

# **SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Welcome and Remembrance of Ms. Ella Baker (PART 1)**

---

Date: April 2000

Location: Raleigh, NC - Shaw University

## **Host:**

**M. Iyailu Moses** - African-American Cultural Center Director, North Carolina State University

## **Welcome Speakers:**

**Everett Ward** - Chancellor's Community Advisory Committee Chair, North Carolina State University

**Ernest Pickens** - Executive Vice President, Shaw University

**Rodney Poole** - President of the Student Government Association, Shaw University

**Joanne Woodard** - Vice Provost, North Carolina State University

**Harold Pettigrew** - Student, North Carolina State University

## **Moderator:**

**Muriel Tillinghast** - SNCC Field Secretary

## **Panelists:**

**Connie Curry** - SNCC Executive Committee

**Casey Hayden** - SNCC Veteran / 1964 Freedom Summer strategist and organizer

**Judy Richardson** - SNCC Veteran / Filmmaker

**Brenda Travis** - SNCC Veteran

---

**M. Iyailu Moses:** ...the Cultural Center at North Carolina State University, and I am one of the many members of the planning committee which has worked very diligently to greet you today in Raleigh, North Carolina. I'd like to first say, welcome home. Welcome home to those of you who were here 40 years ago, almost to this very day, beginning an organization that transcended what was then happening in the Civil Rights Movement.

I want to say, first of all, my personal thanks to each and every one of you who laid your lives on the line, who walked on the lines, who sat in, who registered people to vote. I am your counterpart in age. However, at that time, I was living in New York City and raising a family, so

I couldn't be doing quite as much as you were doing, but I was there cheering you on from the sidelines. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, and thank you for all of the rest of us here.

We know that there have been several changes in what we expected to do this morning, but we want to just keep rolling right along, and we will make up the time. We will make up everything that is promised to you. And so we want to begin this morning with thanksgiving, and to do that, we have Mr. Everett Ward, who is chair of the Chancellor's Community Advisory Committee at North Carolina State, who works for the Department of Transportation, and who is also a member of the planning committee. Mr. Ward.

**Everett Ward:** Thank you. Dr. Moses, good morning. Let me say to you that when Dr. Moses asked if there was anyone who was so inclined to come forward and offer an invocation or some spiritual reflection this evening, I must tell you, as a Presbyterian elder, I had to rise. Because in the Presbyterian Church, we don't have these many people assembled, and to be with Dr. [Ernest] Pickens here at Shaw University, in the Baptist tradition, I consider it an honor as a Presbyterian elder to stand before you and to offer a spiritual reflection.

But prior to doing so, I must, with all sincerity, tell you that we welcome you. As Dr. Moses has indicated, this is a moving experience. Up until this point, we have celebrated with the community, starting on Sunday, with events that have truly brought people together in the spirit of [Ella Baker](#), where we have had elders sitting with the next generation, passing on the legacy of what you did—those of you who were on the front line, those of you who are on the front line today, and those of you, as we look at our student leaders, who will be on the front line, carrying the torch of [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), Ella Baker, Dr. [Aaron Henry](#), Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth into yet another generation.

So if all of our hearts are clear, let us go to the place that guided us 40 years ago, that guided us throughout all of our journeys, and continues to guide us today. Let us pray.

Father, we come to you at this appointed place and at this appointed time to say, thank you for your everlasting and merciful grace. Because you lived, we too live free. Because others—students, elders, and particularly the person we celebrate today in the memory of Ella Baker—because she lived, we are free today, and the journey continues.

As we begin this conference, keep us focused on always moving onward and upward, and let us never forget that we have an obligation with you and with mankind to always do our very best to make this nation and this world truly a place where all people can be free and understand that we who believe in freedom cannot rest. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**M. Iyailu Moses:** Thank you. We'd like to now bring to you several people who will bring you greetings. The first will be Dr. Ernest Pickens, Executive Vice President of Shaw, standing in for the Shaw president, Dr. Talbot O. Shaw, this morning. Dr. Pickens.

