

Atlanta, which served as SNCC's original headquarters. Diane Nash, a Fisk student, dropped out of college to become SNCC's first field secretary. Cleveland Sellers, a Howard University student, became program director for SNCC. Stokely Carmichael, a Howard philosophy student, became one of SNCC's most important field secretaries. Carmichael, who would later serve as a SNCC chairman, became good friends with Sellers. Bob Moses (Robert Parrish), a Harvard graduate and a math teacher, served as a philosophical and spiritual leader for SNCC. Moses directed SNCC's field staff in Mississippi. These leaders represent only a few of the many persons involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The names of all the people who helped this organization move are not known. However, SNCC leaders and field secretaries gave direction and power to the struggle for black equality.

In comparing the work of SNCC to other civil rights organizations, one must take economics into consideration. SNCC was a new organization run mainly by students, and students had no money. Several people, who quit their jobs to work for SNCC full-time, found it difficult to survive. SNCC members worked hard for little or no compensation. Most of the time SNCC workers only received around 10 to 20 dollars a week for their work; Ten or twenty dollars to quit school and risk your life for a cause. In his autobiography *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, Jim Forman said SNCC had the largest field staff of any organization from 1961-62, but the least amount of money. SNCC did not develop an official fundraising campaign because its members did not want money to become its main concern. SNCC criticized other civil rights organizations for being too money-oriented and bureaucratic. Consequently, SNCC survived with no money and didn't know where to get any. Several SNCC organizers tried to raise funds in the North, which did help the organization somewhat. However, the majority of the time SNCC operated in the red with no money to pay office utility bills or support its field staff. It is ironic how economic oppression allowed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to become rich in spirit and inspiration.

SNCC's campaigns involved a combination of nonviolent direct action and voter registration. Most of the time, SNCC would go into a city to register votes and end up participating in demonstration. SNCC believed in the power of the franchise to uplift black people. SNCC felt if blacks were able to vote, then all of the other civil rights would follow. Blacks had been denied the franchise blatantly in several parts of the Deep South, such as Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. White supremacists in Deep Southern states had been notorious for their overt mistreatment, violence and murder of

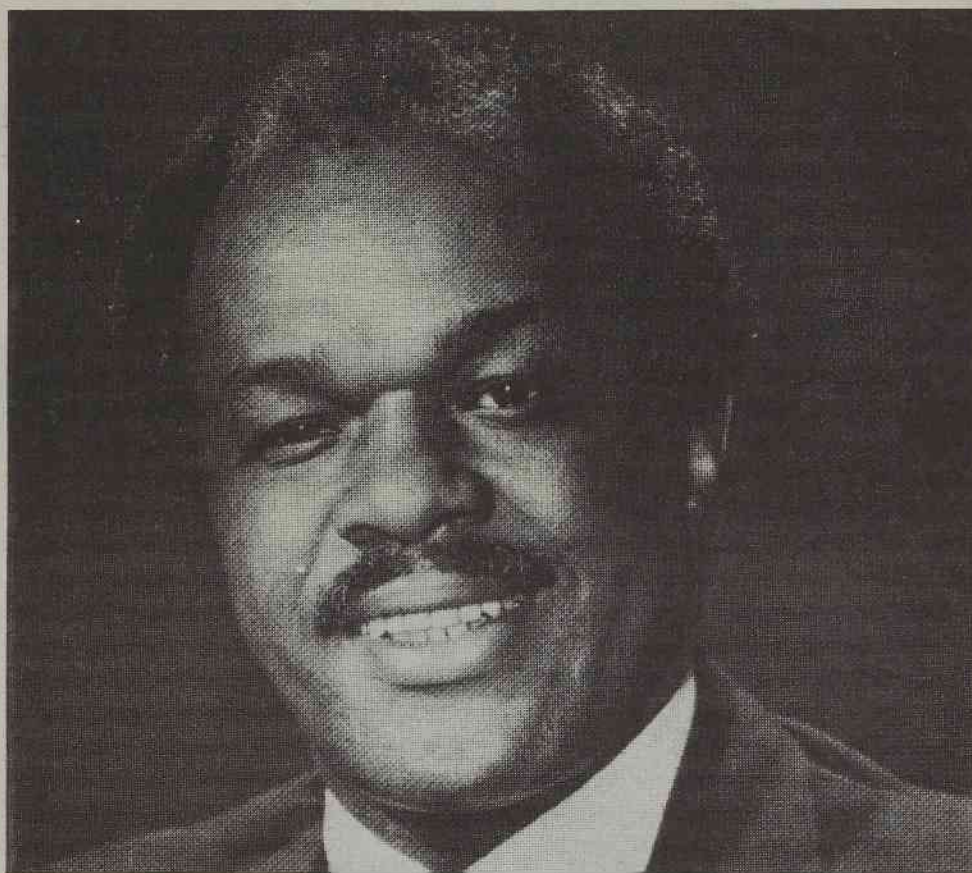
African-American citizens. White Citizens Councils, watered-down versions of the Klan, also became obstacles in the paths of SNCC organizers. SNCC also had to deal with extremely poor black people, many of whom were illiterate. Blacks who couldn't read or write had no chance of voting under Jim Crow because of the literacy test given by registrars.

