

# SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Remembrance of the First Meeting Organizing SNCC

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Date: April 2000

Location: Raleigh, NC - Shaw University

## Host:

[Chuck McDew](#) – Founding Chair of SNCC and early student organizer

## Prayer:

[Charles Sherrod](#) – SNCC Field Secretary / Leader in the Albany Movement

## Speakers:

[Ivanhoe Donaldson](#) – SNCC Organizer / Innovator in community organizing and political strategy

[James Lawson](#) – Nonviolence Theorist / Influential mentor to SNCC

Vincent Harding – Historian / Civil Rights Activist and Speechwriter for MLK

**Comments:** [Lawrence Guyot](#) – SNCC Organizer / Chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

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**\*\*NOTE:** Video begins with remarks already in progress. \*\*

**Chuck McDew:** Before I introduce Brother [Charles] Sherrod, I want to welcome you all to the Shaw [University] campus and the 40th reunion of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

When we met here—40 years ago, when I came from Orangeburg, South Carolina State at an invitation of Miss [Ella Baker](#) to attend the conference with Dr. Martin Luther King, that we went to our campus advisor, Reverend McCollum, in Orangeburg, and asked whether or not we should go.

Reverend McCollum said, “I don't know about Luther King, but if Ella Baker said go, there's no question about whether it's going to be a wonderful time.”

And we came here and started the seeds of the Beloved Community, and found then that—one of the most tremendous experiences that any of us ever had, because we found that we chose to love each other and care for each other.<sup>1</sup>

And it was the greatest love and friendships that we've ever known. Some of us have been in and out of various marriages and unions, and still know that the SNCC family was the greatest family we ever had because we chose to love each other. And now we've chosen to come back, and it's so wonderful to see you all here, because Lord knows, we didn't know that we would be here.

And the many times we sang, *“This may be the last time, this may be the last time, it may be the last time, I just don't know.”*

But now, while we are here, let us celebrate the love and caring and respect that we have for each other—the old wounds and differences—let us put aside, and realize that we came together and chose to be together and struggle together and laugh together and sing together and love one another, and let us celebrate that. Let us remember what keeps us and kept us together, and forget about those times that tore us apart.

When we were doing that movie *Freedom Song*, I remember some of the outside observers—I remember the director said this strange thing. He came into his movie and found a community of people. People who didn't even like each other, loved each other.

And that love of each other was what held us together all these years, and let us keep that foremost in our mind as we spend these few days deliberating and exchanging ideas and planning for the future.

Now, 40 years ago when I came here, one of the first people I met was a young ministerial student. There were all these—I thought the whole future of the church was gathered here in Raleigh, and it was in his fine hands, because one of the first young ministerial students I met, before I met all those Nashville [TN] people, were the Virginia people.

And Charles Sherrod was the first person I met from another campus and, of course, was one of the [founding members of SNCC](#) and has been in the storm all these many years. Sherrod was one person who left, went to Albany [GA], and is still there. I saw Sherrod about three years ago at the dedication of the Albany Civil Rights Museum, and he said, “Mr. Chairman, can I come back to Atlanta now?”

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<sup>1</sup> The “Beloved Community” represents a vision of a just, inclusive society rooted in love, nonviolence, and shared human dignity, central to the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement.

Brother, the struggle is continuing now, and you are doing a wonderful job. Sherrod is going to lead us in devotion. Charles.

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**Charles Sherrod:** Thank you. You know I can't do anything easy. From this pew, I'm asking you to make a circle from here. I'm asking everybody in back to join hands. From this pew, it'll be a circle that comes all over the church. We do that right now.

One main message is to pass the torch. Pass the torch. We must pass the torch. We're going to start by singing "Let Us Break Bread Together."

[singing]

*Let us break bread together on our knees;  
let us break bread together on our knees;  
when I fall down on my knees  
with my face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.  
let us pray together.*

**James Lawson:** Great God of the universe, you are more than everything that is. Yet you are in everything that is. You are beyond all our imaginations, beyond our definitions, beyond our creeds, beyond our images. And yet, you who have embedded yourself as image in each of us gathered here and every human being across the face of the earth, we're grateful for your grace.

For we know our very lives are a sign of your presence and a sign of grace. We have not made ourselves. We did not make the historic and creative circumstances in which many of us found ourselves in the 1950s and the 1960s, but you have brought us through all of them, and we know that we are far better people because of it.

