

SNCC CHAIRMAN

My position is very, very simple. That I fought too long and too hard against discrimination based on race and color, not to stand up and fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

JOHN LEWIS



John Lewis



John Lewis

THEN...

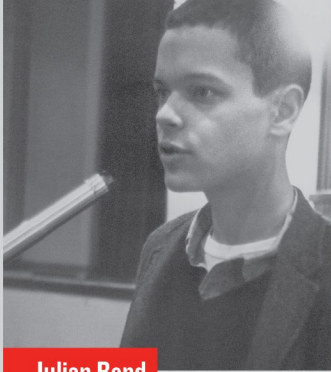
A handwritten letter to Dr. Martin Luther King and the return note with a bus ticket to Montgomery launched teenaged John Lewis into the civil rights movement. Lewis played a prominent role at many important events, including the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and Freedom Summer. While leading the March 7, 1965, march in Selma, Alabama, in support of voting rights, Lewis had his skull fractured by state troopers. Lewis was a founding member of SNCC and served as chairman from 1963–1966. He was known as a fearless activist unafraid to directly confront segregationists while strictly adhering to the nonviolent philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

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Lewis took his activism and became a public servant and leader. He served from 1981–1986 as an Atlanta City Council member and was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1986, and currently represents Georgia's 5th district. He has been called the “moral conscience of the House of Representatives,” repeatedly drawing connections between his civil rights movement experiences, the philosophy of nonviolence, and contemporary issues. He has led an annual pilgrimage back to Selma to give members of Congress, academics, and others his first-hand account of the events and legacy of “Bloody Sunday.” Lewis has been in the forefront of former civil rights activists who have maintained a “universal” perspective on the movement's legacy, arguing strongly for the rights of all people.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Julian Bond

THEN...

As a student at Morehouse College, Julian Bond played a leading role in the Atlanta student lunch counter sit-ins and helped found SNCC, where he served as communications director. He was elected to the Georgia state legislature in 1965 at the age of 26 but was denied his seat because he refused to disassociate himself from a SNCC statement opposing the Vietnam War and the military draft. His case eventually made it to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in his favor, and he served for 20 years as a state representative and senator.

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Julian Bond

...NOW

Julian Bond is known by many titles—educator, activist, and media personality. He helped found the Southern Elections Fund, which registered rural black southerners to vote, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, and chaired the NAACP board of directors from 1998–2010. He has been active in economic justice and peace movements, and continues to be involved in contemporary rights issues, including being an outspoken advocate for LGBT rights. His numerous media credits include hosting the long-running television show "America's Black Forum" and narrating the documentary series "Eyes on the Prize." He has led thousands of visitors to civil rights sites in the South, thus personally telling the stories of the movement to new audiences.

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Marian Wright Edelman

THEN...

Marian Wright became involved with the student sit-in movement while at Spelman College and decided to become a lawyer after she was arrested. After obtaining a law degree from Yale, she worked for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Mississippi, becoming the first African American woman admitted to the Mississippi bar. She was there during Freedom Summer and served as legal counsel for the Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

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Marian Wright Edelman

...NOW

Edelman established the Children's Defense Fund in 1973 and has served as the organization's leader since its inception. In that capacity she has served as a spokesperson, fundraiser, lobbyist, and advocate for the rights of poor, minority, and disabled children. She has written extensively about social and policy issues related to children, and continues to be an outspoken voice for justice and equality.

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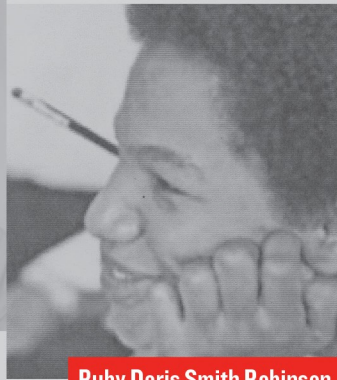


Ruby Doris Smith Robinson

THEN...

