

SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Ella Baker discussion continued and general discussion (PART 3)

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

Comments:

Hank Thomas - Freedom Summer Volunteer

[Rev. James Lawson](#) - Nonviolence Theorist / SNCC Mentor

CONTINUED FROM [PART 2](#)

****NOTE:** The video continues with a gap. Some dialogue is missing at the beginning.**

Judy Richardson:...sensitivity training. One of the reasons that when I get on the staff of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, and we're doing all those police brutality

hearings in New York City, the reason I do a 10-page chronology of police brutality cases for the previous 10 years is because I knew what to do from SNCC. That training came to me. It's not because I dreamed it up. It's not because I knew it from knowing it myself.

And so what happens is that you realize the necessity for always having a factual base for the information that you're giving out so people just don't think that you're making it up.

Muriel Tillinghast: Yes, okay. Well, we have been—I've been told we're down to about a minute and a half at this juncture. So we'll entertain your question. Sir, go ahead, or your comment.

Audience Member: My question is as far as [indistinct] young Black male can go—what is going on, and I just want to figure out how—what would be the best way to see the past and take the past and bring it to the future? Because the struggle is not over.

We still have a long way to go [indistinct] they're being asked about in this time. Well, we're done. We don't need to work hard, we don't need to struggle, we don't need to do this, we don't need to do that. What attitudes did you all have at that age and made that condition so strong that you all changed?

Hank Thomas: I won't rant okay? The answer to that question—are you in school now or college? Get your degree. Okay. Today—let's take 40 years ago. How many of you here are students at Shaw now, in this room? Anybody?

Well, 40 years ago, if you were a student at Shaw about to get your degree next month, you would have had to scramble to get a decent job if you were not a teacher or going into a government agency. Today, that is not true. The unemployment situation here in the Raleigh area is one of the lowest in the world. All you need to do is to get your education. You step immediately into the middle class.

Everything you need to do—this is one of the things that's causing so much poverty within the Black community—is to stay with your family and take care of your family. The major cause of poverty in the Black community today—young Black males leaving their families and not taking care. So number one: get an education and you step immediately into the middle class.

Rev. James Lawson: I contest. Poverty is a consequence of racism...

Hank Thomas: Would you please? Would you please? Would you please? Would you please, sir?

Muriel Tillinghast: Okay, let him finish. Let him finish, and then we'll hear from you. Let him finish.

Rev. James Lawson: Most young Black males are already in poverty. Their behavior is a reaction to poverty and not the other way around.

Muriel Tillinghast: Okay, let me say two things. One is—Hey, Thomas. Hello, Reverend. About to have a SNCC meeting.

Rev. James Lawson: ...the system and then proceed to do what George Will does and Pat Robertson does—say it's only a few dysfunctional Black people who caused the problem in America. You're doing nothing but putting on a year 2000 definition of racism of 1850.

Muriel Tillinghast: Okay, first—excuse me, I'm the moderator—first, Hank, would you finish your comment? Thank you. And then we'll hear from other people. We may have to take another couple of minutes to round this one out.

Hank Thomas: Okay, thank you very much. I stand by what I said. Get your degree. Get your education. You step immediately into the middle class. The middle class—

[crosstalk]

Muriel Tillinghast: He hasn't finished. Reverend, we're going to hear from you, okay? But you are out of order, brother.

Rev. James Lawson: ...college degrees and they cannot find a stable job—

Muriel Tillinghast: I agree with you. I would agree with you. But this is not the way we're going to—this is not the way we're going to proceed. This is not the way we're going to proceed, brother. No. You are out of order. You are out of order. Brother, you are out of order. And I am not going to let you speak. Now I'm the moderator. Thank you. Go.

Hank Thomas: Okay, just to sum it up: get your education, take care of your family. And the last thing—in living legacy as far as I'm concerned. This is one man's opinion of what the Civil Rights Movement has done. It has expanded and literally, if you will, created the Black middle class.

Without a middle class—no group of people—without a middle class, no group of people makes progress. This country has been a magnet for those who come here hoping to get into the middle class. And that has happened.

In the 1960s and prior to us getting involved and knocking down these laws, we were not allowed as a people to enter the middle class. You go to college so that you can become a part of that middle class. You get an education.

I know the word middle class, unfortunately, has become a pejorative term for some folks. But folks, when you go to college, you don't get a degree so I can become a better poor person. You get a degree so that you can have a standard of living that is good, that you can support your family. And basically, this is what is happening today. And this is the legacy. This is the fruit of what we have done.

Muriel Tillinghast: Okay, Hank, I'm going to cut you off, and I'm going to close this one out. And I'm going to lay something out for the group, because we've been told we have to close.

Let me say this to you—that's Hank's opinion. That's not all of our opinions. And I want you to be clear about that.