And we know that this nation—though it has not yet recognized the fact—is a far better nation because of those struggles of the [19]60s and [19]70s. We're grateful that we can be here for this 40th gathering of the student conference at Shaw University in Easter weekend 1960.

Now help us to bend our energies together during these days. To think together, to talk together, to argue, to quarrel—but above all, to be called in deep love and compassion one for another, for all the human family. Make us deeply aware of the nearly 1.2 billion people around our world who are on the very edge of extinction daily.

Make us aware of great numbers of people who hurt from racism and sexism, from violence and fear and brokenness all around us in this land. Make us aware that we who are comfortable have

a responsibility to keep struggling and to keep reaching out, until at last we can turn this nation around. Now, guide and direct us, teach us, instruct us, give us new insight.

Reinforce the image of a Beloved Community, of a just and holy land, as we gather, so that all that we do and say and think and all of our activities together will indeed strengthen each of us and strengthen the cause of truth and beauty in our nation. We pray this boldly in your extraordinary Spirit, Amen.

**Charles Sherrod:** Praise God.

[singing]

*Let us praise God together on our knees;  
let us praise God together on our knees;  
when we fall on our knees  
with our face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.*

**Charles Sherrod:** The death angel had come and gone. Moses called the elders and said these words:

**Joan Browning:** A reading from Exodus, verses 21 through 27:

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said unto them,

‘Draw out and take you a lamb, according to your families, and kill the Passover.

And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin.

And none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your house to smite you.

And you shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever.

And it shall come to pass, when you be in the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that you shall keep this service.

And it shall come to pass, when your children say unto you, 'What mean you by this service?' that you shall say,

'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses.' "

And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.”

The word of the Lord.

**Charles Sherrod:** Thanks be to God. We have come through fire, we have come through death. We have come to the wilderness, and we have one task left. All our suffering and all the things that we have done—all the individual sacrifices that we have made, all the places that we have gone, all the knowledge, all the bruises that we have. It's time to pass the torch.

We have a challenge, each one of us—wherever we come from, wherever we go to—to grab four or five, six or seven young people and tell them what is of the day.

Moses had a staff in his hand, and he threw it down and found there was power in that staff. God gave him some power. And each one of us has a torch in his or her hand. We can pass that torch if we but will. All the knowledge that we gather—there's no reason for this young man and those young ladies to make the same mistakes that we did.

We got something to give that's beneficial, that's beautiful, that's— that's SNCC-ish, that's peculiar to us. And somehow we must find a way to pass it on, that way it can live as it lives within us. Doesn't this bring back memories? The last song that we're going to sing is going to be “This May Be the Last Time.”

But isn't it—the power that we have received, we must openly give and be proud to give. See, if you don't give something when... “I don't know whether he or she gonna take it or not, I don't know how they going to think about me. I don't know, I'm an old fogey, I don't think they—” No. We got something.

And when we know we got something—the young boy, “Come here.” Young girl, “Come here. I got something for you. I want to speak with you just a few moments.”

“You had that conference down there? I need to go to that conference. If I hear about it, I need to say something to you that come from my heart. Can I speak to you from the bottom of my heart? Can I ask you to drop out of this society? Can I ask you to give up all the golden apples that they dangle before you for just a short time in your life, knowing that if you drop off and you never—you never go back?”

Because it's something beautiful—when they can't touch you with a job. When they can't touch you with a material thing—then you are free. The only time will you ever be free in your whole life. And that's what we can offer you.

Because there was one time in the history of our nation that a free people roamed these surroundings. And they weren't afraid of nothing. Not life, not death, anything under the earth, anything in the ocean, or above the earth—anywhere—nothing.

We weren't afraid of it. And we want to give you that spirit. Pass it on to free you like we, one time, were free. This may be the last time.

[singing]

*This may be the last time*

*This may be the last time, children*

*This may be the last time*

*May be the last time I don't know*

**Charles Sherrod:** Oh Father God, we stretch our arms to thee. No other help we know. Oh Father, touch the hearts of our young people. Give them the strength and the spirit to go forth out of the wilderness into the world—confronting whatever they have to confront, being whatever they have to be, living a life whatever they have to live, and finding peace and love. In the name of our Father God, we pray. Amen.

**Chuck McDew:** And if y'all would—if y'all would get seated. Curtis, I was just saying, I know y'all don't move as rapidly to your places nowadays as you once did, but we're going to—as soon as everybody gets situated.

