

# SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Joyce Ladner Remarks (CONT'D)

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Date: April 2000

Location: Raleigh, NC - Shaw University

**Host:**

[Martha Prescod Norman](#) - Early SNCC Organizer / Co-editor of *Hands on the Freedom Plow*

**Speakers:**

[Lonnie King](#) - Student Leader / Architect of the Atlanta Student Movement

[Charles Jones](#) - Founding Member of SNCC / Organizer of the 1960 Greensboro student meeting

[Joyce Ladner](#) - SNCC Organizer / Sociologist and Advocate for Black youth and women's voices

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

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## CONTINUED FROM [PART 9](#)

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

**Joyce Ladner:** ...emerge, a structure, some consensus on an agenda, for sure. She [[Ella Baker](#)] definitely believed you should have an agenda that you were pursuing. And I saw her as being a very businesslike person too, in a way. And when we went to [Atlantic City](#) in [19]64 with the MFDP [[Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party](#)], I was assigned to accompany Mrs. Hartman Turnbow from Tchula, Mississippi to lobby the Oregon delegation. And Congresswoman Edith Green and Senator Wayne Morse were from Oregon.

And Mrs. Turnbow always had this little brown paper bag. I didn't realize until after that—he had made this most eloquent statement, on why we should, in fact, be seated. I learned later that they called Mrs. Turnbow "Sweets," as Sweets had a pistol in her brown paper bag.

Let me just wrap up by simply saying that none of us would ever have envisioned our actions then would lead to our young people killing each other. Our cities, our families being distraught, our communities being wrecked by violence and crack. We would not have imagined that there would be something called an intractable underclass.

We would not have envisioned that there would be a time when we would be afraid of our own children. And I think if there is anything that disappoints me more than anything else, it is that we have come a long way. But in many ways there's a kind of spiritual poverty that is much more insidious, dangerous, much different than anything I experienced growing up under a repressive Mississippi regime.

And [Frantz] Fanon that each generation must decide, must define its mission, fulfill it or betray it. We did ours. And I think this—my son and his generation, your children, and the young people here today—they have, I believe, a tougher set of problems to solve than we did. Thank you.

**Martha Prescod Norman:** As you know, we've run slightly over time and lunch is waiting at the student center. They're holding lunch for us. So, anyone is welcome. I think the charge is \$3 if you're not a panelist. This afternoon, the panels will be back in the civic center and it's on the ground floor. There should be signs up for the panels.

(VIDEO ENDS AND JUMPS TO HISTORIC MARKER CEREMONY ON PAGE 3)

# SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Installation of Historic Marker for SNCC

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Date: April 2000

Location: Raleigh, NC

**Host:**

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

**Speakers:**

**Quincy Scott Jr.** - Dean of the Chapel, Shaw University

**Talbert O. Shaw** - President, Shaw University

**Betsy Buford** - Deputy Secretary, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

**Michael Hill** - Researcher, North Carolina Division of Archives and History

**Camilla Wright** - President, North Carolina State African-American Heritage Society

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**\*\*NOTE:** Video begins with ceremony in progress\*\*

**Freedom Singers:** [singing “Woke Up This Morning” by Bettie Mae Fikes ]

*Stayed on freedom,  
Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah  
Come on and walk, walk  
Come on and walk, walk  
Come on and walk, walk  
With your mind on freedom...*

**Rodney Pool:** Good afternoon. My name is Rodney Poole and I'm the current Student Government Association president here at Shaw University. And I consider it an honor and a privilege to stand before you today on this historic occasion. I'd like to recognize one of the many dignitaries in our audience this afternoon, Mayor Clarence Lightner, the first and only African-American mayor of Raleigh, North Carolina. We will now have the invocation by Dr. Quincy Scott Jr.

**Quincy Scott Jr.:** Let us be together with God and one another as we pray. Let us pray. Eternal, almighty, everlasting God, our Father. We come to this historic moment ever so mindful of the mighty ways in which you have worked through your creation in order to achieve redemption for all humankind.

Our spirits are lifted this afternoon as we recall the likes of one Ella Baker, who, in the face of danger and the threat of negative consequences, nevertheless sought to do your bidding. As we pause to mark her place in history, as we honor her memory, and as we celebrate the courageous work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, we pray that the flame of such courage and noble cause might be undimmed, that the march towards freedom, justice, and equality might persist.

Give us strength to build upon this history till at last we usher in a new day where community is not defined by color or location, but by those who accept your love and who resolve to do your will. By dedicating this marker, we dedicate ourselves to no less a cause. In the name of the Holy Father we pray, amen.