I work in prisons every day, okay? I work with brothers who are coming in with a college education, etc. So I want you to know that while Hank is providing his viewpoint—and Hank was a part of us, and that's one of the things I want to say—that we always had room for everybody's opinion.

This is a very big world. There are millions of people that you hope to move. You're not going to channel everybody down the same highway. People are going on other highways. The point of the matter is: with the way that you are going to proceed in life—do you see the minefields? Are you in a position to make a decision that is on behalf of people?

Will you engage in things that are on the other side? Will you join the people who are enemies of the people? Do you understand what I'm saying? And these things are very problematic. And you can tell just from this brief entrée that there were differences. And there continue to be differences.

So I'm going to yield to the conference coordinator here who's asked us to close this session. Hopefully, we can take some of this fire on to the next level and try to get some more into this discussion. Brother, did you want to say something? Okay, sister, you go.

M. Iyailu Moses: Let me just echo what was just stated, and let me tell you something. As you take out your program pieces and take a look at them, there will be lots of wonderful opportunities for us to engage in these discussions—both formally, by means of the various workshop sessions that are planned, and also by means of the chat room, which we will have available.

The chat room is not the computer chat room—it's a room where you can enter, and there will be SNCC veterans who will be there, and they may or may not have similar opinions. In fact, they may have opposing opinions. And I think that would be a wonderful opportunity for young people to hear the varying opinions.

We don't want anybody to leave angry with anybody. Because—well, I won't say what my former ex-husband used to say about opinions and parts of the body—but we all have them. Yes Dr. Payne. You're trying to get my attention.

Charles Payne: I will suggest [indistinct]...use the first afternoon session in the chatroom to be specifically around these questions.

M. Iyailu Moses: Exactly. Let me then share with you some information that you don't have. If you have this piece of paper that says, "Thursday, April 13," please look down at the first thing—it's 11:30, lunch.

Some of you signed up to go to the Peace Lunch Forum, which will be over at NC State. It's there because that program is one that's been in place for many, many, many years. They do lots of wonderful things and bring various speakers in. Being a part of this celebration, they asked that they do their traditional program there. And so we're inviting you—those of you who've already signed up to go—to go over there.

What about your lunch? Well, it will be in the Talley Student Center, and you can purchase your lunch in the Talley Student Center. Or, if you happen to be on the second round of shuttles, you can get lunch from around here someplace. But be ready to get on the shuttle.

We will have shuttles provided for you to go over to NC State, and we will bring you back from NC State. That will take place between 11:30 and 1:00 PM.

Then, starting at 1:00 PM, when we come back, we will come back to the Raleigh Convention and Civic Center, which is across Wilmington Street. All right? It's right next door to the Sheraton Hotel. It's a part of that complex that's on the Fayetteville Street Mall. That's where the afternoon concurrent sessions will be held.

I'm going to read the sessions. I'm going to read the names of the persons who are going to be on those sessions, so somebody doesn't come up to me later and say, "Who's doing that?"

But I will tell you that I'm a teacher, and I only like to give instruction. I'm also a grandmother, and that's what I tell my grandchildren all the time. I'm going to tell you one time

Judy Richardson: Is this printed anywhere for the panelists even?

M. Iyailu Moses: Unfortunately, it isn't. Now, let me just try and explain what happens when you try and do something like this, and you've got bits and pieces coming from all around the country. We don't all get it all when we need to have it all so that it can be concise. But we're going to work with it. We're going to help as much as we possibly can. We're going to try and do something special for the panelists, because I know they're going to be concerned about it.

But for the benefit of everyone else, right now I'm going to read out who's doing what, and the room numbers that you can look for when you go to the Civic Center.

Okay, starting—yes, yes. Brother Payne, let's have a meeting. There's been a proposal. We don't have enough people for a variety of sessions when we do the concurrent sessions. Given the number of people who have registered—they must be somewhere. What do you want to do? What do we want to do?

Charles Payne: [indistinct]

M. Iyailu Moses: I hear motions to go forward.

All right. 1:00 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.—

“Emerging Scholarship on Ms. Ella Baker and Grassroots Organizing.” The moderator is Joanne Grant. The panelists are Hassan Jeffries, Abigail Lewis, and Barbara Ransby. That will be held in Room E2.

There will be a film—*Eyes on the Prize*—a segment of *Ain't Scared of Your Jails*, with discussion, actually— Dr. Payne? Charles Payne? *Ain't Scared of Your Jails*, the film. We're on the second panel—the film *Ain't Scared of Your Jails*—is that going to be shown today or just discussed today?

Today, right? Okay. Where are we showing the film? Okay, all right. That'll be in Room E3. Something's a little bit different about that for me.

The third one is: “SNCC Culture: What Held Us Together.” Gosh, and it must have been a lot of talking, and dialoguing, and arguing, and getting points across. All right, we're going to stay together. [Ivanhoe Donaldson](#), [Jim Forman](#), Judy Richardson, and [Charles Sherrod](#) are on that panel, and that will be in Room E4 in the Civic Center.