We are about to start the panels and the program. Our adult advisor and great—[Timothy Lionel Jenkins](#), Duncan—found a blast from the past. You all will see each other as we go along. [Martha Norman](#). Now we can begin.

Forty years ago, when we came to this campus, I remember there were all these marvelous people—people that had already prepared for the nonviolent revolution for years before that. And Jim Lawson had prepared the people from Nashville to start nonviolent demonstrations and sit-ins. And it was just an accident of history that, however, on February 1, 1960, in Greensboro [NC], four freshmen sat down and started the modern revolution.

Jim was here. [Anne Braden](#) was here. [Connie Curry](#) was here. [Lonnie King](#) was here. Sherrod was here. I was here. And we started to talk. [Charlie Jones](#) came up from Johnson C. Smith [University], and we started to meet together. [Guy Carawan](#) started bringing us the songs that became the basis of sustaining us through that long struggle. [John Robert \[Bob\] Zellner](#)—we hired our first white boy.

I said we could not have gotten any more perfect—who blended in with the locals. Three generations of Klan membership was broken by John Robert Zellner. I want y'all to know—well,

you know, he was named after Bob Jones. True story, y'all. He'll tell you. He's named after Bob Jones—of Bob Jones University. Yes, he was.

But I don't want to wander on. Bring us back and to move these panels along—that's going to be done by Ivanhoe Donaldson, who will be moderating. Ivanhoe, I yield.

**Ivanhoe Donaldson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Charles Frederick McDew. I enjoyed your hooter. It was indeed a pleasure. First I want to thank the conveners of this conference, honoring Ella Baker and talking about SNCC.

I'm sure that perhaps they, when putting this together, didn't think they would be overwhelmed by this many SNCC people. But I have to tell you that for us, this is really indeed a significant commitment statement, because probably many of us have never had an opportunity to truly honor Miss Ella Baker.

To recognize her greatness, to thank her for being there for us. We talked yesterday about family and commitment and who we are. Well, the unique thing about Ella Baker is that the average SNCC person in this room today—she was our age when she convened this meeting in 1960. Maybe she was a year or two older than the majority of us, but she was a lady in her late 50s at that point in time. So you're indeed talking about a significant person.

At the end of the last century—or whatever you want to view it, the last decade—there were all of these [lists]. “Who was the greatest athlete?” and “Who was the greatest American?” and “Who was the greatest man?” and “Who was the greatest woman?” and “Who was the greatest intellectual?” and “The 100 greatest artists.”

And I used to go through this. I kind of got tired of those lists, but I would kind of peek through them just to see if there was someone there that I agreed with. I think that when you talk about Ella Baker, you're indeed talking about someone who was truly a giant of the 20th century.

This is a person who defined that century, and I think that when we talk about her in terms of civil rights, we're really limiting her. She was a true 20th-century champion of human justice and human rights. She ranked there with [W.E.B.] Du Bois and with everybody else.

And SNCC and the MFDP [[Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party](#)] were, in a way, the last of her legacies, because this was a political activist in the [19]20s, the [19]30s, the [19]40s, the [19]50s, the [19]60s, and the [19]70s—activist even in her death in the [19]80s.

So we have to understand this person. She was not only the convener and therefore, in some ways, the founder of what became SNCC by convening this conference over Easter weekend 40 years ago. She was also the Director of Branches for the NAACP [[National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)] in the [19]40s. A Black woman organizing throughout the South, traveling in buses that were not desegregated yet, to organize these chapters.

She was with the NAACP. She was with the Y[MCA]. Ella Baker even did us a tour of duty with the Urban League. I mean, this was a phenomenal human being, and we are fortunate in many ways to have shared in her life.

Now, the one thing you can always say about her was—she had an enormous amount of patience. Because she was in her late 50s, and she was patient with these crazy 18, 19, 20-year-olds. We saw Bob Moses as a senior citizen. I think Bob was like 26 or 27 at the time.

So this panel will begin—or continue on, in some ways—the process of honoring this great person indeed. And when you think of the 20th century—those of you who weren't in SNCC—you have to realize that any list that doesn't include the name Ella Jo Baker is a list that's just inaccurate. It's a list that just isn't right. Because she indeed was a major American personality.

And to say that—recognizing that she was a woman and had to come through all of what that meant—is indeed phenomenal. And a Black woman.

