

“What We Want is Power for People Who Don’t Have It”: The Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee in California

By
Mary Ceilidh Chase

A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts.

June, 2014, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Copyright Mary Ceilidh Chase, 2014

Approved: Dr. John Munro
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. James Morrison
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Padraig Riley
Reader

Date: June 2nd, 2014

“What We Want is Power For People Who Don’t Have It”: The Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee in California

by Mary Ceilidh Chase

Abstract

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was a civil rights organization operating during the 1960s, one that sought to integrate students in the fight for equality. SNCC worked diligently throughout the United States, developing community projects designed to address an array of racial and social problems. While the historiography of SNCC has focused primarily on their work in the Southern United States, the student organization had branches operating as far west as California. California’s SNCC branches published a monthly newsletter that carefully documented its efforts during the organizations four year existence. SNCC flourished in the Golden State and worked hard to create meaningful change through collaborative efforts with community members and other civil and social rights organizations. The study of SNCC’s work in California adds a new dimension to our understanding of the student organization and of civil rights.

June 2nd, 2014

List of Acronyms

1. ACLU – American Civil Liberties Union
2. AFL-CIO – American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
3. BPP – The Black Panther Party
4. CAP – Community Alert Program
5. CASA – El Centro de Accion Social y Autonomo
6. COINTELPRO – Counter Intelligence Program
7. CORE – Congress of Racial Equality
8. CRC –Civil Rights Congress
9. FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation
10. FSM – Free Speech Movement
11. HUAC – House Un-American Activities Committee
12. KCL – Kern County Land Company
13. LAPD – Los Angeles Police Department
14. LCFO – Lowndes County Freedom Organization
15. MFDP – Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
16. NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
17. NFWA – National Farm Workers Association
18. PL – Progressive Labour Party
19. SCLC – Southern Christian Leadership Conference
20. SNCC – Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
21. STDW – Stop the Draft Week
22. UNIA – Universal Negro Improvement Association

Introduction

Many writers, musicians, artists, activists, sociologists, and journalists have developed an infatuation with the state of California. The people, cities, and culture of California are the subject of many books, novels, songs, and poems. Academics of all disciplines have explored California's rich historical and cultural significance. Historians have also studied a range of topics rooted in the state. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, for example, has analyzed the shift in campus culture during the 1960s, while Daniel Widener has written about the development of a community art project. Civil rights history in the state has been a popular topic amongst historians and many articles and books have been written concerning the historic decade.

In the 1960s, California became a hotbed for numerous organizations seeking to reshape the political and social landscape of the United States by creating local change. California was the birth place of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM). Nevertheless, some organizations migrated to the state after experiencing success elsewhere. This was the case for organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). However, other organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) are not traditionally associated with California. SNCC has often been linked with the Southern United States despite having branches throughout the country. In fact, SNCC has been missing from much of the discussion concerning the history of civil rights in California. From 1964 until approximately 1968, SNCC had operating branches throughout the state and regularly published a newsletter that documented the activities of the local branches. The mention

of SNCC and its presence in California has generally only been made in passing. Few historians have discussed SNCC's work in a comprehensive manner. This thesis will place SNCC in the spot light and analyze the organization's efforts in the Golden State.

SNCC was present in California for approximately four years. The organization's work was well documented through its Californian newsletter, *The Movement*. The newsletter was launched by SNCC's Californian offices in late 1964 and would be associated with the student organization until 1968. *The Movement* reflected on SNCC projects during its time in the Golden State as well as reporting on an array of other national and international political and social issues. This thesis will examine the work done by SNCC in California through *The Movement*. The use of SNCC's Californian newsletter gives historians unique insight into how SNCC evolved as a civil rights organization and the impact it had in California.

Chapter one examines the historiography of SNCC and of California. This examination will help demonstrate the gap that exists in the literature. When discussing civil rights in California, SNCC is sometimes mentioned in passing but has yet to be the focus of historian's attention. The historiography of SNCC focuses almost exclusively on the work done by the organization in the Southern United States. An examination of SNCC in California will work to contribute to the growing literature that shifts attention away from work done for civil rights in the South to projects and chapters that operated outside these traditional geographical boundaries.

The second chapter presents an in-depth analysis of civil rights history in California. Civil rights have deep historical roots in the state and this chapter gives the reader a historical context in which to place SNCC. Currently, the dominate narrative regarding civil rights in California moves from the Watts Riot to the Black Panther Party.

As well, the work done by previous civil rights figures help historians understand how SNCC developed its programs.

Chapter three explores SNCC's presence in California. It discusses the foundation of the organization in the state and the numerous projects that students undertook. An examination of SNCC's work in California will also help reshape historians understanding of the organization as a whole. SNCC participated in a range of projects that helped to promote civil rights and prompt change within the state. SNCC worked alongside not just other civil rights organizations but also workers' rights and anti-war groups. It will demonstrate that SNCC had not simply played a supporting role in the fight for civil rights in California. Chapter three will take SNCC away from the supporting role in Californian civil rights and place the organization at the forefront.

Finally, the fourth chapter will explore how the California SNCC branches compared to its Southern counterparts. An examination of the work done by the Southern branches to the projects launched by the Californian branches will reinforce the importance of the work done. The Californian branches participated in several initiatives that remained unique to the West Coast. As well, an examination of the projects that the Californian branches did not participate in aids in the discussion of SNCC's growth as a civil rights organization.