The fourth session: “Black and White: Together or Separate?” Panelists are Joan Browning, Martha Norman—if she gets here, she's driving down—Muriel Tillinghast, and [Bob Zellner](#). That will be in Room E5.

“Organizing: The Mississippi Experience.” Panelists are Sam Block, Lawrence—Is it Guyot or Guyot?—Mary Lane, and Wazir Peacock. That will be in Room D3.

No, he said D as in David. D for David. Three. The first one was E, as in Elephant. Time now is 3:00 to 4:45—

“Telling Our Story: Women in the Movement.” *We Who Believe in Freedom: Deep in Our Hearts*—book authors. We didn’t get their names, so I can’t tell you who all those folk are, but that will be in Room E2.

“Teaching the Movement: What Do Students Learn from It?” John Dittmer, Martha Norman, [Cleveland Sellers](#)—that will be in Room E3.

“Teaching the Movement Through Music.” Song leaders: [Bettie Fikes](#)—that booming voice—[Sam Block](#), [\[Willie\] Wazir Peacock](#), and Bill Perlman. That will be in E4.

“Group-Centered Leadership: What Did We Learn in the [19]60s?” [Charlie Cobb](#), [MacArthur Cotton](#), Casey Hayden—Room E5.

“Where Are We Today? Issues of Race, Justice, and Peace” James Lawson, Charles Sherrod—Room D2, David Two.

Another film: *Freedom on My Mind*. And the discussion following that is [Victoria Gray \[Adams\]](#). That will be in Room D3. D like David. D like David.

Okay, the research committee room will be announced, because it’ll have to be one of the rooms that you are exiting from. So find me, and we’ll have that taken care of for you by that time. I might as well continue with the rest of what’s here for Thursday, so that you can just note that right now—

Dinner break is on your own. Moore Square’s right up the street, and other nearby restaurants. I’m coming back. At 7:00, here in Estey Hall, the showing of *Fundi*, with a discussion following that.

“Miss Ella Baker: Developing Grassroots Leadership.” The moderator is Dr. Willie High, and the panelists are Joanne Grant, Charles Sherrod. That will be here in this room. I see some hands. Yes?

Audience Member: Just a point of information. This weekend is a shutdown of the IMF, World Bank, WTO, too. There are two buses going from North Carolina—one from Chapel Hill through Washington from UNC Chapel Hill, one going from Durham—the students from Central and Duke.

We leave on Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., respectively. So many of us will not be able to participate in the big day on Saturday. So I really take an issue with the path—go to lunch now, have a schedule [indistinct]. Is it possible for us to continue this discussion for those who want to do that?

M. Iyailu Moses: Sure, it is. Yes and I was going to say that

Audience Member: There are some great stories being told. It would be great to hear some of those other stories. I'd like to tell my shape of the story too.

M. Iyailu Moses: I agree with that totally. And that was going to be my final statement—that if anybody was obliged to stay here and converse, you may continue to do so. Again, that's why we tried to provide the chat rooms, so that these kinds of discussions could go on in those places, and the rest of the program could continue. I see another hand—

Audience Member: Can you tell me the room where the chatroom is going to be?

M. Iyailu Moses: The Board Room—yes, in the Civic Center. Please enter the Civic Center from the Wilmington Street side. There is some major conference going on where people are entering the South Street side, and they have security, so you will not be allowed in that entrance. Please enter the Civic Center from the Wilmington Street side.

[CUTS OFF AND GOES TO VIDEO OF BREAKOUT CONFERENCE - GO TO PAGE 9]

SNCC 40th Workshop: “Black and White: Together or Separate?”

Panelists:

Joan Browning - Freedom Rider, civil rights activist

[Muriel Tillinghast](#) - SNCC Field Secretary

[Bob Zellner](#) - SNCC Field Secretary

[Hollis Watkins](#) - SNCC Veteran

****NOTE:** The video continues with a gap. Some dialogue is missing at the beginning.**

Joan Browning: ...he bought all the tickets [indistinct] which was nine tickets. One person had to be the observer, and of the eight people who were likely—who were to subject themselves to arrest—he wanted it to be four white and four Black.

And so we had Bob [Zellner], who was white, and Tom Hayden, and a wonderful redheaded, bearded Dane—a writer from Denmark—

Bob Zellner: [indistinct] Larson.

Joan Browning: And my boyfriend at the time, Bill Humphreys, wanted to be the fourth white person, but he was at Georgia Institute of Technology on an Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] scholarship, and he knew that life was going to be really miserable for him if he went on a Freedom Ride and were arrested. So it's almost an accidental history [that] I had the right skin color to be an [Albany Freedom Rider](#).

I echo what you've heard from Charlie. Hollis and Charlie have talked about regional issues having an influence almost as strongly as racial issues. I was a Southerner, and I felt a little intimidated about 1963 when all these brilliant northern people started coming down—much more articulate than I ever could aspire to be. So I understand a little of that regional sensitivity.