**Ernest Pickens:** Thank you Dr. Moses. Let me repeat: welcome home. I say that with a great deal of pride and with the understanding of this conference. A sense of—where else could we be this morning, talking about the theme that we're talking about, dealing with the issues that we're dealing with? Where else could we be, other than this campus? And you know the answer to that—probably very few places, if any.

I say, welcome home, and my greetings to you are going to be just a little different, perhaps, than what you're going to hear from time to time. I'd like to focus on that welcome home part of the greeting. I want to say, welcome to Shaw University. Who knows—some of you may be sitting where Ella Baker sat. Since this very building in which we are meeting today was used as a residence hall for women, it certainly had to be very active during the time that our celebrant was on this campus.

Shaw University, as you know, is the oldest historically Black university in the South, the third oldest in the country. And that's arguable. Some people say that Wilberforce [University] and Cheyney [University] want to lay claims. But the question is, were they a genuine university at founding? And the answer probably is no—normal school, high school, or something else at that time.

But as you know, Shaw University, founded in 1865, 135 years ago—a long time by any standard—has a lot of firsts in its history. I'm not going to chronicle them all for you this morning, but among them: the first four-year medical school in the country was founded here on this campus. Shaw University, right across the street, [the] historic building that's being renovated—Leonard Hall—first four-year medical school in the country, founded on this campus.

We could go through and chronicle a lot of other firsts. We are here because 40 years ago, there was a first—the founding of SNCC on this campus. So when you talk about Shaw University, you talk about an institution involved with the cutting edge items in a number of ways.

As Executive Vice President of this institution today, I have to assume some responsibility to let you know that when you leave here, you will have heard all of the experts on the SNCC issue, all of the experts on Ella Baker, all of the experts on the issue of freedom. Carry also with you some information on Shaw University—that Shaw University's motto is "Pro Christo et Humanitate," for Christ and Humanity—an institution with a commitment that religion and learning go hand in hand, and that character should grow with knowledge.

Carry with you the fact that Shaw University was founded in 1865 by Henry Martin Tupper, a white man from Monson, Massachusetts, who had a vision to provide an educational opportunity for freedmen to learn to read and interpret the Bible. [In] 1865, 135 years ago.

And today, this institution's commitment is to provide educational opportunities for a diverse population who may otherwise not have an opportunity for education. [The] very same mission, stated differently, 135 years ago.

I want you to be able to announce that indeed, in 1870, this very building that you're sitting in was built as the first residence hall for women in the country. In 1873, beautiful Estey Hall.

I want you to be able to say that Shaw University is the mother of African-American higher education in North Carolina. For out of the womb of Shaw University, we have North Carolina Central, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, Livingstone College, and A&T State University. Were it not for Shaw, we would have a different scenario with these institutions in North Carolina.

Yes, Ella Baker—alumna, par excellence, Shaw University's finest. Today, our president, our visionary leader, has established as an administrative aim and motto: "Strides to excellence. Why not the best?" And Ella Baker certainly exemplifies both components of our administrative motto 135 years after its founding. If our president were here, he would say, "You sit and stand on hallowed ground. Your purpose for being here is genuine." We are delighted that this conference is being shared with us on our campus today.

So on behalf of our president, who is not here at the moment, I'd like to extend to you a genuine welcome to the Shaw University and ask that the work that you have come to do here will be work that will be spread widely as you achieve the mission. Welcome home. Thank you.

**M. Iyailu Moses:** Thank you, Dr. Pickens. And following him, we will have comments from Rodney Poole, who is president of the Student Government Association here at Shaw.

**Rodney Poole:** Good morning. "Once upon a time in a land far, far away" is the beginning for many a fairy tale. It would be nice if the American Civil Rights Movement could begin with those words, but it cannot, because it was not in a land far, far away. It was here in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was all over the South and various other parts of this country. Today we commence the celebration of the life of a Shaw graduate and an enormous figure in American history, Ms. Ella Jo Baker, and the reunion of the birth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

To those of you that spent your Easter vacation here 40 years ago, thank you for coming and welcome back. To those that have traveled from across the country or from across town, we thank God for your safe arrival. So on behalf of the Shaw University Student Government Association and the entire student body, we hope that this conference will be empowering, enlightening, and effective. Thank you and welcome.