**Rodney Poole:** Thank you, Dr. Scott. At this time, we will have words of welcome from our president.

**Talbert O. Shaw:** Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. We have some dignitaries here. We have mentioned one. We are all dignitaries, but we have a few that punctuate history in a very special way. We have with us former Mayor [Marion] Barry. We also have with us today the very distinguished leader, one of the founders of SNCC, the Honorable Julian Bond. Where is he?

Again, we want to welcome you to this historic occasion. Years ago, when SNCC was founded, little did I know that I would have an opportunity to participate in celebrating this most important point in the history of this country. SNCC and others changed the stream of American history.

We are rejoicing today in the commitment and the leadership that they brought forth towards this particular problem. I want to congratulate Mr. Ward and others who thought of this celebration and who have spent a lot of time getting it together. I want to applaud you. And all those who have stood with you through the months of preparation.

In a sense, we are celebrating three important events here today. We're celebrating SNCC, that helped to change the course of history, but we are also celebrating a distinguished woman who has left her mark on American history, and particularly on this movement—that is Ella Baker. She was the most committed woman.

*[VIDEO JUMPS TO A LATER PART OF REMARKS]*

The third thing that we are celebrating today is the historic relationship that this institution has had with SNCC and with the effort to change human relations. Shaw has been sitting here for

135 years. SNCC was founded in the womb of this university, and we are committed to the liberation not only of the mind, but of the spirit. And so this institution can say today that it is a part of history that helped to liberate men and women. And we are delighted that Shaw University is a part of it.

History, unwritten or unspoken, is forgotten history. Today, the establishment of this marker punctuates the fact that we are writing this history. And in perpetuity, it will remain here to say that there was a group of people who committed their lives and their times in conjunction with this institution to help change the course of American history. We're delighted to be a part of it, and we hope that you continue to enjoy the rest of this great event. Congratulations. God bless you all.

**Rodney Poole:** Thank you for those words, Dr. Shaw. At this time, we will have remarks from Mrs. Betsy Buford, the Deputy Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources.

**Betsy Buford:** Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to welcome you on behalf of the state of North Carolina, and to tell those of you who are out of state especially what this highway marker means. It means that a group of historians has approved its incredible validity.

There are only so many highway markers that are passed every year, and our Department of Cultural Resources—specifically the Division of Archives and History—approved this marker three years ago. But because we have some sense of history ourselves, we saved it so it could be unveiled with you here to add to its own sense of momentousness in history.

Highway markers are very important because they're very exclusive. They're also important, I think, because people take note of them. It's not only the text, which Michael Hill will comment on in just a few moments, but it's grounded here—as most of you probably already noticed—by Martin Luther King Boulevard.

And yes, I know you all know he was here, and as President Shaw has already noted, historically grounded here in Shaw University, in honor of Ella Baker and those wonderful Shaw students and students from across the nation who came that day. Thank you for being here. There are many giants who have already been recognized and yet to be recognized in the crowd.

I want to evoke the name of my mentor, Terry Sanford, who some of you knew personally, and who, as a very young and very brave and very smart governor, deputized the Highway Patrol to make certain that SNCC voter registration students in the next two years after its founding in the following summers stayed safe and more safe. So welcome. Thank you for honoring us with your presence, and thank you for helping us. Let us share in your celebration. God bless.

**Rodney Poole:** Thank you, Mrs. Buford. Now we'll have remarks from Mr. Michael Hill, the researcher with the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

**Michael Hill:** This is a great day.

*[VIDEO JUMPS TO A LATER PART OF REMARKS]*

These signs—certainly familiar to those of you who are from North Carolina—they're all over the state and every county. But you'll find signs of this type, historical markers, in most every state and a lot of municipalities. They're made by a foundry in Ohio. They're made of cast aluminum. They're intended to be permanent markers—memorials.

North Carolina got into this business of putting up this type of standard state marker way back in 1936. In the earliest years of the program, not surprisingly, they spent a lot of time marking governors, Civil War battles, shrines, those sorts of things. But there was some thought given to African-American history in the early years.

The very first one to a Black North Carolinian was to John Chavis, a name much honored here in Raleigh.<sup>1</sup> That marker is at Chavis Park. In fact, it is the original marker. It has been there since 1939. The second one was the one here at Shaw. The original marker up here, across from McDonald's, was put up in 1939.

There's been an interest, but I'm glad to see that in recent years there have been more markers and more attention brought to a more inclusive sense of history and bringing everyone into our history.