At the conclusion of this thesis, the historical importance of SNCC and its work in California should be readily apparent. The organization's impact in California deserves to be discussed rather than simply glossed over. The contribution of SNCC's work along the West Coast will put forward not simply a new narrative to SNCC but will also fill in the historical gap that currently exists in California's history.

Chapter One: The Historiography of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating
Committee and Civil Rights in California

Historians have focused on a wide range of subjects that arose out of the 1960s such as second-wave feminism, the African American civil rights movement, anti-war movements and even the creation of a New Right and America's Silent Majority. Many of these organizations would gain national recognition for their efforts towards creating a more equal and just society; even the New Right organizers thought they were benefiting society. In many ways, the civil rights movement served as the inspiration for other organizations whether as a means to further rights and freedoms for other disenfranchised groups or as a means to counter the new 'leftist' agenda. One of the most prominent and popular civil rights organizations had been SNCC, a predominantly African American student civil rights group. SNCC would become one of the main actors within the civil rights movement. SNCC has understandably become a subject of historical focus, and historians have worked to create a more comprehensive understanding of the organization and its influence.

SNCC was launched as a way to meet the demands of African American students who were seeking ways to become engaged in the fight for equality in the United States. SNCC was launched as a response to the 1960 Greensboro sit-ins, where four college students demanded service at the whites-only counter of their local Woolworth's department store.¹ These sit-ins sparked much of the revolutionary action that characterized the 1960s. SNCC would gain guidance from veteran civil rights activist Ella

¹ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 61.

Baker. Baker, who had previously worked with the NAACP and the SCLC, believed that the students offered the “potential for a new type of leadership that could revitalize the Black Freedom Movement and take it in a radically new direction.”² She worked with the students in hopes of making them autonomous from the previously existing organizations by creating an organization where students controlled their goals and involvement. Throughout the 1960s, SNCC would continue to be a dominant force in the quest for social and political equalities and freedoms in the United States and beyond.

SNCC tended to work on local community-based projects rather than nationally based projects. For former SNCC leader, Julian Bond, for example, “SNCC organizers spent their first weeks in a new community meeting local leadership, formulating with them an action plan for more aggressive registration efforts, and recruiting new activists through informal conversation, painstaking house-to-house canvassing, and regular mass meetings.”³ Since SNCC originated in the Southern United States, much of the historical research done regarding the organization has pertained to the local projects launched in this particular geographical region. Still, it is important to note that SNCC did not exclusively exist in the South. Rather, it had branches throughout the nation, including along the western seaboard.

SNCC’s presence in California, the topic of this thesis, indicated that the history of the civil rights movement in California is about more than the Watts Riot or organizations like the BPP. Considering California’s extensive civil rights history, it is surprising that historians have previously mentioned SNCC’s work in the state only in passing. Yet, between 1964 and 1968, SNCC had popular branches working tirelessly in

² Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 239.

³ Julian Bond, “SNCC: What We Did,” *Monthly Review*, 52:5 (2000), 19.

cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. While the historiography of civil rights in the state of California is extensive, an analysis of it demonstrates the lack of attention given to SNCC during a period when these student activists played a large role in various state and national issues.

This chapter examines the extensive historiography surrounding SNCC as well as the history of civil rights in the state of California. It will discuss the historical trends that have developed as historians have written and researched the civil rights organization. An extensive examination of the historiography of SNCC will demonstrate that much of the historical discussion surrounding the organization focuses primarily on branches located in the Southern United States. The historiography of SNCC demonstrates a lack of attention paid to the branches operating in California. This chapter will also examine the historiography of the state of California outlining the lack of historical research dedicated to SNCC in the state. The historiography concerning California, while extensively studied, mentions SNCC rarely and generally in passing focusing attention on other historical events or organizations. By doing so, this chapter will bring to light the historiographical gap that exists in these two historiographical topics. Subsequent chapters will discuss SNCC's work in California and establish its importance and why SNCC's West Coast branches deserve historical attention.

The historiography surrounding SNCC can be divided into three main categories. The first is the primary documents that were published during the 1960s. This has included various newsletters that national and local offices had published, manifestos released by the organization, and in some cases, hard copies of the numerous speeches given by the various leaders, organizers and protesters of SNCC. While primary sources are not traditionally used for historiographical purposes, in the case of SNCC some

primary documents are essential to the historiography of the topic. For instance, former members such as Julian Bond and Stokely Carmichael have published relatively recent reflective and autobiographical writings that offer important interpretations of the organization.

The second category relates to those historians whose writings, concerning SNCC, were published from roughly the 1970s to about the early 1990s. Historians during this time period examined the internal dynamics of the organization to help explain the evolution and impact of the group. The final category includes work by historians that has examined SNCC from an international perspective, most of which was published from the 1990s to present day. This work has looked at the relationship of SNCC to other organizations operating in other countries and related SNCC to a wider global trend of social activism during the 1960s.

Primary Sources of Historical Significance

In a 2000 article, Julian Bond reflected not only on his involvement with the organization but also on how effective SNCC had been in their attempts to organize and run community projects. Following the Greensboro sit-ins February 1960, Bond and others at Morehouse College, in Atlanta, Georgia, decided to take action and join in a wave of sit-ins that spread across America. Bond discussed the various political parties sponsored and launched by SNCC, such as the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (MDFP), and how they attempted to educate the African American masses. Bond also asserted that “the MDFP served as prototype for the model of Black Power advocated and

popularized by Stokely Carmichael.”⁴ While historians must be wary when analyzing these potentially biased papers, they provide important first-hand accounts of SNCC and bring to light internal difficulties and issues that may not have been known otherwise.