**M. Iyailu Moses:** This entire project has been a wonderful collaboration. I've met some wonderful people—some people at Shaw and people at NC State and people at Duke and people from St. Aug [referring to Saint Augustine's University] and people from [North Carolina] Central and people from various places around the country have convened, have met, and have talked about this, and we've come together to do this project. In that spirit, we want to also bring you greetings from North Carolina State University, and here to do that is Vice Provost Joanne G. Woodard from North Carolina State.

**Joanne Woodard:** Again, good morning. It is my privilege to welcome you on behalf of North Carolina State University to the 40th anniversary celebration commemorating the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The actions of this new organization of bold and courageous young people created a tidal wave of positive social change that extended far beyond the walls of this community to wash over the entire region. Ella Baker, Jim Lawson, John Lewis, Diane Nash, and so many others, including many of you in the audience, were participants in the founding of SNCC.

NC State University is very proud of the foundation of racial cooperation laid by our former Chancellor John Caldwell, who, in the early 1960s, worked diligently with Governor Terry Sanford's Good Neighbor Council.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, we've continued that tradition of racial cooperation with our new Chancellor, Dr. Marye Anne Fox, we work to enhance race relations with the larger Raleigh community through the Chancellor's African-American Community Advisory Council and through the annual University-Community Brotherhood Dinner.

For the past 18 years, NC State has hosted the Brotherhood Dinner with our sister institutions, Shaw University and St. Augustine's College. The Brotherhood Dinner honors the achievements of an African-American who has helped to promote scholarship, leadership, and community service. And I mention the Brotherhood Dinner because our honoree this year for our dinner that was held just last month was Congressman [John Lewis](#), one of the early leaders of SNCC.

I'm frequently asked to represent our Chancellor, Dr. Marye Anne Fox, and Provost Dr. Kermit Hall at events when their busy schedules do not permit them to attend. And as a historian, I saw this assignment of giving a welcome at the SNCC conference as an unparalleled opportunity. I am humbled to be in the presence of the makers of history and persons who have so shaped our lives over the last four decades.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Good Neighbor Council was a North Carolina state initiative established in 1963 by Governor Terry Sanford to address growing racial tensions and promote peaceful racial integration and equal opportunity, particularly in employment and education.

In 1960, when SNCC was founded at Shaw University—and I'm probably going to date myself here—I was four years old. During the 1960s, I remember my parents speaking proudly and reverently about the activities of the alphabet soup of organizations involved in the civil rights movement: SNCC, CORE [[Congress of Racial Equality](#)], COFO [[Council of Federated Organizations](#)], the Urban League, the SCLC [[Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#)], the NAACP [[National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)]. And those students who've had African-American history with me know they must learn what those initials mean. It's not just an alphabet soup.

But I want to say that the persons, Black and white, associated with these groups were indeed the foot soldiers in the war for freedom and equality. As a teenager, books about the student involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, like Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, captured the imagination of this young Black woman coming of age in Charlotte, North Carolina.

This week's celebration of the founding of SNCC marks the birth of a key organization in the modern Civil Rights Movement. And I have to frequently remind my students that the Civil Rights Movement didn't just begin in the [19]50s or [19]60s. What we see by the time of the founding of SNCC is just another wave in a long cycle of the struggle for civil rights in the United States.

In the post-World War II era, massive resistance emerged as a tactic employed by those protesting segregation and the denial of rights to Black Americans. Nonviolent direct action was a complement to legal action in such landmark cases as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954. And people like Ms. Ella J. Baker and groups like SNCC helped to accelerate the deliberate speed with which desegregation was to take place.

In his book *Civilities and Civil Rights*, Duke University historian William Chafe describes the "progressive mystique" of North Carolina in the first half of the 20th century. According to this progressive mystique, race relations were characterized by a degree of civility. Consequently, major flashpoints of the Civil Rights Movement do occur in North Carolina—like the sit-ins in Greensboro, the founding of SNCC in Raleigh, desegregation of schools and busing in Charlotte.