Soon after arriving on the campus of Spelman College, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson launched her intense involvement in the civil rights movement. She became a leader in the Atlanta Student Movement lunch counter sit-ins and was arrested several times for her actions. She was a founding member of SNCC and soon played a crucial role within the organization. In Rock Hill, South Carolina, she was one of the architects of SNCC's "No-Boil" tactic in 1961 and served a 30-day prison sentence. For her participation in the Freedom Rides she spent 45 days in Mississippi's Parchman Farm penitentiary, where she was brutalized. Reflecting her administrative abilities, she helped coordinate SNCC's Atlanta office and was elected as the organization's first female executive secretary in 1966. She increasingly argued that African Americans needed to control SNCC, so as not to be dependent on whites.

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Ruby Doris Smith Robinson

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In 1967 Ruby Doris Smith Robinson was diagnosed with terminal cancer and died within the year at the age of 25. She has long been regarded as one of the most forceful figures in SNCC. SNCC freedom singer Matthew Jones recalled, "You could feel her power in SNCC on a daily basis."

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Constance Curry

THEN...

The child of Irish immigrants, Connie Curry graduated from Agnes Scott College, where she was active in the National Student Association. In 1960, she became director of the NSA's Southern Student Human Relations Project, shortly before the student sit-ins began. She attended the organizational meeting of SNCC and was the first white woman chosen for the SNCC executive committee. From 1964–1975, she worked for the American Friends Service Committee, primarily working on school desegregation and voter registration.

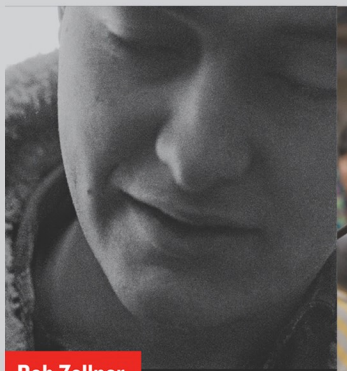
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Constance Curry

...NOW

Connie Curry continued to address issues of inequality, and has become an important chronicler of the civil rights movement and its legacy. From 1975–1990, she served as director of human services for the city of Atlanta. She has authored and collaborated on numerous books on the movement, including *Silver*.



Bob Zellner

THEN...

As someone with Ku Klux Klan members in his family, Bob Zellner had an unlikely background for a life of civil rights activism. Introduced to the social gospel movement by ministers and professors, Zellner met Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King while a student in Montgomery, Alabama. He participated in the Freedom Rides, became SNCC's first white field secretary involved in activities across the South, and was arrested and beaten numerous times for his civil rights activities. When SNCC became an all-black organization after 1966, he joined the Southern Conference Educational Fund to continue his work organizing white and black workers in the region.

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Bob Zellner

...NOW

Bob Zellner has continued to work for the rights of all people through speaking engagements, research, and direct activity. Since the 1980s he has worked closely with documentary film crews doing work on the movement. He makes frequent lectures and media appearances about the legacy of the civil rights movement in today's world, and in 2008 authored his memoir, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement*.

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Joyce Ladner

THEN...

As high school students, Joyce Ladner and her sister Dorie joined the burgeoning civil rights movement in their home town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. After being expelled from Jackson State University for their involvement with a demonstration, they transferred to Tougaloo College, where they continued their activism. Joyce Ladner served as a SNCC organizer and worked closely with Medgar Evers and others doing voter registration in rural Mississippi. She herself had to wait on a federal court order to finally gain her right to vote, after being repeatedly turned down by a local election official. She also spent a week in jail for trying to worship at an all-white church. Despite her extensive movement activity, she graduated from Tougaloo in 1964, and four years later received a doctorate in sociology from Washington University.

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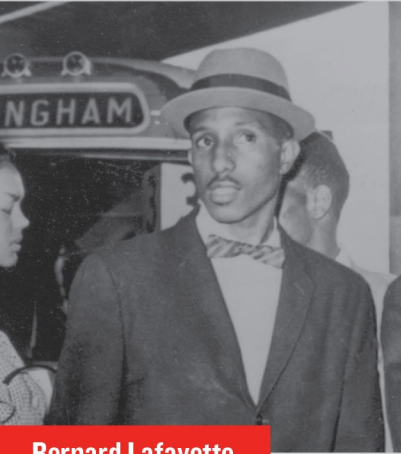


Joyce Ladner

...NOW

Joyce Ladner is a prominent academic leader, writer, and thinker. She served as the first female president of Howard University, where she was a professor from 1981–1998, and held other academic positions in the United States and Tanzania. She is the author of eight books and is a recognized expert on issues pertaining to children and families. She continues to explore the ongoing impact of 1960s activism on society and those who participated.