As a white person, I knew that I—particularly as a white woman—because understand now, that white supremacy is based on the fact that the elite white men in the South wanted to be sure they passed on their property to their heirs. And the way that they could do that is they had to be sure that babies born to white women were their progeny.

So white women were captured and, you know, and dealt with. There were a lot of ways of dealing with that, including becoming a white supremacist yourself. But in any way, white women were a special target of the plan from the [19]20s on. People don't generally know it, but some white women were lynched—particularly white women who crossed the racial lines.

So I knew that being a white woman brought a lot of new wrath—more wrath than might otherwise be in place—in demonstrations and in the movement.

And for that reason, I was—and others—I was really anxious to be told what to do. I never aspired to be a leader. I didn't think I had the smarts to know how to conquer the kinds of situations that my family and others in the South had created. I was delighted to be a part of SNCC and a part of those times.

And even today, as I work for the kinds of things—and I'm a local person. I have a major case of "local personatus." I can only do it interracial. I live in a place that's only 5% minority, but I cannot work in a group that's not interracial—even today. And I would really hope that you young people find it uncomfortable to do that too.

Muriel Tillinghast: With regard to what I thought we were going to talk about, I thought that we were, in fact, going to not just talk about what happened then, but that we would also try to project into the current situation.

And perhaps you've spent enough time visiting the past, so I will speak to what I think young people ought to be thinking about doing, and how I work with—and I've tried to continue to work with—young people.

First of all, because as an aging—I'd like to say revolutionary—but sort of an aging, angry progressive, I'd like to keep in with young people for several reasons. One, because they keep you young. Their ideas are fresh. They are new. They have a higher level of energy. So an 18- to 20-hour day is not an impossible day for them.

And in that regard, I work with a group in Boston that's called Center for Campus Organizers. I encouraged you to be a part of that group before, and I'd like to talk to you later. And I also work in prisons, where I see a lot of young people.

And one of the things that occurred to me—and I've often thought about SNCC, because it was a life-transforming process—is that in some cases, we did not recognize or appreciate our place in history. This morning, I indicated that we did see ourselves moving the earth. That's a lonely spot to be in and you have quite a bit of weight on you, and it's singular.

When I say that most of us in SNCC used SNCC as a family base, because those other people had now divorced themselves for one reason or another—either they thought we had lost our

minds or that we would engage in something for which they may ultimately have to answer. So we clung to each other pretty tightly.

The point, however, is that we did not transition well to the next forces to come in. There were efforts on the part of SNCC to reach out laterally to the [Black] Panthers—and that's a whole other story. There was an effort to develop white organizing, but that went off half-cocked, in my viewpoint, because of what happened within SNCC. I don't think that it had a good transition.

And then we also issued a [statement on Palestine](#), which alienated most of the Jewish people. So then we were financially strapped—being basically right in a lot of ways and advanced in a lot of ways, but never having really sort of laid the groundwork.

Of course, at the same time, COINTELPRO [Counterintelligence Program] was wreaking havoc with us. So, you know—but you can't have it both ways.

COINTELPRO was the government intelligence program, which was an infiltration. It was really the equivalent of a buy-and-bust, only this time intellectually infiltrate and kill if you have to do it physically, okay, but you just confuse them all right—we'll go with that if you can. What's the word—there's a high-level disinformation issue.

And I worked in the finance office. I have to tell you how I heard this story. I was in the finance office of SNCC, and we used to hear a lot of stuff. And one time, [James] Forman got a phone call from somebody. Because when you do good things, there's always a little birdie. It may not be a big bird, may not be the eagle you want, but you can find a canary every so often.

We got a call from Washington or from a source that was well placed that essentially said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have now had a meeting, and they have made a decision—and you will have to go.

And part of that was in terms of that internationalism that I began to talk to you briefly about this morning—that you're just getting too big for your britches. We can't fathom you. We can't control you. We don't know which way you're going. And you're asking some pretty fundamental questions along the way.

A lot of what we were about was—people talk about Blacks and whites—we had Asians. We had all kinds of people who were in SNCC. We had gays, non-gays. We had a few heroin acts. We had a few people from every walk of life. And one of the things that we were was a place where whatever your past was, we tried to be able to transform you into something else. That we worked together as sort of a catalyst in that process.

Having said all that, one of the things that I've spent some time thinking about is: what happens when the intellectual head of a movement dies? Because that's what happened to SNCC in many

ways. We spent a lot of time reading and a lot of time trying to plow the land in front of us. But as I said, we had no back troops. Our own physical situation was one of exhaustion.

I gave you an idea of that kind of extreme strain. I didn't tell you about people who could not stay in the same place for more than 12 hours because they were being looked for by dogs and anything else walking—that it was open season on shooting them.