Stokely Carmichael, a former chairman of SNCC, would also contribute to the post-SNCC experience literature. Carmichael wrote a short article, entitled “Toward Black Liberation” (1966), where he defined what Black Power meant to the African American community and how they could achieve it. In the article, Carmichael analyzed the differences between individual racism and institutionalized racism, claiming that institutional restrictions had led to the oppression of the African American community thus creating generational problems. As Carmichael explained, many African Americans were born into poverty and lived in impoverished communities. Racist policies had excluded African Americans from both employment opportunities and also possibly housing options. Many were forced financially or through social norms to remain in these impoverished areas, thus perpetuating poverty from generation to generation. He emphasized the repressive state African Americans had been living in and how the African American community had been “excluded from participation in the power decisions that shaped the society.”⁵ Carmichael discussed how SNCC and other civil rights organizations needed to proceed beyond the 1960s. His interpretation would become influential in historiographical interpretations of SNCC’s achievements. Later, with the help of Charles Hamilton, Carmichael penned *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967). The text reflected on the political atmosphere of the 1960s and how African Americans needed to work towards community, not personal, goals of

⁴ Bond, “SNCC,” 5, 22.

⁵ Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” *The Massachusetts Review*, 7:4 (1966), 642-643.

equality.⁶ It became an elaboration on his previous piece, reporting on the progress made by civil rights movement.

Written works by the members of SNCC are not the only primary resources available to historians. There are a variety of texts published almost directly after the decline of SNCC, among other organizations. For example, former SNCC member Richard Young released *Roots of Rebellion: The Evolution of Black Politics and Protest since World War II* in 1970. As current historians know, many of the civil rights groups continued to operate in some form throughout the 1970s and thus, Young's work should be treated not as definitive but as contextual. Young compiled scholarly works that addressed various issues and questions raised in response to the civil rights movement. His text straddles the line between a primary and secondary source. In one chapter, Young republished an interview original written for the California SNCC newsletter, *The Movement*, with BPP leader Huey Newton. In the interview, Newton attempted to demonstrate that the BPP had come as a response to the oppression that African Americans faced at the hands of racists and violent police officers.⁷ These primary documents are worth classifying on their own because of the unique perspective they offer to historians. Nonetheless, many of these primary sources are written by former SNCC members who worked primarily in the Southern United States. Their work enforces the historical trend of placing the discussion of SNCC in the South.

⁶ Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), Chapter 2.

⁷ "Huey Newton Talks to the Movement," In *Roots of Rebellion: the Evolution of Black Politics and Protest Since World War II.*" ed. Richard Young, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), 374.

Examining SNCC's Internal Structure

Those historians who chose to analyze SNCC's internal dynamics often attempted to discuss the various situations, events, and people who shaped the student organization. One example of this is author Clayborne Carson with his monograph, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (1981). Carson asserted that "SNCC's rise and fall coincided with the evolution of the black struggles of the 1960s."⁸ As the civil rights movement evolved, many student organizations such as SNCC evolved with new demands. By the mid-1960s, SNCC's leaders started to "[reject] the use of white organizers in black communities" which would lead to a clash of values among many members and leaders.⁹ According to Carson, unclear goals and divided leadership alienated many members of SNCC, turning them towards other, often more radical African American civil rights organizations such as the BPP.

Allen Matusow also analyzed SNCC and its rise in popularity during the civil rights era, in *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (1984). Unlike Carson, Matusow had taken a more critical approach towards organizations like SNCC. Matusow stated that "the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Act [was] enforced – not always wisely or aggressively but with sufficient determination to finish off Jim Crow."¹⁰ Matusow's interpretation of SNCC led him to believe that for the organizers, "[i]t mattered not that progress in alleviating racial discrimination was occurring" but that "racial reform fell short of expectations."¹¹ In Matusow's analysis, SNCC did not appreciate the true benefits of the Voting and Civil Rights Acts. SNCC felt

⁸ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 298.

⁹ Carson, *In Struggle*, 299.

¹⁰ Allen Matusow, *The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 187, 345.

¹¹ Matusow, *The Unravelling of America*, 345.

that progress had not been occurring fast enough, which led to their evolution towards a more violent form of protest, thus creating tension between SNCC and other civil rights organizations.

Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* is a comprehensive study of SNCC and other civil rights organizations work in the state of Mississippi. Payne began his historical discussion through a detailed account of what he calls "racial terrorism" that existed in the state of Mississippi.¹² Payne's work looks at the events and the people involved in Mississippi's fight for civil rights during the 1960s. Payne discussed how SNCC worked to build relationships within the Southern communities despite accusations by some locals that students were self-serving and hoping to gain some national recognition for their efforts.¹³ Payne's work, while imperative to our historical understanding of SNCC, focuses on the organization's work in the Southern states.

Other historians, like Dennis Urban and Paula Giddings, have examined SNCC and its internal structure by examining the role women played within the student organization. Paula Giddings situated women, SNCC, and the rise of feminist culture in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984). In this work, Giddings defined the influential role of women throughout the fight for civil rights and equality. Giddings began her analysis with the launch of the first anti-lynching campaign organized by Ida B. Wells in the 1890s and explored women's role in the crusade for civil rights. For Giddings, as the years progressed, women pushed to acquire higher positions in various activist organizations and hoped to break gender as

¹² Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 1.