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Bernard Lafayette

THEN...

As a student in Nashville, Bernard Lafayette took part in nonviolent training sessions and developed a lifelong commitment to nonviolence. He was active in the student sit-in movement, attended the SNCC organizational meeting, and took part in the Freedom Rides, where he ended up spending 40 days in Parchman Farm penitentiary. In 1963 he and his wife Colla began SNCC's voter registration efforts near Selma, Alabama. On June 12, 1963, the same night Medgar Evers was killed, Lafayette was also targeted for assassination in a multi-state conspiracy. While badly beaten, Lafayette survived and continued his involvement in the movement. After Martin Luther King's assassination, he played a leading role in coordinating the Poor People's Campaign.



Bernard Lafayette

...NOW

Bernard Lafayette followed his direct activism by becoming a global leader on nonviolence. He earned masters and doctoral degrees from Harvard and served on the faculty of many universities, including the University of Rhode Island and Emory University in Atlanta. He has taught about nonviolent strategies and philosophies in South Africa, Colombia, Nigeria, the Middle East, and Mexico. His work has focused on bringing the technique of Gandhi and the civil rights movement to fruition in modern peace and freedom movements. He has also focused much of his time on situations where long-standing conflict can end in reconciliation.

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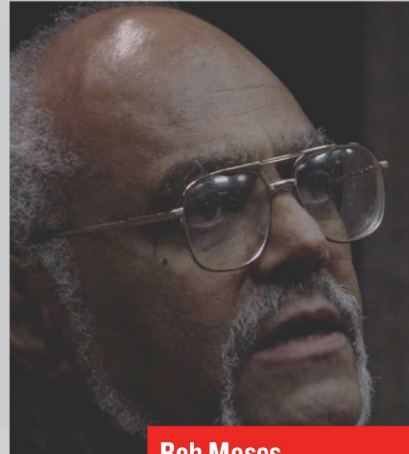


Bob Moses

THEN...

Bob Moses was teaching math in New York City when Bayard Rustin suggested he go to Atlanta to support the growing civil rights movement. By 1961, Moses was pioneering voter registration efforts among African Americans in Mississippi, getting threatened, beaten, and jailed in the process. In 1964 he helped conceive Mississippi Freedom Summer, where college students from across the country came to assist SNCC organizers and black Mississippians in a grassroots voter registration drive. After the murders of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner, his calm and steady leadership helped the initiative to continue. Moses steadfastly believed in cultivating and nurturing local grassroots leadership. He even resigned from his leadership position in Mississippi, stating that his role had become "too strong, too central, so that people who did not need to, began to lean on me, to use me as a crutch."

© VICE/CONTOUR



Bob Moses

...NOW

Moses became increasingly outspoken in his opposition to the Vietnam War. To avoid the military draft, he moved to Canada and then relocated to Tanzania, where he taught in a small village. In 1977, he returned to the United States and renewed his doctoral studies at Harvard, while continuing to tutor math students. He increasingly felt that the lack of math and science skills denied poor and minority children equal access in our information-age society. Assisted by a MacArthur Fellowship, he founded the Algebra Project, a national organization that uses mathematics as an organizing tool to help ensure a quality public school education for every child in America.

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Eleanor Holmes Norton

THEN...

Eleanor Holmes became active in civil rights at Antioch College, heading the campus NAACP chapter and protesting segregated facilities, and continued her activism while attending Yale Law School. She joined SNCC in 1963 and took part in the Mississippi Freedom Summer. In 1965 she went to work for the American Civil Liberties Union, specializing in freedom of speech cases. On one occasion she won a Supreme Court decision on behalf of the white supremacist National States Rights Party. She later recalled, "You don't know whether the First Amendment is alive and well until it is tested by people with despicable ideas. And I loved the idea of looking a racist in the face—remember this was a time when racism was much more alive and well than it is today—and saying, 'I am your lawyer, sir, what are you going to do about that?'"