This is only the second marker we've had that is related to civil rights. The first one went up twenty years ago at Greensboro [NC] to designate the site of the sit-ins in Greensboro. But I could expect that we would see other markers this time in the future. We, in fact, have had inquiries about Ella Baker. The question may arise: why is Ella Baker's name not on this sign?

The text is very limited, as it is on all these signs. Our intention with these signs is that we keep the words to a minimum, that they be seen from traffic if possible. This one is well situated so that traffic at the stop sign can be able to read it. Ella Baker's name is not on the sign for a very simple reason. Our guiding legislation prohibits us from naming a person on a sign until 25 years after that person's death.

Ms. Baker died in 1986, and I can see that in about 10, 11 years, she will be eligible. And I've already had discussions with people in Halifax County, and I think that there will be a lot of interest in Littleton [NC], which is her hometown, for the marker. But we would be glad to

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<sup>1</sup> **John Chavis** (c. 1763–1838) was a pioneering African American educator, Presbyterian minister, and Revolutionary War veteran.

consider other sites. We often have one area—there might be interest here at Shaw, there might be interest in the hometown.

I know in the case of John Coltrane, who's a North Carolinian, we had competition between Hamlet [NC], where he was born and lived until he was two, and High Point [NC], where he grew up and went to high school.

So at any rate, we'll try to make the best decision when Ella Baker is eligible for this marker. Those decisions are made, as Betsy mentioned, by a committee of historians. They meet twice each year. We'll take proposals from anyone that cares to come to us with proposals.

In this case, the topic of SNCC came up from discussions within the committee, the recognition that the anniversary was approaching, and this would certainly be an important topic. They look for things of statewide significance. In this case, as this conference is designated as a national conference, this clearly was an eligible topic, because this is a topic of national importance.

The program's co-sponsored by the Department of Transportation. DOT comes in for a lot of licks across the state, but they do do some things that everyone can applaud. I was out here last Wednesday when this sign went up, and DOT did a good job of placing it. As I said, it's in an ideal location—major entrance to Raleigh, intersection of Martin Luther King and Wilmington Street, the southeastern corner of the Shaw campus. I think it's ideally placed.

So to conclude, it's my hope that this marker will play some small part in seeing that SNCC is remembered, memorialized, and honored here in the city where it was created, for many, many years to come.

**Rodney Poole:** Thank you, Mr. Hill. I'd like to recognize three very important people in our audience this afternoon from the Raleigh Citizens Association of 1960, that co-sponsored with the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] the Easter weekend conference: Ms. Vivian Irving, Ms. Mabel Wright, and Dr. John Fleming.

And now we'll have remarks from Ms. Camilla Wright of the African-American Heritage Society of North Carolina State University.

**Camilla Wright:** Hi, good afternoon. Standing in for Mr. Harold Pegg, who was unable to be here due to a meeting. He was just recently elected as student body president at NC State, so I'm quite sure he's busy and having other things to deal with right now.

As a student and a president of the organization, African-American Heritage Society on NC State's campus, this conference has been successful. I'm learning things to use with my organization to go back and help motivate the students that are in the organization for me. And just to be able to say, well, look, we have bigger things to deal with, and we can't play around.

I'm really, really glad I was able to be here. I'm glad that Dr. [Iyailu] Moses pushed me to come, and she always does. That is my mentor. And I'm just honored to be here with all these wonderful people—wonderful people who were able to make it possible for me to go to NC State. Thank you.

**Rodney Poole:** And now for the moment we've all been waiting for. I'm going to ask four individuals to come forward: Ms. Eleanor Nunn, Dr. David Forbes, Mr. Chuck McDew, and Ms. Connie Curry. And we're going to make our way to the marker for the unveiling.

[singing “We'll Never Turn Back” by Mavis Staples]

*We've been 'buked and we've been scorned,  
We've been talked about, sure 's you're born.  
But we'll never turn back,  
But we 'll never turn back  
Until we have all been free...*

**Bob Zellner:** Well, we gonna have some more of these as we go along. In the next 25 years. A lot of these.

**Charles Sherrod:** Keep on going.

**Bob Zellner:** Took a long time. It's funny. It says Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, but it doesn't say SNCC. S-N-C-C. But I guess everybody knows it as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

[camera pans to other SNCC members and attendees socializing]

[singing “Which Side are you On”]

[singing “Oginga Odinga”]

[singing “Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around”]

[singing “We Shall Overcome”]