¹³ Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Chapter 12.

well as social boundaries. She attributed the success of the SNCC Freedom Rides to female leaders like Diana Nash and Ruby Doris Smith.¹⁴ According to Giddings, SNCC tended to be more progressive than other social protest movements offering women roles of authority that had traditionally been reserved for their male counterparts.

However, not all authors agreed with Giddings' considerably positive interpretation of the treatment of women in civil rights organizations. Some historians presented a more critical of SNCC and the role they allowed women to play in the organization and the civil rights movement as a whole. Bernice McNair Barnett stated that many of these women working towards greater rights and freedoms for the African American community were obscured from the public eye. In "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race and Class" (1993), Barnett demonstrated that many local female leaders had been omitted from the civil rights story, leaving only the 'great men' narrative to dictate history. This situation led to a lack of understanding of the female contribution to the civil rights movement. Through an empirical study, Barnett showed that the values people attributed to leader and role models of the civil rights movement, such as generating publicity, fundraising, and mobilizing followers, are generally less associated with the female figures than their male counterparts.¹⁵ Her work used these surveys to demonstrate to the reader that history has left out an important female perspective on the civil rights movement and a misinterpretation of the role women played during this revolutionary era.

¹⁴ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1984), 31, 279.

¹⁵ Bernice McNair Barnett, "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race and Class," *Gender and Society*. 7:2 (June, 1993), 163, 171.

Dennis Urban also explored how SNCC may or may not have played a role in second wave feminism. Urban's essay, titled "The Women of SNCC: Struggle, Sexism and the Emergence of Feminist Consciousness, 1960-66" (2002), chronicled how "oppression did exist within the group at that time" and was part of the daily struggle of the female SNCC members. Urban argued that many of them were still given opportunities that were not previously available to women in their position. Urban explained how women like Ella Baker were able to participate in the development and founding of SNCC and eventually acted as mentors to the organization. Still, these new positions of power and influence were not enough to combat the inherent sexism in the organization. People like Ella Baker and Diana Nash, the SNCC branch organizer for the Nashville students, were few and far between. Rather, women were frequently asked to work in gender specific roles, like that of secretary, whereas men frequently were encouraged to assume leadership positions.¹⁶ Thus, according to Urban, SNCC had not been any more progressive than any other civil rights organization during the time period.

The work done by these historians has proven to be extremely important to our understanding of SNCC and its contribution towards the civil rights movement. Their work should not be disregarded simply because these historians have chosen to focus their study on SNCC's work in the Southern United States. Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* is considered to be fundamental in the understanding of SNCC and the organizations work in Mississippi since SNCC's roots lay primarily in the state. However, expanding the historical scope outside these traditional geographical boundaries can give historians a greater understanding of SNCC and its interactions with communities. The

¹⁶ Dennis J. Urban Jr., "The Women of SNCC: Struggle, Sexism and the Emergence of Feminist Consciousness, 1960-66," *International Social Science Review*. 77:3. (2002), 186-188.

projects launched in California differed from those launched in the Southern United States, as we will see in the comparative analysis I offer in chapter four.

Situating SNCC in an International Context

As the historiography for the civil rights era progressed, so did the views of the historians writing on the subject. Historians working in the 1990s and 2000s felt that a national framing did not entirely answer how SNCC came to prominence in the post-War era. These historians attempted to place SNCC in a larger and even international framework in order to answer their questions. They compared SNCC not only to other national movements occurring during the same era (generally those unrelated to the civil rights movement) but also to possible international counterparts. However, these historians also used the Southern branches in their comparative analysis of SNCC and international organizations. They argued that SNCC, and other civil rights groups, belonged to a much more global movement of civil disobedience. These historians have attempted to relate SNCC's program, and those of other civil rights organizations, to the feminist and socialist movements that were occurring roughly the same time.

Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch compared the ideology and activism of SNCC to that of Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*, and to the 1960s Leftist culture outside of the United States. In "Black like Mao: Red China and Black America" (1999), Esch and Kelley discussed the connections between Communist China and the plight of the African American community in the United States. Some within the civil rights movement believed that "black people in the United States were living under domestic colonialism and that their struggles must be seen as a part of the worldwide anti-colonial

movement.”¹⁷ The authors explained that some within the African American community looked towards China as an example of socialist ideology to combat racism in America. From Mao’s socialist perspective, African Americans needed a revolution of their own to fight the powers that oppressed them.¹⁸

Martin Klimke outlined similar points in his monograph *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (2010). While not pertaining directly to SNCC, Klimke’s research established the international connections that many student groups experienced during the 1960s. Klimke’s work focused primarily on the American based organization, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its sister organization, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (German Socialist Student League). Each organization would mail one another their monthly newsletter in order to keep each other informed of the events happening across the Atlantic.¹⁹ Again, while not dealing directly with SNCC, Klimke documented the relationship that SNCC and the American SDS had with international organizations. He recounted the correspondence between SNCC member Bob Moses and Carl Oglesby, the elected Chairman of the SDS in 1965. The two men discussed the need for greater international relations and support. Klimke made it clear that many student protest organizations, including SNCC, had begun thinking globally when drafting plans to fight against racist institutions.