However, our state avoided, for the most part, the bloody violence that characterized the civil rights struggle in areas of the Deep South. This progressive mystique and the willingness of people—Black and white, people of goodwill—to work collaboratively and peacefully, to respond to the nonviolent direct action demonstrations of SNCC allowed Raleigh and North Carolina to move forward.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that some things are so dear, so eternally true, that they're worth dying for. And if a man hasn't found something that he's willing to die for, then he's not fit to live. The cessation of breathing is but the latest announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. And I'll say, these are powerful words—words that aptly describe the activities of the students

involved in SNCC. The SNCC students had found something they were willing to die for. Many of them risked their lives daily, helping America to live up to the true meaning of its creed.

This is not to say that the SNCC students were unafraid. As we've heard over the past few days, as people give us their remembrances of the movement, people say that they were very afraid. But their convictions proved to be stronger than their fears.

To quote from the statement formulated by SNCC in 1960: "Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality."

Indeed, the SNCC students had found something worth dying for. Students like the ones involved in SNCC were revolutionaries because the Civil Rights Movement was a revolution. The second American Revolution of the 20th century helped to bring to fruition those national visions first articulated during the first American Revolution of the 18th century.

The SNCC students were ideal revolutionaries and participants in massive resistance. Their youthfulness cloaked them with a certain autonomy that allowed them to risk more than older adults, who were sometimes hesitant or more restrained in protesting for fear of swift economic, social, and political reprisal.

So in closing, I'd like to say NC State is proud to be a sponsor of the SNCC conference, and it is our hope that the conference brings about a greater appreciation of history, much of which occurred right here in our own city of Raleigh. We're also hopeful that the conference will help to rekindle among our students some of the activism of the SNCC students of four decades ago. And lastly, we hope the SNCC conference brings about the recognition that we are not there yet. We need to renew our commitment to continue the struggle for freedom and equality for all people. And I thank you, and do enjoy the conference.

**M. Iyailu Moses:** And following her is a young man who has esteemed himself greatly on the campus of North Carolina State University. I'm going to just take a second to speak about him, because he's one of mine. This year, he became a [Leader of the Pack](#). That's a very high honor for young people at State, and they're voted by their peers. That means he gets to represent them at nice events like homecoming and special occasions such as this.

Over the past year, he's also been president of the Society of African-American Culture, the largest African-American student organization representing all students at NC State. He also took the time out to become an Alpha during this very busy year. And not the very least of the things that he's done is that he has very, very recently won an election, and he is our president-elect for next year's Student Government Association. So I'd like to bring Harold Pettigrew, one of my darling students, up to welcome you from NC State.

**Harold Pettigrew:** Good morning, everyone. Now before I begin, I know I'm excited about being here, so I gotta just feel a little bit more energy now. So we're gonna try this one more time—maybe twice if it doesn't sound good—but good morning, everyone.

**Audience:** Good morning.

**Harold Pettigrew:** That sounds a lot better. Sounds a lot better. I'm very excited to be here. It's just amazing to see so much history in one place, to know that as a student, throughout my college career, I've read about the monumental figures that had visions some years ago, and to see that celebrated here today.

It's just amazing to me to see so many figures out here in the audience, to see so many figures this past week come back to Raleigh and talk about their experiences with creating a vision that ultimately became a reality, that ultimately helped me as an African-American student represent North Carolina State University, the largest public university in North Carolina. That's amazing.

Come here this morning and I'm thinking, well, what am I actually going to say? And I mean, there's going to be a lot of people here, a lot of experts here, and I don't have a degree yet, so I can't class myself as an expert quite yet. But I was wondering, you know, what actually could I get up here and say this morning?

I was thinking, well, what I can do is say how I've been impacted, how through my readings, how through my studies of all these figures, I've been allowed to be student body president. I'm allowed to go to NC State University. I'm allowed to work with the individuals at Shaw University to help bring this conference about.

I've had a wonderful experience at NC State—wonderful—and it does my heart dear in knowing that we're here today to celebrate the visions of a woman, of one woman, who had such an astounding vision that brought society together, that shaped things so that all of us could be here today, 40 years ago.