I remember a story that Anne Braden told the Smithsonian a few years ago, where she talked about what it was like to be in Alabama, growing up and going to get a job as a newspaper reporter 50 years ago. Actually, longer than that.

They didn't understand why this white woman—why she didn't go home and have babies, and do the things that you should do in America at that point in time. This was a contemporary of Ella Baker. But yet, think of Ella Baker in that context and we recognize how truly profound the person she was, and how fortunate an organization we were to have an Ella Baker as our adult advisor. To have Anne Braden as our adult advisor. To have [Howard Zinn](#) as our adult advisor.

As many in this room know, the person who established the Beloved Community, the concept, the frame of reference, the preamble that gave birth to this organization was one, Jim Lawson. [For] the Nashville students—I guess in some ways he was their mentor, their guiding light, their spirituality. And was here at this conference, at this university, for the evolving SNCC.

The last time—this is a small world—the last time I saw Jim Lawson, I went to a service about, I don't know, I guess 15, 20 years ago now at least—I think it was. Maybe it was 10 years ago. You lose track after a while.

A young man by the name Walter Bremond, the founder of the Brotherhood Crusade in L.A.—was a friend of mine, and we were colleagues and comrades in struggle. And there were these United Black Funds being started all over the country, and Bremond had started the Brotherhood Crusade in L.A. with some colleagues of his.



And I saw on the program that Jim Lawson was doing the service, and I said, “No, I know a Jim Lawson, but it couldn’t be the same Jim Lawson.” And I sat in the back of the church, and I looked up and I saw this person. I said, “My God, that’s Reverend Lawson.”

And I thought how small the world is, and how constantly we overlap and interface with each other wherever we go. They say the world is only six degrees apart, and I think in some ways it’s really true.

We have two wonderful individuals at this moment to talk about Ella Baker this morning. Vince [Vincent] Harding, I understand, has not joined us yet, and when he does, I will say a few words about Vince. So in the meantime we’re going to begin our program, and I give you—without further commentary—Reverend James Lawson.

**James Lawson:** Let me see. Thank you very much. Let me also welcome you in the words of Charles Sherrod and Charles McDew and Ivanhoe—all words that I would emulate in various ways. Let me now do one additional moment of celebration, and that is: let’s see everyone who was here Easter weekend of 1960. If you will, please stand wherever you are. Let’s see who you are.

And I’m going to go one step further. I want you to remain standing. And if you will, name yourselves. Begin in the back—yes—and where you’re coming from.

[voices from audience]:

**Debbie Amis Bell:** Debbie Amis Bell.

**James Lawson:** And where are you coming from?

**Debbie Amis Bell:** Philadelphia [PA].

**Lonnie King:** Lonnie King. I was from Atlanta, GA. I’m in Maryland now.

**Virginus Thornton:** Virginus Thornton from [indistinct] Massachusetts. I was from Virginia at the time.

**Connie Curry:** I’m Connie Curry, and I’m from Atlanta and still am.

**Charles Sherrod:** I was from Petersburg, Virginia, and now from Albany, Georgia.

**Chuck McDew:** I’m Chuck McDew, and I was from South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, North Carolina. And I now live in Minneapolis [MN], close to the Canadian border.

**Charles Jones:** Charles Jones, from Charlotte, North Carolina, Johnson C. Smith University. I'm in Charlotte now. I've been practicing law for 22 years, and—God knows I'm glad. Jim, God bless you my brother.

**James Lawson:** Good to see you, man.

**Charles Jones:** Thank you. You too.

**James Lawson:** Charles McDew and I came from Massillon, Ohio originally, and we found ourselves both in the South.

Now let me see—how many people here became part of the SNCC movement directly—who became either members of the committee itself or field people or participated in some of the efforts across the South? Let's see you all stand now.

Yes. If your children are here, let them stand up too. Here we go. Good that's passing the torch.

I'm going to try to be very, very brief, although it's difficult to do that on an occasion like this, and it's perplexing in so many different ways. I want to indicate initially that by 1960, I was the Southern Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was organizing full time in the Southeast. That's a long story—I will not go into it.

The workshops I did in [19]58, [19]59, [19]60 in various places across the Southeast in particular were part of the preparation for the sit-in campaign. Everywhere I went in those days, I carried the comic book on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was a small but very effective tool for showing that we had a power, and a methodology, and tools that we could use to bring about social change.