Other scholars in the later 1990s and 2000s took the lead from historians who studied SNCC’s international relations and examined the organizations national relations

¹⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley & Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” *Souls*. 1:4. (1999), 12, 21.

¹⁸ Kelley & Esch, “Black Like Mao,” 21.

¹⁹ Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West German and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11, 19.

with other civil rights groups. Simon Hall and Francesca Polletta, for example, continued to work within a national framework but sought to answer questions about how different organizations related to each other despite conflicting views. In “The NAACP, Black Power and the African American Freedom Struggle, 1966-1969” (2007), Simon Hall divided the concept of “Black Power” into pluralist and nationalist categories. In the pluralist version of an equal society, respect and coexistence would prevail with proper political and social representation of the vibrant African American community. In the nationalist version, the prevailing belief was that “one group would always come to ‘dominate and oppress’ the others and that, to avoid ‘assimilation by fiat,’ some separatism [...] was necessary.”²⁰ Hall’s article demonstrated how SNCC and the NAACP worked within their own frameworks of Black Power in order to satisfy the needs of their members. Finally, in “It Was like a Fever: Narrative and Identity in Social Protest” (1998), Francesca Polletta sought to explain how SNCC, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and other African American groups viewed themselves during this period of social revolution. According to Polletta, these protest collectives followed a simple formula through which they identified a “social condition in need of remedy, a *prognosis* for how to do that, and a *rationale* for action.”²¹ For the many African Americans this meant protesting against their government and the racist social and political policies that were in place. The structure of these groups and their platforms became imperative to the development of organizations like SNCC. According

²⁰ Simon Hall, “The NAACP, Black Power, and the African-American Freedom Struggle, 1966-1969,” *The Historian*. 69:1 (2007), 53.

²¹ Francesca Polletta, “‘It Was Like A Fever...’: Narrative and Identity in Social Protest,” *Social Problems*. 45:2. (1998), 139.

to Polletta, organizations such as SNCC hoped to offer a forum for students who wished to become politically active.

What these authors shared was their efforts to place SNCC within some kind of context in the entirety of the civil rights era. The evolution of approaches is evident as more historians in recent years have looked at groups like SNCC in an international context. Another similarity between this international/national group of historians is when examining the success of SNCC, these researchers tend to focus primarily on SNCC's work in the Southern United States. The work done by the student movement in the Southern United States should not be disregarded. However, to better understand SNCC historians should focus also on branches that extended well beyond these traditional geographical borders. Racism, oppression, and injustice existed throughout the United States and so too did organizations such as SNCC. These historians provide us with an international context in which to place SNCC and other civil rights organizations. Nonetheless, adding the work done by the Californian branches could provide support to the arguments found in much of the existing literature. Just as SNCC was not confined to the limits of the nation during the "global sixties", neither was it confined to the South within the United States.

Civil Rights in California

While undeniably SNCC had its roots in North Carolina, growing out of the Greensboro sit-ins, the group did not operate solely within the American South. States all across America, including California, had vibrant and active SNCC branches where students worked tirelessly in co-ordination with SNCC's head office and within local communities. The scholarly focus on SNCC's work in the American South has led to a lack of research concerning the organizations work in other states. Yet in California much

of the historiographical work concerning civil rights has dealt with the rise of the BPP, the Watts Riots, or the FSM. SNCC, in many instances, played only a supporting role in many of these civil rights narratives concerning California. However, student members of SNCC published a monthly newsletter that carefully documented not only national happenings but also what members were doing at the local levels. Projects launched by other civil rights groups have been well documented and have provided insight into California's African American history. SNCC was heavily involved in various community efforts and aided in the development of civil rights for the African American community. Although the historiography presents a different narrative concerning civil rights in California that does not include SNCC, the student group played a key role in the events of the late 1960s.

Some historians, such as Regina Freer have focused their attention on individual activists rather than examining an organization as a whole. Freer accomplished this in her article, "L.A. Race Woman: Charlotta Bass and the Complexities of Black Political Development" (2004), which took up the impact that Bass had on the African American community through her contributions to a local African American newspaper, starting in 1912.²² Freer notes that little historical discussion has taken place concerning Charlotta Bass because of much larger lack of research on the pre-Watts Riots years in Los Angeles. The study of her life, and subsequently the newspaper, helped develop a pre-Watts narrative that is crucial to understanding the historical roots of the civil rights movement in Los Angeles and California.

²² Regina Freer, "L.A. Race Woman: Charlotta Bass and the Complexities of Black Political Development in Los Angeles," *American Quarterly*, 56:3 (2004), 609.

After Charlotta Bass and *The California Eagle* came the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) which operated in Los Angeles in the 1940s and 1950s. In his 1998 article titled “You Understand My Condition: The Civil Rights Congress in the Los Angeles African-American Community”, Josh Sides continued the historical examination of the development of African American activism in California. The CRC attempted to defend “the rights of ‘labour, minority groups,’ and ‘the Negro in particular’.”²³ Frequently in alliance with Charlotta Bass, the CRC attempted to meet the many demands of the African American Los Angeles community. The CRC has often been credited with being the “first line of defence for many black victims of police abuse” regardless of whether or not the CRC believed their defendants were innocent or guilty.²⁴ The CRC intended to act as a forum in which all African American people could seek legal aid despite their economic, political or legal standing. The defense of African Americans against police brutality would be a continuing trend with the CRC until they disbanded in 1956. Organizations like SNCC, Watt’s Community Alert Program (CAP), and the BPP took up the fight against police brutality after the CRC disbanded.