One of the things that I've learned in being a political science major is that a lot of things through history you have to truly understand to really see how things are today, to really know where you stand in the present. And not knowing the name of Ella Baker, I truly don't think you can know where you stand today. I know where I stand. A lot of people here, everyone here, you all know where you stand.

I'm not going to get up here and ramble too much because I don't want to feel like I'm giving a speech or going into a testimony or getting a church service started in here. But I would like to say on behalf of the students of North Carolina State University, on behalf of the administration and the staff—because I can speak on behalf of them now—I'd like to bring you welcome and just let you know that I'm very excited to be a part of this conference. Thank you very much.

**M. Iyailu Moses:** From where I'm sitting, I get to see you as you are coming in, as you are warmly embracing each other. I'm excited about this week, and just watching you enjoy meeting each other and greeting each other again lets me know the kind of spirit that was generated among you, and it's making me feel real good. I hope you're feeling real good too.

There are a number of announcements that I have to make before we move to the next session, but I wanted to ask you a question, and at the same time introduce some people to you who are here especially for this activity. Have you had a chance to rest lately? Have you rested in the last 24 hours? Have you had a chance to rest lately? What about last week or last month or in the past 40 years?

I think you're here because we all have one purpose, and that is that we all believe in freedom. Now I'm going to kick this off, but I'm going to ask these other people who are in the room to come on up and join me, because I know they can probably do this a lot better than I—the [Freedom Singers](#) are here with us, and they're just going to come on up as we let everybody know how we feel about this thing.

**Freedom Singers:** [singing]

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest.*

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.*

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest.*

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.*

**Freedom Singer:** Hey, listen, we all want to stand up and loosen up because we never started meetings like this. What I'd like to do before we do anything, I'd like to say a prayer. See, I believe in putting God in everything that we do, because he's the one that brought us over. See, so many stories have been told, but it's—it's so much—we need to just put God into it.

So, everybody just bow your head for just a minute. Father God, as we gather here in body and in soul and in peace, bless us right now. Bless those that are not able to come but in the spirit of—thinking of us right here, right now. This is a historical day. Bless us right now, my Father. In the name of the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit. Everybody say, Amen.

**Freedom Singers:** [singing]

*Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom*

*Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom*

*Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom*

*Hallelu (hallelu)*

*Hallelu (hallelu)*

*Hallelujah*

**M. Iyailu Moses:** Thank you. Now we feel warmed up and energized. I just have a few housekeeping notes. And I guess our panelists for the opening plenary can kind of begin to wind their way on down this way.

The registration room is next door. You can have an opportunity to take care of all of your registration needs once the first plenary session is over. We do have some shuttle buses who will be picking people up at hotels as soon as we can identify directly who's at which hotel.

Let me do that again, people in the back didn't hear me. Registration—next door. There's a registration packet. If you've already registered, there's a name card. Please don't lose the name card. That'll be your meal ticket on Saturday. You got your name and a little yellow dot on it.

Shuttles will be provided to go to the Holiday Inn, to the Hampton Inn, to the Club Hotel, to bring you here tomorrow. We didn't plan on doing it for those of you who are at the Sheraton. We understand there was some major mix-up at the Sheraton last evening. We do apologize. As soon as I get done here, I'm going to go see if we can figure out what that was all about. And we hope you can get settled in there today.

Some of you registered for the Peace Lunch Forum, which is going to be over at NC State. If we can get some sense of how many people that will be, we will have some shuttles here to take you over there. You can purchase your lunch at the Talley Student Center, which is where the activity will be held. And we will bring you back here for the afternoon sessions. The afternoon sessions will be at the Raleigh Convention and Civic Center. When you get your registration materials, you will have inside these sheets which have program information. Room locations will be listed at the Civic Center once you get there.

I think that's it for me. I'm done right now. We'd like to have the panelists for the opening plenary and the moderator for the opening plenary to please come on down. Thank you. Freedom Singers...

**Freedom Singers:** [singing]

**M. Iyailu Moses:** We're looking for Muriel Tillinghast, Connie Curry, Casey Hayden, Judy Richardson, and Brenda Travis.