I was fulfilling a part of my own dream as a college student—to one day work in the South, where it seemed to me, all across the nation, we needed in some ways to speed up the process of desegregation, speed up the process of facing up to racism and doing something about it.

I want to just make three major points. That's what I'm going to do, and I've written them down so I try to stick to them within just a handful of minutes and will not try to expand upon them.

We should recognize that the student conference that gathered Easter weekend in 1960 at Shaw University was a consequence of the sit-in movement that had spread by that time across the country. That sit-in movement was the first national movement in the [19]60s. And I say this for two or three reasons.

One—because there were efforts in almost every state, with the possible exception of Mississippi—though there were stirrings there as well. All of the southern, South Central states had activity going on of some kind.

Then, in addition to that—because it was indeed a student-centered movement—it spread to all of the 50 states, so that there were student groups everywhere: on college campuses, in communities like Cincinnati, Ohio, who joined with people in the community and said, “We must support what is going on in the South.”

And they themselves then began to ask Woolworth’s in Cincinnati, “What do you mean not serving everyone in Nashville or in Orangeburg or Greensboro?” and the rest.

But then they also turned their focus to their local scene. They recognized the message coming from the sit-in campaigns in the South, and said, “Now, what are the issues here that we need to concretely address?”

And that, of course, was a prelude and a preparation—the sowing of the seeds for the soil of what later became some of the student movements, some of the peace movements of the late [19]60s, 1970s.

This is often ignored in many of the conversations and books about the 1960s, and I want to make certain that we understand that I operated not simply as one person committed to nonviolence, but I also operated as a scholar and student of the movement and sought to be not simply experimenting, but finding out what was going on, and observing, and listening, and analyzing what it meant in terms of our struggle.

Because none of us, including Martin King and Ella Baker, knew what we were doing. We had a commitment to the fact that this nation had to change. We did have a vision of democracy, and justice, and freedom, and liberty, and the rest of it.

We did have a vision that the way people were treated in this land—out of the rapaciousness of racism, and violence, and sexism, and poverty, and greed—that those conditions had to be changed. And we had that vision. We did not know how to do it, but we were about the business of trying to make it happen anyway. And we oftentimes made mistakes—no doubt. But the mistakes were a part of our effort to experiment and go forward.

The student conference was brought together at the initiative of Martin King and Ella Baker. Ella Baker was the Interim Executive Director of SCLC [[Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#)]. She called me—and I know a number of other people—to talk about it and to help put together the agenda.

She also called Doug [Douglas] Moore, who was a campus minister in Greensboro—or someplace in North Carolina—in Durham, that’s right, in Durham. And so several of us across the South therefore were pushing it and organizing it. Over the phone we created the agenda.

It was my insistence that it should be a working conference. That is, we did not want to have lots of speeches, but let students come from all the different places, and let us talk about where we

were, what we were trying to do, and where we wanted to go. And let the conference itself make the decisions about the future.

And I came without a predetermined set of ideas about what the conference may or may not do. I was one of the adults in the process of organizing it, and we became a working conference. We did get, as I recall, people from over 12 states. We did get over 100 and some folk who were here. Most of the major sit-in campaigns in the Southeast were here and were represented here.

In Nashville we were enthusiastic about it. And the Nashville Christian Leadership Council—which was the organization in Nashville that had decided we would desegregate downtown Nashville—out of the movement financed the trip and saw it as an essential trip for our continued working abilities.

We were a representative group. We had representatives from the North.

The point I would make here is that if we want to broaden democracy in the United States, let us look at the student conference and some of the work since then as one of the ways that that broadening of American democracy can take place. Let us see SNCC—the student conference and the ensuing years—as a metaphor for how we get a better understanding of where we are and where we want to go in this 21st century of ours.

It was a representative working conference. There was only an opening speech and a closing speech. In between, we formed a great variety of discussions and proceeded to see if we could be of one mind. We discovered very early on, as Charles McDew has already indicated, we found very early on, that here [there] was a gathering of the family. Here there was love and understanding and effort to forgive, forget, but to pull together for a common cause.

The conference was a participatory conference. Do we need to broaden democracy and make it more participatory? Amen. It must be done. It has to be done. For we are now at a time where we have strong economic and political forces. We have strong military forces whose notion is that this nation should be governed by an exclusive elite—and by a small and smaller number.

Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition maintain that this nation should be governed by a theocracy in which only their form of religion—only people who accept and adopt their form of religion, which is an atrocious distortion of what religion is about—should be elected to public offices or should be appointed to public offices.<sup>2</sup>

That assault from the right is an assault upon diminishing any people's effort to broaden the scope of our understanding and to broaden our scope of participation.

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<sup>2</sup> The Christian Coalition, led by Pat Robertson, advocated for a theocratic political agenda that sought to privilege a narrow religious ideology in public life, raising concerns about threats to pluralism and democratic inclusion.

We worked from consensus here. I don't remember if we took that many votes, but we tried primarily that if there were a vote, that that vote would be an overwhelming vote in one direction. If it wasn't, we kept on talking until we found ourselves going in the same direction. That is participatory democracy.

We decided to write a little mission statement. And I was on that committee, and I was asked to draft that committee. I know that in places that statement is seen as Jim Lawson's statement. It wasn't. It was the statement of the conference. I drafted it. We redrafted it and redrafted it until the conference said, "This is what we want." It was a consensus of the student conference that Easter weekend.

We put "temporary" in front of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee because there was unanimous agreement that that's what we wanted to call ourselves. We put "temporary" on it not to indicate that we expected to go out of business, but because we were trying to form and shape who we were, and what we were, and how we would proceed—what our structures were. So it was "temporary" only in that sense.

This participatory democracy was something that the [Nashville Movement](#), which is often called the model movement up to that time in our struggle, demonstrated. We determined that in Nashville there would not be division between university and community, or students and adults of the community. We decided there would not be division between male and female.

In our Central Committee, which was our primary ideological and structured committee—planning all the strategy—we worked to make that happen among ourselves. So there were adults and students. All the schools were represented on that Central Committee. We had a student majority so that we who were clergy or who were adult laypeople could not dominate by any kind of vote or takeover.

We also, in order to have participatory democracy, insisted there would be no one single chairman or chairperson. We insisted, rather, that each chair of the Central Committee would be for six months—and that only a student could be chair of that Central Committee, which governed not only our strategy, our work together, our planning, but also the money and the politics of the present and the future. That was the way in which we operated in Nashville as a participatory unit—no one leader.

And consequently, when the press began to attack me—primarily as the organizer of the Nashville Movement—calling me a communist and a whole lot of other junk, I refused to be a spokesperson for the Central Committee or the movement in Nashville. We instead moved the speaking around. When we did a press conference, we selected who would do the speaking and what the issues were we were going to raise.

There is that great scene on April the 19th when 5,000 of us marched silently from Tennessee State to downtown Nashville and to the mayor's office, where we had bombarded him with telegrams.<sup>3</sup> He was not meeting with us, and we said, "Meet us there on Monday morning." I think it was a Monday morning—maybe April the 19th—and he met us there. [Diane Nash](#) demonstrated her leadership in our midst. She was selected as the spokesperson. Along with C.T. Vivian, they both had their words that they were to say.

And then, with the opening, Diane—with her great intellectual understanding of what we were about—pushed the mayor to say, for the first time in the Deep South by any mayor, that the restaurants should be integrated, that segregation should be broken down. And that was a breaking point in Nashville.

But the point I make is: you want to broaden American democracy, then let's have a democracy in which we include people, rather than constantly excluding them. Even if it means it takes pain for some of us older folk to make the adjustments to who is included. Let's move towards an inclusive kind of society and community. And let's be an inclusive people as we move to make that happen as never before.

And then the third and final thing I'd like to lift up is: we want to broaden democracy, then let's have a common cause. For that student conference—with the handful of adults who were there—we had a common cause. We knew that segregation had to end.

If there are difficulties today with words like "integration," or what some of us may call ourselves, let that be seen as simply the pains of growth and movement. We had a common cause. We knew that the signs needed to come down in this nation—"white," "colored," and so forth. That the insulting had to cease. That the indignities heaped upon so many people had to stop.

In Nashville—I shall never forget that in the winter and spring of 1959—as we did workshops around the issue, "Where do we want to go from here?"—it was the women in our midst who insisted that we ought to move on downtown Nashville, where they did most of the shopping for the families in the Black community in Nashville.

And it was that which impacted at least my own mind and made me recognize that our target—to desegregate downtown Nashville—was the task that we needed to take upon ourselves. We had a common cause in Nashville. That common cause lasted for the Central Committee some 10 or 15 years, where generation after generation joined with the adults who were already engaged to move the desegregation from downtown outward.