And this was not always the case, but it was enough of a case for people to understand that you could not really get settled wherever you were. If you were not in the middle of either a major, cultural redefinition—I'll use that to say for the White Citizens Council and all other kinds of things—then you were going to be the recipient of somebody who was coming out of that. And you had to be ready to move to be of assistance.

SNCC, in many ways to me, was the intellectual leadership of the movement. It spawned a lot of the thought, and people were willing to go out and to develop those ideas and make them happen.

Having the intellectual leadership of this operation walk itself down in what I consider internal racialisms was a real step to the rear. As far as I was concerned—wasn't a part of it, always spoke against it, and cared.

And there were times where our leadership was really not under a collectivity, if I could just say it that way—that it was more singular. So people set up a singular style, and they went. That was, as far as I was concerned, a direction that did not have everybody on board with it. But be that as it may, that's history, and that is what has happened.

I believe too that the world has to be—you have to live in the present. And for the organization that you work with—you want it to look like the group of people that you want to live with. There's no such thing as “moving, and I'm going to do it down the line.” You may not have down the line. All you have is today.

And so the people that you work with, the people you respect, the people that you cohabit with, the people that you swap lives with, etc.—are the people around which you should surround yourself in your current situation.

I encourage people to not just look at what we did historically, but to look at where you are in your classes. It's to make your classroom work serious. To start doing research where it counts. I mean those silly little research projects or whatever—you can turn it—you can make it politically right. You can raise the questions in class.

You should be—everything in the bibliography—ace out of the professor—and turn the class around on him or her and say, “And what about so-and-so? And what about so-and-so?” So that you have dealt with the class. That's a basic.

The leadership of the 21st century has got to be technologically capped. You just can't be angry, and you just can't be cross-eyed. You've got to have technology. You've got to be able to finesse and work with people. You've got to be able to negotiate, and you need to be able to walk from a prison cell to a corporate boardroom in the same breath, and be able to move both of those parallels together and come out with something that's common.

You're constantly synthesizing. You're constantly raising the correct questions—not the questions that get pushed necessarily, because you will find special interests is very apt at changing and massaging what you said.

And with your responsibility—I find that northerners, for example, when they organize, try to organize on a union kind of model. You have a particular interest with me, I'm trying to work this with you. The nature of human rights is much broader than that.

Everybody—white people—ought to recognize that racialism and racism has worked to their detriment. And that's hard to explain to white people who feel like at this juncture the world is their oyster. But spend some analysis in terms of reversing what is considered a normative—so that you can, in fact, have new information, new perspectives to bring. That's kind of it.

Bob Zellner: For me, it's wonderful to hear such good sense, such good sense, and so clear. To me, it's clear—maybe I know, I think we all know enough to know that what you're talking about is very good.

Joan Browning: I'm a little puzzled also about—what was the slogan for today? Okay, good. Well, they're all relevant. But every seminar, every session was the same.

Bob Zellner: You have different things to say at different ones. I did do a little bit of thinking beforehand, which I generally don't. I just bounce off the things that are going. I see some of my students here also—Natalie and Jeff for sure—anybody else? So if you've heard it all before, just say, hey, you're going over the same stuff again.

I did a little thinking, and I looked back at what Clayborne Carson said in one of the editions—maybe the last edition—to *In Struggle*. And he said—he put it very simply—he said that around the middle [19]60s, sometime after [19]64, SNCC and to a large extent the civil rights movements in the South gave up three terrific weapons that they had used to very good effect.

They gave up—basically—Amen, join us. We are discussing today, “White and Black Together or Separate.”

But Clayborne Carson, in the introduction to his book, posed the question—and first the problem and then a question. He said, around the middle [19]60s, the SNCC and the movement gave up three tremendously potent weapons that had gotten them a long distance.

Grassroots community organizing—because basically, we did a pullout of Mississippi. And part of the rationale for that was, we produced local leadership, we work ourselves out. So we had a rationale for that. But basically, it was a pullout and a secession, for at least a long time, on a nationally organized level of doing grassroots community work—where you burrow into the community, develop ties that Muriel was talking about.

The other was that they gave up, in a large measure, nonviolent direct action. Nonviolent direct action was still used in some cases and so forth, but basically it was not the third—one of the three strong arrows in the quiver anymore.

And thirdly, basically gave up interracial work, which—in terms of SNCC—had been part of the keystone of what we had always talked about. Because we realized, I think very early on, maybe under the leadership of Ella Baker and others, that you're never going to reach a time when everything is the way you want it and it's going to stay that way.

We learned that struggle is a constant struggle. And therefore, whatever society that you want in general, you should have that society for yourself. And part of that beloved community was [indistinct].

One of the things that's happened in the history and the telling of the story in the last 25 and 30 years is that a lot of times that has been overlooked or underplayed to such an extent—let me stand up here—it's been underplayed to such an extent that many people don't realize that the early movement was quite well integrated.