Would those of you who are sitting in the rear of the room come on down? We don't have a mic that projects—this mic is for the benefit of the cameras—and if you would just come down a little more, I think we'll all be able to hear you.

**Muriel Tillinghast:** Good morning, brothers and sisters. My name is Muriel Tillinghast, and I've been asked to moderate this particular session. On this session, we're going to talk about Ms. Baker as a personality, and these four women will give testimony and analysis in terms of the impact of Ms. Baker on their individual lives and on the movement. Because, as we have been mandated, we're supposed to leave here with some fire in our bellies and pass it right along.

I think I should say, by virtue of my role as moderator, these women will appear in the order so listed: Connie Curry, Casey Hayden, Judy Richardson, and Brenda Travis. And upon their taking the stage, they will tell you about themselves, give you a little bit of history in terms of their role in the movement, and then proceed into what they wanted to present to you with regard to this particular segment of the conference.

I will say to you that Ms. Baker is a person that I met and with whom I spent a great deal of time, particularly towards the end of her life, because Miss Baker was a whirlwind at one point in her life. You simply left messages where she was supposed to be, and she picked up those messages and left other messages. That's how we functioned.

Ms. Baker's diary, as you will see—I think we're going to have an excerpt of the film—but if not, if you get a chance to see *Fundi [The Story of Ella Baker]*, you should grab it, because one of the telling aspects in there is Ms Baker's diary, which really reads like sort of an itinerant back road preacher in the [19]40s. In many ways, she was.

I will say this to you, and then I'm going to allow the persons to come forward as I indicated. We didn't believe we were developing a style. Many of the things that we did in SNCC were by consensus. They were by a great deal of thought, an awful lot of discussion and very deliberately done so that in many ways Ms. Baker—and I love the idea; I'm sure she's overwhelmed by the notion of becoming an icon at this stage of the game—but Ms. Baker did what she thought was right and fair on behalf of people.

And this is one of the things that we embodied in the organization—that when you had people move into a position where their lives could, in fact, be in jeopardy, the decision had to weigh on them. You could not coax them. You could not do anything but point out the measure of the stand that they had to take and the principles supporting those stands. And people, I will tell you, the stands are before you every day in every way. And with that, I will present the first person who will come before us today. And if I can find it quickly on this page, it will be Connie Curry.

You. You?

**Connie Curry:** Well, I just wanted to say that I had a—can you hear me Everett? I had a somewhat different relationship with Ella than a lot of the people who were in SNCC in the really early days. Ella was—as adult advisors to SNCC—Ella was a lot older than me. But because of our peer relationship, since we were both sort of advisors, I have always called her

Ella. And you'll find that throughout this conference, people—most people—call her Ms. Baker. I always called her Ella.

I first met Ella in Atlanta [GA] sometime between the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1 of 1960 and then that Easter weekend conference here at Shaw. And I want to just tell you a funny coincidence. I am from Greensboro, North Carolina, and I had just moved to Atlanta to work on this Southern Student Human Relations Project of the National Student Association, which was supposed to bring—remember now, this is 1960, when the world in the South was totally segregated—and we were supposed to bring Black students and white students together from college campuses to discuss things that would be of interest to both—to students who would even consider coming to an interracial meeting.

When I was at Agnes Scott College, I had to get permission from my parents to attend an integrated meeting. Agnes Scott is in Atlanta. But in any case, I'd gone up to Greensboro, North Carolina to move my stuff from Greensboro to Atlanta and I was riding down the street, and I heard on the radio, "[Four students from A&T College in Greensboro](#) are now seated at lunch counter stools at Woolworth's downtown."

Now, this is my hometown and although I may have read or understood that the NAACP had sponsored sit-ins early on in Oklahoma and other places, it didn't register to me. And I thought, golly, that is really, really a strange phenomenon.

I remember I went home and I was talking to my neighbor, and I think I was the only person that she'd ever known that had been going to interracial meetings. And she said, "Did you come to town and do that?" And I was credited for something that I had not even been aware of.