In Laura Pulido’s monograph *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (2004), the majority of her research deals with the development of the BPP, and two other ethnic organizations, El Centro de Accion Social y Autonomo (CASA) and East Wind, while SNCC is only barely mentioned in passing in order to reinforce its association with the American South. Pulido attributed the rise in support for more radical organizations like the BPP to a shift in ideology after SNCC “began identifying itself as a

²³ Josh Sides, “You Understand My Condition”: The Civil Rights Congress in the Los Angeles African American Community, 1946-1952,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 67:2 (May, 1998), 234.

²⁴ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 240.

human rights organization rather than a civil rights group.”²⁵ However, for Pulido, the key to understanding activism in Los Angeles was to examine civil rights organizations such as the BPP, CASA, and East Wind rather than through an organization like SNCC.

Racial discrimination was palpable in California, leading to a six day riot in 1965 in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Watts, where racial tensions would boil over, resulting in full blown rioting. In *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1997), Gerald Horne examined the pretext and the subsequent reactions to the Watts Riots. Horne explained that during the age of white flight realtors selected Watts as an area for African American development. It was a period in which real estate agents effectively pushed the African American community into specific neighborhoods, generally ones which were underdeveloped and unwanted by whites. As Horne clearly demonstrated, to understand the Watts Riots, one must understand the housing issues that played a major role in firing up the African American community. However, the Watts Riots were caused by a combination of factors and many who lived there understood it to be only a matter of time before tenuous relationship between law enforcement and community members boiled over. Still, Horne’s analysis of Watts went further to show that “[t]he Watts Uprising helped to set in motion a nationalism that filled an ideological void in Black L.A.” The response was that the riots would be the creation of organizations such as the Citizens Action Program, the Watts Writers Workshop, among several other groups. Horne’s discussion of SNCC was vague, like much of the California literature concerning the student organization. He mentioned that while SNCC was

²⁵ Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2006), 92-93.

operating in the California they were generally discounted as they had been considered to be Communist sympathizers.²⁶

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz also added to historians understanding of SNCC with her article “The 1960s and the Transformation of Campus Culture” (1986). Horowitz examined the influence of the civil rights movement and other various forms of protest on campus life and how student activism became almost synonymous with college life. Horowitz attributed the shift of traditionally conservative colleges towards a more liberal stance as a post-Red Scare response. The classroom, Horowitz explains, shifted to one where students challenged their professors and professors became “mentors and allies” as opposed to the traditional figures of authority.²⁷ Horowitz used the University of California at Berkeley as an example of how conventional colleges became more liberal. While adding to historian’s understanding of student activism in the California area, the mention of SNCC was rare and was merely a side note in the overall student activist narrative.

In Daniel Widner’s article, entitled “Writing Watts: Budd Schulberg, Black Poverty, and the Culture War on Poverty” (2008), the author discussed the creation of the Watts Writers Workshop, part of a developing Black Arts culture in the California area. Launched by Budd Schulberg, the Watts Writers Workshop would become influential in local politics through their various plays, dance troops, films and creative writing. Through the workshop, members were able to get published in *Time* magazine with their responses to the Watts Riots of 1965. While considerably angry over the many instances

²⁶ Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: Da Capo Press, 1997), 35-36, 132, 266.

²⁷ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, “The 1960s and the Transformation of Campus Culture,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 23:1 (1986), 6.

of racism in Los Angeles, the authors also sought to “convey thoughtfulness, critical self-analysis, memory and humour” to the Watts Riots discussion.²⁸ Their original goal for the Watts Writers Workshop was to help bring awareness to the increasing financial disparity that kept many African Americans in low income areas which subsequently made them and their families more susceptible to crime and violence.²⁹ In his article, Widener demonstrated that there were larger, more culturally creative aspects to the civil rights movement, shown through the creation of a popular and influential theatre and creative writing organizations. Participants in the civil rights movement, as Widener demonstrates, did not always adhere to what some may consider standard protest practices. Rather, they used a variety of creative forums to convey their demands for equality and freedom.

The history of civil rights in California is important for two reasons. An examination of the historiography of California demonstrates that historians have not paid much attention to the work done by SNCC. The historical work that has been done also presents the long standing history of civil rights within the state. The success of Bass’ newsletter likely presented a precedent for SNCC, possibly leading to the Californian branches decisions to launch its own newsletter. As well, SNCC’s collaborative efforts with the Mexican American community would add a unique perspective to its analysis of the BPP and a separate Mexican American organization, CASA.

Placing the Californian Branches Into the Historiography

All of these historians worked towards the same goal of contributing to history’s understanding of SNCC. Still, they approached this task by different means and

²⁸ Daniel Widener, “Writing Watts: Budd Schulberg, Black Poetry, and the Culture War on Poverty,” *Journal of Urban History*, 35:665, (March, 2008), 670.

²⁹ Widener, “Writing Watts,” 666.

perspectives. Many of these historians tackled large historical questions such as: what caused the failure of SNCC? What did “Black Power” mean to SNCC and to other civil rights organizations? How should historians define California and African American activism? Through their respective works, each of these historians attempted to convey the most comprehensive interpretation of the events as possible. Authors like Barnett and Urban offered historians an understanding of how SNCC failed to bring equal rights to its own organization. This feminist perspective allows others to understand SNCC as an organization not without its flaws. While students fought for civil rights, they may not have been at the forefront for female equality. Much of the current feminist literature, as previously mentioned, worked to remedy the predominantly male civil rights narrative. Within Barbara Ransby’s monograph, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, mentions of tensions between Baker and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. existed primarily due to sexism within the SCLC.³⁰ Thus, authors like Ransby and Urban have moved away from studies like Giddings to argue that the positivity of simply including women in SNCC and other civil rights organizations is not enough anymore to enhance our understanding of women and civil rights work.