And that some people are aware of a few of us who did certain things, but in a lot of ways, the movement was very integrated. Now, the question that Clayborne Carson asked after saying they gave up those three weapons—he said, “What took the place of those weapons”—in the book. And that is a question that I've heard him pose. I've never heard a thorough investigation of that question.

If we're going into nationalism, if we're going into all of those elements that had—if you're a dialectician—you believe that they have positive and negative aspects. Part of the reason for giving up the grassroots community work and the nonviolent direct action and the interracial work together was the move toward the nationalist point of view.

That, to me, is the period that we're still in. We have not yet answered those questions. We have not yet really had a thoroughgoing examination of it and said, “Okay, if in fact we've given up those weapons, how do we—and do we need to—take them up, along with what other weapons?”

Number one is, we always talk about biracial—Black and white—and now it's not a question of biracial Black and white. It's multiracial. It's multicultural.

And the kind of organizing that many of us are doing today—for instance, last night I conducted a nonviolent workshop in Southampton, New York—and this was after five people had been arrested and injured, some of them quite severely.

I was beaten up by the state troopers—[injured] my right arm. And I made a pledge to myself that I'm going to do this—as hokey as it is—because the report from the New York State Police and everybody is that: no injuries. Five people were arrested.

And if you'll look at my two arms—this arm right here is so severely dislocated, it'll never actually be the same again. This is after the arm's basically healed—ripped open with tendons and everything. They train these cops, by the way, to concentrate now on soft tissue and on joints. They don't break the major bones that's going to show up in an X-ray.

They broke my left leg in the knee. Broke my arm in the elbow. They also knocked my jaw out of place, which had been knocked out of place before, a number of times. And now I have some kind of TMJ [Temporomandibular Joint injury].

But anyway, what we're talking about basically is something that is still happening today. I mean, this is a Shinnecock reservation.¹ We have so many situations, and when those cops started beating me—first of all, they dragged me over behind cars—four, five of those cops beat me, working on my joints. They broke this arm twice, and then when they put me in the paddy wagon, they slammed the door on that arm.

I mean, I have never, ever had such excruciating [pain]. And [in] nonviolence you're supposed to be cool, right? The kid was screaming. You know, I was 60 years old, and since then, I've had a birthday. I'm 61 years old. My bones are not that resilient anymore

But what I'm saying is, we're still doing the same thing. We're so trained that when the situation developed, we just go there and do it. But y'all gonna have to do it now, because we gettin' too old. We shouldn't even spring back right away.

I debated whether or not to bring my walking stick, because I remember Danny Lyon had something temporarily wrong with him. He brought his walking stick, and I—ever since then, I've been thinking about, poor Danny—walking—really getting old.

But anyway, what I'm talking about is, what is it going to take? How are we going to get back together? And are we going to say—can we get that back together without really dealing with the time?

And a lot of times we approach it—we don't really deal with it. Maybe there were some mistakes made. Obviously SNCC went out of existence in terms of an organization. SNCC never died in

¹ The Shinnecock Indian Nation is a federally recognized Native American tribe based in Southampton, Long Island, New York, with ancestral roots going back over 10,000 years on the East End of Long Island.

terms of the spirit. In fact, they might have done us a favor in that—we were going to be like—who was it that they shot—Big Bill and everything—Bill Haywood, right? Yeah. And he was always going to be around wherever there was struggling. So at least that's what we're doing.

But what I want to tell you is that we need to tighten it up. We've got a lot of things right there in Southampton now. They're less embarrassed about being racist and beating up people in Southampton now than they would be in Southampton, Virginia. Southampton, Virginia—that would be all over the news. But they can beat up Indian activists and Indian community people and world Asian activists up in Southampton.

And you know what they do? They do put it in the *New York Times*—in the Long Island edition. They put it in *Newsday* in the Long Island edition. If it gets in anything else other than the Long Island edition, [or] gets in the Metro section of the *New York Times*—they don't even put it so that the Indian activists in the northern part of the states can do it.

But [Danny Lyon](#)—you know that Danny's working on a book now on American Indian activism—and he says that around the reservations and all the places, they're looking at what's happening in Shinnecock. And I'm wondering—how is the information getting out?

We do have a movement grapevine and everything. So I'm just telling you that what happened then is really basically the same things that we're still faced with now. And so we're having to go through a whole new process of organizing people, getting them together, and talking about that situation of jail—and also the situation of allies.

Because in the situation with the Shinnecoeks, there's a tradition of being very close, very dignified, very secretive. And now they're reaching out for allies—not only among other Native activists, but also in the white community.

And I've been appointed the—what is it—co-chair of the Anti-Bias Task Force in Southampton. And they made a mistake. I know they didn't know that this was going to happen. But never appoint an old activist to some kind of town position—because they expect that you're going to be respectable and deferential and everything like that. But we have a habit of calling things like they are.