Eleanor Holmes Norton

...NOW

Eleanor Holmes Norton's involvement in civil rights spawned a long career in social activism. She served as Human Rights Commissioner for New York City, paying particular attention to women's rights issues. In 1977 she was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to be the first female head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She has represented Washington, D.C. in the U.S. Congress since 1990, and is closely associated with such issues as nuclear disarmament and full representation for the District of Columbia.

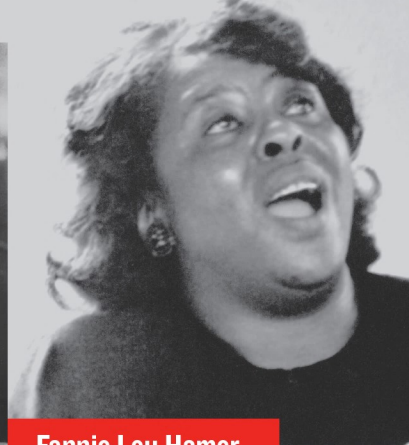
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Fannie Lou Hamer

Hamer continued her activism in political organizing and civil rights until her death in 1977; on her tombstone is her most famous quote: "All my life I've been sick and tired. Now I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

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Fannie Lou Hamer

THEN...

Nobody epitomized the courageous, grassroots leadership of the movement more than Fannie Lou Hamer. Born in 1917, Hamer grew up a sharecropper in the Mississippi Delta. It was not until she attended a SNCC-sponsored meeting at the age of 44 that she learned that African Americans possessed the right to vote. When she attempted to register, she was fired, evicted from her home, and received numerous threats. After sitting in the "whites only" section of a bus terminal on the way home from a voter education workshop, she was viciously beaten in a Winona, Mississippi jail. Hamer began work in 1963 as SNCC's oldest field secretary, and helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as an alternative to the white-dominated Democratic Party. She became a symbol of resistance, appearing on national television during the 1964 Democratic Convention with an appeal to have MFDP delegates seated.

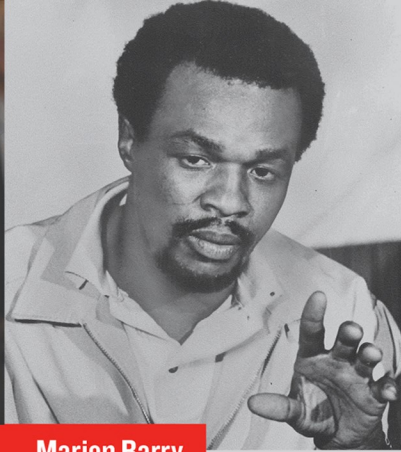
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Diane Nash



Diane Nash



Marion Barry



Marion Barry

THEN...

As a student at Fisk University, Nash took part in nonviolent training sessions, then became a leader in the Nashville student sit-in movement and was a founding member of SNCC. Her leadership, commitment, and courage also showed during the Freedom Rides when she insisted that the rides continue despite the violence and intimidation. In 1962, after receiving a two-year sentence for encouraging young people in nonviolent direct action, she chose to go to jail rather than accept a plea despite being four months pregnant. As she stated, "This will be a black baby born in Mississippi, and thus wherever he is born he will be in prison. . . . If I go to jail now it may help hasten that day when my child and all children will be free." She ended up spending ten days in prison before the judge reduced her sentence. Nash also was a key strategist for the Birmingham campaign, the March on Washington, and the voter registration campaigns around Selma, Alabama.

PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY: ALL-ALL RIGHTS RESERVE

...NOW

Diane Nash built upon her civil rights movement work by actively opposing the Vietnam War, and has continued to be involved in peace movements. A long-time educator in the Chicago public schools, she has also been a strong supporter of women's rights, and has organized around tenant and welfare rights issues.

PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES

THEN...