But anyway, I went back on down to Atlanta, and by the time I got back down there and settled in, the options for getting Black and white students in the same room to talk had just absolutely flown away. And the sit-ins were snowballing across the South—to colleges and universities, African-American colleges and universities all across the South. And the sit-ins changed so much, because all of a sudden students could do more than just talk about what segregation meant to their lives.

Now, that Easter came pretty soon after February the first, and we came up here for the founding conference. And it was incredibly exciting, that meeting here at Shaw at Easter of 1960. For me, it's sort of a kaleidoscope right now with very eloquent, energetic Black students from all over. Many of them are here today—Jim Lawson and Dr. King—and then, of course, Ella Baker with her voice that the sit-in movement was for more than a hamburger.

I've forgotten what hall we were in, but I'm going to go back and see it. I was lucky enough to find in my papers some of the recommendations that came out of that first conference in Raleigh, and I just wanted to read you a couple of them.

Down somewhat, it says, "Nonviolence is our creed, and the coordinating committee shall work out a definite statement. This conference recognizes the virtue of the movement and endorses the practice of going to jail rather than accepting bail."

Further on down, it says, "We identify ourselves with the African struggle as a concern of all mankind. We understand there's a possibility that President [Dwight] Eisenhower will make a visit to Africa this fall and agree that this is a desirable step. We feel that before going to Africa, the president should lend the prestige of his office to the solution of the racial problem in this country."

Sounds familiar, right? "And thus he shall be even better prepared for his visit to Africa." It goes on. So if some of you are interested in those early recommendations from SNCC, I do have them.

Then I want to read you the composition of that first meeting that I culled from the list of people here who were here. There were 21 students from seven high schools. There were 113 college students from 45 colleges. They were representing 11 states and Washington, D.C. There were nine students who had been already suspended and expelled—that was from Southern University in Baton Rouge [LA]. And I know Bernard Lee had been expelled from Alabama A&M. And the students that had been expelled or suspended got the full support of those of us who were here, and that was part of the statements that I was reading you earlier.

Then there were a lot of others who were not students, but I wanted to just tell you a few of the agencies. Of course, SCLC was here, the National Council of Churches, the National Student Christian Federation, National Student Association, the American Friends Service Committee, the Congress on Racial Equality—a lot of ministers who were supporting the students in those very early days.

Now, as I said, back in Atlanta after the meeting, when Ella and I were chosen advisors to the committee—I just want to tell you some of my sort of lasting memories that maybe give a little more about Ella on a personal basis.

I remember the interminable meetings in the back room of BB Beamon's restaurant on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, which is where we held the SNCC meetings. And I remember Ella waving the smoke away from in front of her face, or putting a Kleenex or handkerchief up in front of [her face]—because she was allergic to smoke.

Then at those meetings—it's fascinating in retrospect, because in the early days we had no idea what the sit-ins and the beginning of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were giving birth to. Because we discussed things like how to pay for a radio that supposedly a SNCC staff person in Albany, Georgia had taken from somebody's house they were staying in. And whether or not it was true, the issue was how do we pay for that radio? And it ranged everything from that all the way to whether we should adopt nonviolence as a strategy or as a way of life.

And there again, that was a hard and long debate, but I remember Ella specifically, because Ella's way in these meetings was to really let people sort of self-direct themselves and never tell us what the answer was or what we should be doing. Even though she had been with the NAACP, she had been a grassroots organizer all of her life practically, but she carried that right on through to us—as young as most people were—to really let people make their own decisions and learn by having to struggle through the issues. And she may have known the potential that was in that room a lot better than most of us did.

I also remember the segregated YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] cafeteria that was right down the street from the building where Ella and I were working—her in the YWCA office, the regional office, and me downstairs in the NSA [National Student Association] office. But we staged a two-person sit-in in the YWCA cafeteria down the street, with Ella announcing that she worked for the YWCA. And we just went through the cafeteria line and ate that first day in Atlanta.

