



# The Freedom Singers



**(From *Survey: Current Field Work*, Compiled by SNCC's Atlanta Office, Spring 1963):**

"Besides periodic mail appeals, SNCC has two main sources of support for its direct attacks against segregation. These are the "Friends of SNCC"

groups in several Northern cities and on college campuses, and the Freedom Singers.

"The Freedom Singers are four young people who sing the Freedom Songs that typify the Southern anti-segregation struggle. Because their work is as important and as difficult

in many ways as that of the students working in the South and because we consider their work of educating the North so important to the Movement, we consider them part of the field staff.

"The Freedom Singer's fund raising efforts are indeed necessary. But just as important are the personal contacts they make during their tours of Northern college campuses. They communicate, through their songs, the urgency, immediacy, and sincerity of the student movement in the South.

"Each of the Freedom Singers played a vital role in the Movement even before they began to sing together for SNCC."

"They debuted February 1, 1963, at Carnegie Hall, and since then have appeared on television,





radio, and in a series of concerts. They have recorded an album of their songs which will be ready for release this fall.”

**Chuck Neblett keeps the Freedom Singers together today. For example, they recently performed for President Obama at the White House. Chuck writes:**

“Cordell Reagon organized the SNCC Freedom Singers from the suggestion of Pete Seeger and James Forman.

“Each member of the first group of the SNCC Freedom Singers were first and foremost part of SNCC's staff as field organizers. They all had been jailed numerous times throughout the south for civil rights activities before they became SNCC Freedom Singers. And they were all song leaders.

“We saw ourselves as organizers and motiva-

tors. Sometimes we did three or four shows a days, which was a rookie mistake, because it hurt our voices.

“The first group of SNCC Freedom Singers were Bertha Gober (soprano), Rutha Harris (soprano), Charles (Chuck) Neblett (baritone/bass), Bernice Jonhson Reagon (contralto) and Cordell Reagon (tenor).

“I provided continuity for the subsequent Freedom Singers groups.

The members of the second group were tenors Emory Harris, Matthew Jones, Marshall Jones, and Cordell Reagon; at various times the basses were James Peacock and/or Chico Neblett. I was the baritone/ bass and guitar players were alternatively Rafeal Bentham and Bill Pearlman.

“Rafeal Bentham, James Peacock, and Cordell Reagon are deceased.”