Marion Barry's participation in early efforts to desegregate buses, his involvement in the Nashville sit-ins, and his political talents led to his election as the first SNCC chairman. His move to Washington, D.C. to start the SNCC chapter there would lead to a lifelong affiliation with the city. He combined his SNCC involvement, which ended in 1967, with efforts to garner more self-rule for the District of Columbia. In the aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and the riots that erupted in Washington, Barry was a key organizer of relief efforts, and persuaded major companies to donate food and supplies to those impacted by the burning of residential and commercial buildings.

THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

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Marion Barry began his political career on the heels of his civil rights movement work by being elected to the D.C. Board of Education in 1971. He served on the D.C. City Council from 1974-1979 and became the mayor of Washington, D.C. in 1979, becoming the first former civil rights leader to be elected mayor of a major city. He served as mayor from 1979-1991 and again from 1995-1999, returning to the D.C. City Council in 2002. Marion Barry remains a controversial figure after some of his public statements and his drug-related convictions. *The Washington Post* wrote, "You cannot understand the politics of Washington, D.C. without understanding Marion Barry."

PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES



Maria Varela



Maria Varela



Ella Baker



Ella Baker

THEN...

Maria Varela quickly understood the power of the camera to empathetically depict often marginalized people and to protect civil rights marchers from violence. She joined SNCC in 1962 as a literacy teacher in Selma, but found that existing materials were inadequate and created her own photo books and film strips. Encouraged by photographer Bob Fletcher, she started taking photographs to document rural African American life and civil rights activity. Covering the 1966 March Against Fear, where the slogan "Black Power" was first popularized, she photographed a local teenager with a T-shirt featuring a hand-drawn black panther. She recalled, "The media implied that 'black power' was imposed on the Southern rural movement by urban-raised black militants. Through the lens, I saw differently. Mirrored in the eyes of that youth was a strength and pride that had been freed from within."

PHOTO: BOB FLETCHER/GETTY IMAGES

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In 1967 Varela moved to New Mexico, where she drew upon her experiences to commence a long career organizing rural communities to promote economic and cultural sustainability and self-determination. She has helped individuals start traditional weaving businesses, local grocery stores, and community ranching initiatives, among other enterprises. In 1990 she received a MacArthur Fellowship in recognition of her work.

PHOTO: BOB FLETCHER/GETTY IMAGES

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Baker returned to New York, and continued her activism, joining the Puerto Rican independence movement, speaking out against apartheid in South Africa, and being involved with peace and women's issues. She died on her birthday in 1986.

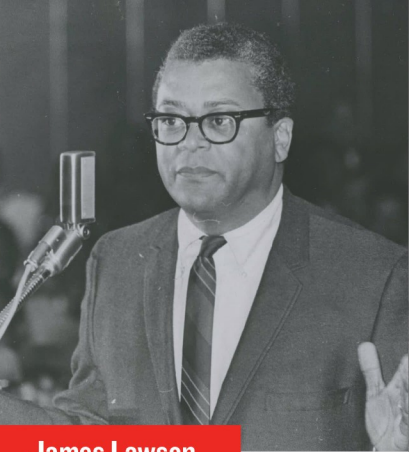
PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES

THEN...

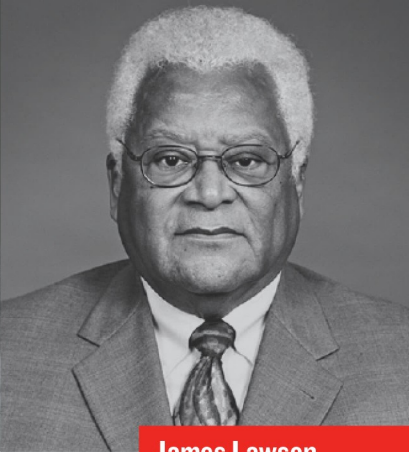
Ella Baker offered a bridge across generations of civil rights activists, and across different civil rights organizations. Born in 1903 and raised in rural North Carolina, Baker developed a sense of social justice early in her life. She heard her grandmother tell stories about slavery and was influenced by her mother, who encouraged women to be active agents of change. After graduating as class valedictorian from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, she moved to New York where she later began her long association with the NAACP, serving as national director of branches from 1943 to 1946.