First of all, we did something that was symbolic. The town has a seal, and it's a big white Pilgrim—you know, big white Pilgrim with a rock over one shoulder and a big three-mast schooner over the other shoulder. And we don't even have a Plymouth Rock and the Mayflower in Southampton. But they using all this imagery, right? So we made a modest proposal that we would change that.

And the vitriol that came out in the papers. “Who is this guy? Where’d you come from? Who is this—Jew Zellner? He’s only been here—I bet he’s only been in this country 20 years”—and all this—messing with our seal and everything like that.

So then we said, okay, we’ll make a deal with you. You keep the white man. But let’s have some hiring in town. Because now we have about a third of this town of Southampton is minority—people of color: Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans.

In the 338 people hired by our town in Southampton, 19 are people of color. One is an American Indian. And in the school, which gets 8 to 12 million dollars a year, there is one Native American hired in the school. That is incredible. And they have had an affirmative action plan in place since 1979.

So when we begin to find out those things, we had to tell the truth. And then pretty soon, we had people marching on Town Hall. We had people standing behind the town board with signs saying, “Shame on the Board,” and people taking pictures of the board and the people. And there’s that pilgrim, up there.

But we started joking about the Pilgrim. We thought, well, maybe we can demystify...do you know why the pilgrim’s pants always fall down? Because he has the buckle on his hat.

So the last thing I’m saying. My point is that if we try to do the organizing that we’re doing now at Southampton College, in the town and everything, on the reservation—if we try to do that without having all races of people together, and Black and white working together—boy, it would be ridiculous. We could not do it.

So, especially getting ready for the world that we’re in now. With globalization and everything, the mechanization, learning all this stuff about computers and everything—we are old to learn that. That’s so natural to you guys.

We can’t even talk about being—we can talk about nationalism. We can talk about those feelings. We can talk about the positive aspects of that. But in terms of working together and making a movement, we have to constantly change our ideas about doing it—multiculturally, multiracially, multinationally, and all those ways. That means Black and white have to work together. Thank you.

Joan Browning: We don’t actually have a moderator. So, Hollis, you’re in the center.

Bob Zellner: Did everybody see the movie, by the way?

Hollis Watkins: Which one?

Bob Zellner: *Freedom Song*. Hollis is one of the main characters in the movie—

Teresa Del Paso: I want to raise another aspect of it. I'm Teresa Del Paso, and I worked with SNCC—first in Wisconsin as a support person, spreading the word in Wisconsin and in the student community, and then through a larger community—about the summer project, about what was happening in the South.

At that time when I first started doing that, I was stunned to find out that most white people didn't know that Black people couldn't vote in the South. There was a lot of educating to be done. Then the summer project [referring to [Freedom Summer](#)] came along, and I want to raise the question about [that]—we talk a lot about the community organizing of SNCC, but there was also another side of SNCC which was sometimes in conflict with this idea and sometimes not, and that was reaching the larger national community.

The debate then—and that has always gone on—was that the recognition was that unless white people were also targeted the way Black people were being targeted, there was not going to be any concern about what was happening to Black people in Mississippi. And that it was this—I would call this the approach that was targeted at the national politics of the country, as opposed to community organizing.

And in fact, it was true, because when the summer project happens, and all those people came from all over the country, and their parents became interested, their churches became interested in what happened in Mississippi, the local television stations where they were were interested in what happened in Mississippi. For the first time, the community organizing that had been going on in the South was now getting support from the national political scene.

And I, for one, don't think that the gains that were made by the movement would have ever been possible if it had not been for that pulling together of both the grassroots organizing and the national attention, and the spread out of that that then had influence on the anti-war movement, the women's movement, and all the kinds of things that followed from that.

This is a subject that I—when the stuff started to happen in SNCC, where the nationalism became a reality, to me it was just something I kind of expected to happen. I knew about it as a historical phenomenon, and I had seen it in northern situations, and I kind of expected it.

And I think that we have seen the results of this. We've seen 30 years of results of it, which is very splintered. And we have people constantly duplicating their efforts. You've got the groups that are lobbying with conditions, situations in prison. You've got people lobbying about the environment. You've got people lobbying about local political—you've got people arguing about the distribution of income for schooling and education, all those kinds of things.

And what we've all been doing—what I feel for years—is like we're all spinning our wheels, the same wheel. Where everybody's out there working over the same issue, rather than working in a coordinated effort.

Because somehow we lost that track at that point in the [19]60s. I'm one who just accepts that that had to happen, because somehow that is like the history that this country is saddled with. That's the outcome of slavery. That its impact was so deep and so divisive that people would, in fact, just as you say, give up the most successful weapons they had and go off in another track.

I think also that we've seen from the FBI files that have been released, and the COINTEL stuff and all of that, that there was a tremendous effort to direct it at SNCC, to foster this kind of divisiveness, and to kind of set people against each other, et cetera.