Then I remember I had a red and white Karmann Ghia, which was the pride of my life. And I remember when we would get through work, we would get in my Karmann Ghia, and Ella would hold her hat while I speeded out to the Waluhaje, which was the one hotel and apartment place in Atlanta for both transients—and I think Ella thought she was in motion here—but she lived at the Waluhaje for many, many years.<sup>2</sup>

Then when we would get there, I would have a glass of scotch, and Ella would have a glass of bourbon, and then we both would have lamb chops. And that's all I remember—those details.

In the early days, I also remember that Ella brought [Jane Stembidge](#) down from the seminary in New York to be the quote, first executive secretary of SNCC. And I remember the three of us sitting in that tiny office in Atlanta on Auburn Avenue, and I remember that we laughed a lot.

And I also remember a lot of this in retrospect, because of the controversies you hear sometimes about SNCC being male-driven and sexist, and many of the other later things and judgments about SNCC. And I sit and I think about the three of us who were three women there behind the scenes, running the conference and organizing the first SNCC conference in October, and doing a lot of the work. That was before Jim Forman came.

Then, I also remember—Ella was a very personal—not advisor, exactly—but we were talking about personal things. And I remember I always used to get tickled, because she was always worrying about my being single. And I thought this was really interesting, because she was herself single. She always asked me what had happened between so-and-so and me, and I don't

---

<sup>2</sup> The Waluhaje Hotel and Apartments was a prominent African American-owned and operated establishment in Atlanta, Georgia, built in 1949 during the era of racial segregation. It served as one of the few upscale accommodations available to Black travelers, professionals, and civil rights leaders who were excluded from white-only hotels.

know what all that was about, but I always used to sort of marvel at her concern about my marital status.

Then the other thing is, the last time I saw Ella was about 25 years after we began everything. This was in the [19]80s, and it was in Atlanta, and she was staying at my house, and she was with Joanne Grant, and they were both staying there. And her mind was beginning to wander a little bit, and she was staying in my bed, and I had a cat named Herman's Brother. Don't ask me about why it was named Herman's Brother.

But anyway, the cat kept on getting up on Ella's bed, and she would caress the cat, and she kept on saying—and Joanne and I would get very tickled—she would say, "This is the blackest cat I have ever seen in my life." And then she'd call us there and say, "Look how black this cat is." And she'd say, "This cat reminds me of how black my grandfather was." And it was just—then she would start talking about where she grew up, in North Carolina.

But she was clear as a bell later on that night, when she was the main speaker at the American Civil Liberties Union dinner, and she told us once again, low those 25 years later, that we who believe in freedom cannot rest. And I have taken that along with my own luckiness at being involved in things since then.

But I often think of her now in the work that I'm doing in the criminal justice system. I think that probably the prison system and the funnel from Black kids being kicked out of school, put in special classes or in alternate schools, and then being siphoned off into the juvenile justice system, right from there into the adult prison system—knowing that a lot of it is recidivism. And in Georgia alone, where I live now, 70% of the people in the Georgia prisons are young Black males.

With the private prisons and other private things going on and with mandatory sentencing, with the death penalty, injustice and racial injustices, and just the whole gamut—you don't really know where to begin. But to me, this is sort of the continuing edge of the way that African-Americans have been treated since the days of slavery. And I just echo what Ella said about we cannot rest. Thank you.

**Casey Hayden:** Hi, I'm Casey Hayden. Can you hear me in the back? Oh God, I hate it when I have to talk loud, because it makes me nervous. Okay, can you hear me in the back now?

It's not a mic. I wish we could get a mic, a mic for these sessions, because it's really awkward to have to shout. Some of the information I have to share is sort of intimate, and I feel really uncomfortable shouting it. So, I do. I wish we could get a mic. Yeah, for now, I'll try to yell.

I first met Ella Baker at the second SNCC conference in Atlanta in October of 1960. Can you hear me in the back? She was at the registration table when I arrived, along with Connie and

Jane. I've always traced much of the character of SNCC, as well as my own sense of who I was within it, to that first impression of the organization as an integrated group of women. The SNCC of which I was a part was nurturing, warm, familial, supportive, honest, penetrating, radical, and pragmatic. I think of it as womanist. I see Ella in all of that. **CONTINUED IN PART 2.**