Authors like Matusow and Carson sought to explain the causes of SNCC’s dissolution. Each of these authors provided historical research with a range of interpretations. For Matusow, SNCC’s failure to sustain itself was a result of impatient students. He argued that their inability to accept a slow but steady change in the mentality of the American population can explain why so many students would eventually turn towards more radical organizations. When the fundamental shift in the United States failed to happen after the passing of the Voting Act and the Civil Rights Act, students

³⁰ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 235.

became irritated at the “lack of progress.”³¹ However, Carson presents an opposing view of the same events. Carson claimed that SNCC lacked sustainability due to its varied attempts to “keep up” with ever shifting civil rights ideology. Students eventually became uncertain of where SNCC fit into the struggle for civil rights and what the organization was attempting to accomplish. They subsequently left the organization for groups that appeared to be more cohesive.³²

Differences in the understanding of “Black Power” have also led to different interpretations amongst historians. In Hall’s article, he asserted that organizations like the NAACP initially felt the black power ideology simply perpetuated hate and racism that many civil rights activists were fighting against.³³ However, former members like Stokely Carmichael claimed that “Black Power” provided communities with a political voice and would be necessary in the progression of civil rights.³⁴ Still, there are points where these two authors came together. Hall explained that even organizations like the NAACP begrudgingly had been in favor of “Black Power” when it specifically related to community empowerment and racial pride.³⁵

The examination of works dealing with SNCC in the California area allows historians to comprehend where gaps in the literature may exist. While the organization’s work in Californian has not been discussed in depth, SNCC has been discussed in some historians work concerning Californian civil rights history. Generally, the literature concerning California treats SNCC as a small piece in a much larger narrative. The narrative for the Golden State, while well developed, tends to focus on three main areas:

³¹ Matusow, *The Unravelling of America*, 345.

³² Carson, *In Struggle*, 299.

³³ Hall, “The NAACP, Black Power, and the African-American Freedom Struggle,” 78.

³⁴ Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” 641.

³⁵ Hall, “The NAACP, Black Power, and the African-American Freedom Struggle,” 80.

post-War activism, the Watts Riots, and radicalism. In Martin Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr.'s text *Black Against Empire* mentions how BPP founder Huey Newton was inspired to create the BPP after reading an article from SNCC's Californian newsletter, *The Movement*.³⁶ Nevertheless, SNCC is only mentioned on a handful of pages and is mentioned only briefly. Historians like Lauren Arazia in "Complicating the Beloved Community: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the National Farm Workers Association" have begun to examine SNCC's role in Californian civil rights history. Arazia carefully documents the relationship that existed between SNCC and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA).³⁷ While SNCC takes on a leading role in Arazia's work, the article only focuses on one specific aspect of SNCC's work in the state. It is clear that historians have begun to shift their attention towards SNCC but there still remains much to discuss regarding the student organization's time in California.

The contributions these historians have made towards our understanding of SNCC and civil rights are significant. Still, these historians have primarily focused their attention on the efforts made by SNCC branches in the Southern United States or discussed SNCC's California branches as a subsidiary narrative. The branches operating in the South deserve significant historical attention since many of them were founding offices. The work that has already been accomplished by these historians should not be disregarded, as they have laid the ground work to allow for others to examine SNCC in broader terms like relating SNCC's work to other international organizations. This thesis will add to the growing focus of SNCC's efforts along the West Coast.

³⁶ Joshua Bloom & Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012), 39.

³⁷ Lauren Arazia, "Complicating the Beloved Community," in *The Struggle in Black and Brown: African American and Mexican American Relations During the Civil Rights Era*, ed., Brian D. Behnken (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 78.

This thesis also intends to work within a new historical discussion taking place. Historians like Thomas Sugrue have contributed to our understanding of the civil rights movement by shifting the attention away from the Southern United States and brought the discussion to the Northern states. Sugrue's book, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, discusses the de facto segregation that existed throughout the northern United States through issues like housing inequality.³⁸ This thesis will contribute to this shifting perspective on civil rights by discussing the work accomplished by the SNCC branches in California.

³⁸ Thomas Sugrue. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle of Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 203.

Chapter Two: “We All Black To the White Man”: The History of Civil Rights in California

The fight for freedom and equality in California has a long and exciting history that extends beyond the perceived civil rights era of the 1960s. Activists such as Charlotta Bass dominated African American activism in California before more nationally known leaders like Huey Newton or Eldridge Cleaver came onto the scene in the 1960s. With the Watts Riot of 1965 and the creation of the BPP shortly after, much of the historical focus of civil rights in California has been during this decade.³⁹ There had been significant progress made by earlier civil rights activists prior to 1945. This chapter will present the vast history of activism that existed in California throughout the twentieth century. The chapter will show that while the discussion of civil rights is extensive, little to date has been mentioned regarding SNCC and its efforts in California. As well, this chapter will demonstrate that civil rights was significant in the state and that organizations such as SNCC bring forward a greater understanding of how freedom movements progressed in the state.

