in the face of that. So they're doing all sorts of disinformation campaigns, targeting Latino communities, um, and trying to move these communities more and more to the right. And, um, it's, it's really scary. And, you know, we're lucky to be a part of a coalition in Florida. That's trying to figure out how are we doing the deep organizing together, um, to bring communities together across difference, to be able to build the type of coalition necessary to transform the state, but there's no shortcuts to that work. And the right has, you know, when in the pandemic, when we weren't canvassing, because we were wanting to keep people safe, the Trump people were out there talking to people and, and bring, bringing more people under their umbrella. So it's just really important. There's no shortcuts to the, to the slow, deep organizing work of bringing people, um, fighting against this information and bringing people onto our agenda. Um, so that's all I can say is we're trying to get out there and talk to people and be in coalition with other organizations who have the same.

Speaker 3 (01:13:36):

Yes. I know how difficult it is. Paul lives in Florida, like you and I, uh, any ideas Paul about this?

Speaker 4 (01:13:45):

Just keep, you know, keeping on, you know, keep the faith. I mean, we're all doing really good work we're but to just remind each other, we're under siege to give each other a break sometimes to, to be sympathetic, you know, uh, just to listen. Listening is the most important skills to organizer. That's what I learned in the U F w that's what I learned from SNCC time and time again, listening.

Speaker 3 (01:14:09):

Well, thank you to, uh, Maria Varela, Paul Ortiz, Rachel Giler. Thank you so much for being on this black and brown models of organizing panel. And, uh, I'm so happy that the four of us are already knew each other and are working together and will continue working together to build these coalitions, to build the kinds of the, really the kind of country that America has never been, but surely can be. Yes. Thank you so much.

Speaker 6 (01:14:47):

Thank you, LA Hora for doing all of the heavy lifting and getting this together.

Speaker 3 (01:14:52):

Well, it was a pleasure just working with you guys. Take care.

Speaker 4 (01:14:56):

Thank you everyone.

Speaker 6 (01:15:02):

So are we supposed to leave? Huh?