In 1958, Baker came to Atlanta to coordinate the headquarters of the new Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Inspired by the energy and vitality of the student sit-ins, in April 1960 she convened a meeting for young activists from across the region. The event became SNCC's organizational meeting. Baker was insistent that the students not attach themselves to one of the existing civil rights groups, but rather that there was a special place in the movement for a less hierarchical, youth-centered organization. She left the SCLC soon afterward to devote her energies in support of SNCC. In addition to being an advisor to the group, Baker worked with the Southern Conference Education Fund to organize white and black workers in the South, and in 1964 helped found the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party.

PHOTO: BOB FLETCHER/GETTY IMAGES



James Lawson



James Lawson



Stokely Carmichael



Kwame Ture

THEN...

If there was a "father" of SNCC, it was the Reverend James Lawson. Following a fourteen-month prison sentence as a conscientious objector to the Korean War, Lawson served as a missionary in India where he studied Gandhian philosophy and techniques of nonviolence. He moved to Nashville in the late 1950s, where he trained and mentored a number of SNCC's future leaders. Martin Luther King also considered Lawson a mentor and turned to him for advice on several occasions. In 1962 Lawson moved to Memphis, and it was Lawson who invited King there in 1968 to support striking sanitation workers. On the eve of his assassination, King called Lawson "the leading theorist and strategist of nonviolence in the world."

PHOTO COLLECTION COURTESY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

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In 1974 Lawson relocated to a church in Los Angeles where he served until he retired in 1999. He has actively supported various causes, from immigrants' rights and the rights of Palestinians, to opposition to the war in Iraq, to worker and LGBT rights. He has also continued to train new generations of activists in the theory and practice of nonviolence.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE, FROM ARCHIVES OF PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

THEN...

A native of Trinidad, Stokely Carmichael got involved in civil rights work while a student at Howard University. At the age of nineteen, he was among the youngest of the Freedom Riders, and received a 49-day prison sentence at Parchman Farm penitentiary. The charismatic Carmichael worked as a SNCC field worker during the Mississippi Freedom Summer and led voter registration efforts in Lowndes County, Alabama. His growing frustration and anger witnessing the repression and intimidation leveled against the movement led him to reject nonviolence. In 1966 his cry of "Black Power" struck a chord among many disaffected African Americans, even as it contributed to divisions within the movement and a backlash among many whites. That same year, Carmichael succeeded John Lewis as chair of SNCC.

ARCHIVES OF SNCC

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After Carmichael left SNCC in 1967, his militancy escalated. He became a staunch advocate of Pan-Africanism, changing his name to Kwame Ture and moving permanently to Guinea in 1969. But he returned to the United States on numerous occasions before his death in 1998.

ARCHIVES OF SNCC



Bernice Johnson Reagon



Bernice Johnson Reagon

THEN...

Bernice Johnson Reagon's voice has nourished countless individuals since her days in the movement. A native of Albany, Georgia, Bernice Johnson joined SNCC-sponsored demonstrations and was expelled from Albany State College for her civil rights activities. She was an original member of the SNCC Freedom Singers who performed at mass meetings and demonstrations, and traveled nationally to raise support for civil rights activities. Over a period of nine months, they drove over 50,000 miles to perform. Congress on Racial Equality leader James Forman wrote about Reagon, "And when the call came to protest the jailings, you were up front. You led the line. Your feet hit the dirty pavement with a sureness of direction. You walked proudly onward singing 'this little light of mine,' and the people echoed, 'shine, shine, shine.'"

PHOTO BY GUY LAWRENCE, FROM ARCHIVES OF PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

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As a performer, a producer, and a scholar, Reagon has continued to be an emissary for African American music. While pursuing her doctorate in history from Howard University in 1973, she founded the black women's group Sweet Honey in the Rock, which went on to international renown for its socially conscious lyrics and dynamic performances. For nearly twenty years she worked as a curator and historian at the Smithsonian Institution, and is the author of two books on African American music. Her numerous credits include the compilation of the anthology "Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Freedom Songs, 1960-1966."

ARCHIVES OF SNCC