And I think that what Bob says is absolutely right. As we go into this next century—for the people who are coming up now, I just don't see that there can be—to me it almost seems ludicrous that we're still discussing the subject. That it's so self-apparent that unless people with the same interests, whether they're Native Americans, whether they're African-Americans, whether Italian Americans, or whatever, can be unified and work together in coalitions, I just don't see how there could be any success for anybody.

Hollis Watkins: I'm sure you've learned from this: never bring a bunch of us together, but we do all the talking. One or two, if you want to ask a question. You have a question?

Audience Member [Billy]: Okay, wow. So hey, I'm Billy, and I'm a white kid, in case folks are wondering. Just to start from there. I'm having a hard time trying to frame what I'm trying to say. I'm understanding the stuff about, yeah, we got to build multi-racial coalitions and things like this, right? That makes sense to me.

But I'm really struggling with this, because another thing is, for example, I work with a youth organization, and defining young people as 18 and under, right? And so we're trying to build this organization where people 18 and under run their own organization.

So from that perspective, I understand this whole deal of racial separation as far as the work that we do, on some level. Not to say that those young people shouldn't collaborate in coalition with other people, right? But they got to run their own organization. I understand that.

And also I'm really, really curious, right? Because I haven't lived in the suburbs that I grew up in in some time, in a number of years. And I'm not particularly excited to go back there, but I understand that—who's going to organize white suburb folks? The white suburban kids.

And so I'm really, really, really curious to see what that really looks like. You know what I mean? Like, yeah, it's ideal if we can figure out a way to bring this all together, right? Most of the world's people are not benefiting from the system, so we should work together to overthrow it, right? But what does white organizing look like? No, but really. I guess that's my main question: like, what does white organizing really look like and how does that work?

Because this is an important question, because I do realize that a lot of this stuff of dismantling racism—you folks are coming from a really unique position, right? You're coming from a history of where the white folks that were involved were involved in a Black-led organization, right?

That's not the reality of most of the white organizations that exist today. Most of the organizations with white folks in it at this point were started by white people with a vision by white people, dominated by white racist culture. You know what I mean? And all these kinds of thing and that's just very different.

Bob Zellner: First Jimmy, and then you.

Jimmy Rogers: My name is Jimmy Rogers, and I worked with SNCC in bloody [Lowndes](#) and Macon County, Alabama. I've worked principally in Alabama. I started working with SNCC in 1965. And the thing that most people don't realize—or they don't talk about—the only civil rights workers in Lowndes County that got killed were white, at least during the time that I was there.

The first one was Viola Liuzzo, who was the wife of a union official from Detroit [MI] who came down to the Selma to Montgomery march. And she was transporting people back and forth from Montgomery to Selma and whatnot. And in the middle of the night, she was riding with a Black man and Klan just—

The next one was Jonathan Daniels, who worked with SNCC in Lowndes County. And one Saturday, we decided that we would go to a town called [indistinct]. This was me and Jonathan [indistinct]. The local people, they were very disturbed because when Black people went to this one restaurant, they had to go to the back window to get served. You couldn't go inside, you know [indistinct] you weren't allowed in the restaurant.

So that Saturday, we got arrested. I think there was something like 15 of us or so—13 Black and two white. Well, two weeks before that time, I happened to be in Hayneville City Hall, and this man walked up to Jonathan Daniels and he said, "I can understand why he's here, but I don't understand why you carpetbagging Yankees are coming down here. And I've got a gripe with Black folks. We gonna get you."

And sure enough, two weeks later, we had the demonstration. We were arrested and put down. We stayed in jail for a week. We got out the next week. He walked to the store that we were all used to going to. The people in there were always very nice to us. But on this day, there was a guy standing inside the store with a shotgun. And when he walked up, he just blew him away.

And I don't have any idea—I mean, I don't have any doubt—that the reason why he got shot was because he was white.

And to sum it up, what I'm trying to say is, during that time, I think that a white person working in Lowndes County or Macon County had much more of an impact than Black people going around registering people to vote.

Joan Browning: I wanted to speak to this young man's question, to tell you how I'm using some of the best that SNCC developed—not that I did—but the best SNCC ideas to do—to work with white young people.

I'm part of a project called Education for Liberation. And my assignment is to take Charlie Cobb's concept of [Freedom Schools](#) and see if there's something there—a model there—to use to teach white young people that in giving up what they perceive as white privilege, they will actually be much enriched and gain from that. And that's a tough assignment, Charlie. And if you have any ideas—but I'm ready for it.

I think it's my job to talk to—I thought it was always my job to talk to white people. I never thought that Black people had anything to learn from me, except perhaps that there's not—that all white people are not uniform.

But my job is to explain—try to figure out a way to explain to white people that their—that white society or Black culture—European culture—has played its hand. It's done its thing. It's been dominant for a long time. There's nothing new or—(AUDIO ENDS) **CONTINUED IN PART 4.**