SNCC also had to convince black people in these towns of the importance of the ballot. Economically-oppressed people have a difficult time understanding why they should vote, if they have no food on the table. Why should you risk your life registering to vote, if you have no job or a descent roof over your head? What good is a ballot if you can't read what's on the ballot? SNCC workers organized freedom schools to educate blacks on the importance of the franchise. Freedom schools or "Nonviolent Highs" also help educate students, if they were expelled from school for participation in protest. SNCC field secretary Dion Diamond helped organize a freedom school in Mississippi's Pike County.

SNCC field secretaries were sent into the most dangerous areas of the Deep South to organize voter registration drives. Long before other civil rights organizations thought about mobilizing people, SNCC was there. During Freedom Summer of 1964, SNCC joined forces with thousands of white students from Northern white colleges to register a record number of black voters. In addition to Freedom Summer, field secretaries could be found in a number of other southern cities.

It is sad that no one remembers their names. Ivanhoe Donaldson, Anne Moody, Charles McClaurin, Courtland Cox. They were young and brave. Kathy Conwell, Don Harris, Sam Block, Luvaughn Brown. Some of them died for the franchise. Jimmy Lee Jackson, Sammy Younge, Jimmy Travis. And nobody knows their names.

Although SNCC went wherever needed, the field staff felt that Mississippi was very important to address. Mississippi had historically denied black people the franchise. In McComb, Miss., 200 out of 8,000 eligible blacks were registered to vote. In neighboring Amite County, only one black eligible voter was registered out of nearly 5,000 black people. In Walthall County, no blacks were registered to vote, even though it had 3,000 blacks age 21 and older. These statistics showed that something was definitely wrong. Almost the entire SNCC field secretary staff became involved in the voter registration drive in Mississippi. Bob Moses and Travis Britt helped lead the campaign in McComb, which had a reputation for being Klan country. SNCC got local high school students to protest segregation in McComb's public accommodations. Several people were arrested for trying to register to vote. Travis Britt was beaten and



Marion Barry, the first national chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

threatened throughout the drive. Another voter registration drive was started by field secretary John Hardy in Walthall County. Hardy was beaten when he attempted to take voters to the registrar's office. In addition, Herbert Lee, an NAACP organizer, and Lewis Allen, a local resident, were killed in McComb, MS. Dozens of people were arrested for trying to register to vote and participate in nonviolent protest. SNCC also took its voter registration campaign into other southern cities such as Birmingham, AL and Albany, GA. Desegregation in these two cities is often scene as the work of SCLC, but SNCC was first. And although SNCC was beaten and brutalized, they kept their eyes on the prize.

Some SNCC members grew wary of nonviolent direct action as a tactic for social change. After utilizing civil disobedience for the majority of the movement, SNCC decided to change its strategy. By the mid-1960s, SNCC had become more oriented towards the Black Power ideology in its goals and tactics. SNCC felt that civil disobedience had outgrown its usage because nonviolence did not raise consciousness at all times. SNCC, which had several prominent white members such as Bob Zellner, began to move towards all-black membership. Stokely Carmichael replaced John Lewis as chairman in 1966. Carmichael started out a die-hard pacifist but became more militant after over 24 arrests for participation in nonviolent protest. SNCC also faced internal problems over leadership. SNCC never wanted its leaders to become too powerful because that might dilute the strength of a people's movement. Bob Moses changed his name to Robert Parrish because he thought SNCC members treated him as a prophet figure. SNCC also discov-

ered that the FBI had infiltrated the organization because it had become so powerful in the movement. By 1969, SNCC's influence was in decline in the South. SNCC was never able to articulate and utilize Black Power, the way it had articulated civil disobedience. By the early 1970s, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was defunct. The organization that had do so much for black people in barely a decade was no longer in existence.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee served as a vital force during the struggle for black equality. Black history is lacking in something if it doesn't explain SNCC's role in the civil rights movement. Behind the scenes, SNCC died for the ballot. Behind the scenes, SNCC walked the hot, dusty roads in the Deep South. Behind the scenes, SNCC dedicated its life to the uplift of black people. No other group did so much and received so little credit. They were beaten, brutalized and killed for a cause. SNCC was filled with dreamers; young people who believed in the power of the franchise. And yet nobody knows their names.

All African-Americans should know their history—and not just the history placed before you. Question history and its portrayal of black people. Don't accept everything in history books as true. Read, research and remember the history of black people. Don't let "his story" become your story. White history has downplayed the role of SNCC in the civil rights movement. African-American students should look at SNCC for inspiration and encouragement as they struggle to overcome institutional racism at colleges and universities nationwide.