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<sup>3</sup> This quote recalls the powerful silent march on April 19th, 1960, organized in response to the racially motivated bombing of City Councilman Z. Alexander Looby's home, exemplifying the disciplined nonviolence and strategic pressure of the Nashville student movement.

You should know that the sit-in movement caused—in the South—over 300 cities to begin the process of taking down signs from waiting rooms, from restaurants and counters, from airports, from train stations, bus stations, and the like, and to begin that slow, tedious process of desegregation. The desegregation has not yet happened.

You need to recognize that the dismantling of racism is still the number one task that this nation must adopt if the nation would become a nation where, indeed, equality and justice is available for every girl, boy, woman, or man—everywhere in our land.

Trent Lott and Jesse Helms are the symbols of the obstinate, abhorrent white power in this nation—that is also economic power—that wants this nation to become an authoritarian society.

And we must get a common cause where it's not a matter of right or left, but rather it's a matter of dismantling violence, dismantling sexism, dismantling the addiction in our nation, dismantling the materialism that ruins so many people, dismantling the greed and the poverty in our land. It can be done.

And then finally—I just want to add to that—we had not only a common cause in that conference, but we had a common ideology. Let's not play games about the business of nonviolence. None of us—all of us, rather—who gathered here that Easter weekend had been weaned on the violence of America. All of us played games with the romance of violence that this nation still holds so dear.

We were not unanimous in saying that nonviolence was the ideology we would abide by. We were unanimous in understanding that, in the cause of dismantling segregation, we had to have a common discipline and a willingness to take the risk to make that discipline and that common cause come alive. I could say much more about this.

But the final thing I guess I want to say is that the romantic rhetoric among those of us who think we are progressive people is nothing but romantic rhetoric, which has no basis in the reality of this America. The violence in this nation is institutional and systemic. And any and all who seek to change it will be subject to the rapaciousness of the CIA, the military intelligence, the FBI, and the police. And then, if that doesn't work—the Pentagon itself. Let's not play games.

The handful of people who wanted to break windows and so forth—the anarchists in Seattle [WA]—they may be very good intentioned, but they are wrong for Seattle, which was an enormous demonstration of people power around nonviolent preparation and discipline and training.

Everyone was trained to carry out their strategies and tactics, whether they did it for ideological reasons, or spiritual reasons, or moral reasons, or for tactical reasons. All were encouraged to abide by a common social dimension that would enable them to get their tasks done.

The little handful of breaking windows—or handful of people—with 50,000 people—became the way that the media could then interpret Seattle and pretend that something enormous had not happened. And the press will always do this. Always.

For they do not want ordinary people like ourselves to recognize that we have a life-giving power in our own hearts. If we tap it and use it, we can still see the second revolution in America take place, and turn over these thresholds of pain and hurt, and create that beloved society.

**Ivanhoe Donaldson:** Thank you very much, Reverend Lawson. It's the power of love, what they say. You know, we're still out here. We're still struggling. You know, we're still moving forward.

I said something earlier about Miss Baker and the YMCA. And I think what I meant to say is that the Young Negro Cooperative League, back in the late [19]20s, was one of her missions that she undertook.

When I think of Anne Braden, it reminds me, in many ways, of—SNCC was one of these organizations that, I guess, sort of assumed anybody could do anything. I was in Atlanta. I don't even know if I was old enough to vote. And Forman told me, "Well, you need to go to Louisville [KY] and help out up there."

And I had just dropped off some books at Miles College and came over to Atlanta—was figuring out what my next mission was going to be.

I'd never been to Louisville. I don't think I'd been to Kentucky, except to pick up things in Louisville to take South to Clarksdale [MS]. But [Reggie Robinson](#) and [Bob Zellner](#) drove me up to Louisville, Kentucky, and I met—I'd seen her before in Atlanta—but I met Anne Braden and Carl Braden. I stayed in their home, and we proceeded. I think SNCC gave me, like, \$25 and said, "Go forth and organize a movement."

It was just the way things worked. I got a car ride and \$25 [\$265 in 2025]—and they gave me home, fed me, and, you know—the rest was just history. So we went down the West End and started organizing, you know, demonstrations against that I... **(AUDIO ENDS CONTINUED IN PART 7).**