Early Examples of Civil Rights in California

Women played an important role in early civil rights activism in California. Charlotta Bass, a California native, eventually became one of the most recognizable and

³⁹ In some instances, historians writing and reflecting on the August clash have refrained from addressing the events as a “riot.” As well, many of those involved perceived the incident as an organized rebellion with clear motives and targets. While the term “riot” tends to be associated with spontaneous, disorganized, and violent protest, historians and participants have chosen to address the events as the Watts Rebellion or the Watts Revolt, rather than the Watts Riot. Still, the events that occurred in the African American neighbourhood of Los Angeles are more commonly referred to as the Watts Riots. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, the events that occurred in Watts will be addressed as the Watts Riot.

prominent activists in the state, primarily due to her position as editor of the *California Eagle*. The *California Eagle* had been Los Angeles' most popular and influential black newspaper.⁴⁰ Because many American media outlets during the early twentieth century “largely ignored communities of color, black residents of all classes and ideological organizations looked to the *California Eagle* for news.”⁴¹ Bass became extremely dedicated to publishing a newspaper that would satisfy the needs of the African American community. From 1912 until 1951, she edited and owned the *Eagle*. The examination of activism through this paper has enlightened historians on the early community efforts, especially since Bass had ties with prominent organizations, such as the NAACP.⁴² Bass had been influential in the Los Angeles, she was also a product of a time which allowed her, as a woman, to become a leader after to the onset of First Wave Feminism. While Bass was working almost exclusively in the Los Angeles area, the many issues she and other African Americans faced during this period were common throughout cities across the United States.

Bass edited and owned the *Eagle* during a time in which the African American population of Los Angeles had gone through major growth. Prior to her arrival in Los Angeles in 1910, the African American community was relatively small and dispersed throughout the metropolis in comparison to other cities such as New York. This somewhat diffuse city life initially attracted many African Americans to migrate to Los Angeles. The African American community doubled between 1910 and 1920; swelling

⁴⁰ Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 283.

⁴¹ Regina Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 612.

⁴² Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008), 191.

from 7,599 to 15,579.⁴³ New housing initiatives would eventually force African Americans into underdeveloped neighbourhoods such as Watts. In order to reach African Americans with her newspaper, Bass sought to gain memberships to a variety of black activist organizations such as the NAACP and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which was led by Jamaican immigrant activist Marcus Garvey. By becoming involved in these organizations, she hoped to bring her readers the most informative African American newspaper possible. Naturally, these two organizations had been “engaged in a fierce battle in the 1920s over the best strategy for black uplift, integration or separation.”⁴⁴ However, the Californian branches of these two groups appealed to many African Americans, since residents “embraced whatever seemed likely to help black live better lives in their half free environment.”⁴⁵ The NAACP’s Los Angeles branch was established in 1914 with the goal of abolishing racist Jim Crow laws while UNIA’s Los Angeles branch was established in 1921, with the goal of creating a strong, independent, and separate social and political system in the African American community. The NAACP and UNIA appealed to numerous members of the African American Los Angeles community, though few would actually advocate for Garvey’s program of an eventual return to Africa. Rather, members of the Los Angeles branch had been swayed by UNIA’s economic empowerment efforts.⁴⁶ Despite differences regarding how to achieve greater equality within society, both of these civil rights organizations, along with Bass, worked diligently on community issues. One of these issues would be the fight for equal access to housing which would prove to be a conflict that would

⁴³ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 611.

⁴⁴ Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 193.

⁴⁵ Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 193.

⁴⁶ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 612-613.

continue throughout the twentieth century for African Americans across the United States.

Bass, and other civil rights activists during this period, fought for the desegregation of housing development. In larger cities, minorities were more likely to be forced, due to a variety of legal and economic restraints, into inadequate housing facilities. Fair, adequate, and equal access to housing would be an issue that dominated civil rights discourse throughout the United States, not just in California. While some historians have associated the discourse of racist housing policies with the rise of suburbia in the post-World War Two era, Bass and other African American activists were already working on achieving such goals during the urban expansion period of the 1920s-1940s. Bass and many other community members fought against the racial restrictions imposed on potential African American home buyers. While they helped bring to light such civil rights issues Bass also helped draw attention to local organizations that would help Los Angeles residents fight similar cases of discrimination.⁴⁷

In the 1930s, the NAACP and the Urban League would both become intensely involved in the racial politics of housing. These organizations would launch anti-discrimination campaigns in the hopes of countering the exclusion of African Americans from adequate housing facilities. However, despite their early efforts little tangible progress was made to defeat the racist practices that prevailed in the employment and housing markets of Los Angeles. As one survey showed, “by 1970, 70 percent of the black population [were still] confined to one assembly district.”⁴⁸ While in Los Angeles, more than in any other city, African Americans were more likely to own their homes,

⁴⁷ Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 192.

⁴⁸ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 236.

they were often “in violation of restrictive covenants,” and faced numerous instances of harassment.⁴⁹ The growth of the Los Angeles’ African American population reached its peak by World War Two, as thousands migrated to the city each month, resulting in a push for housing equality. Through the *California Eagle*, Bass often published accounts of those who had recently been evicted from their houses, thereby creating greater awareness about this issue. In one case, a story Bass released resulted in her and other community members forming a committee of approximately 100 women, ending with the evictee regaining entrance to her home.⁵⁰ The *California Eagle* and Bass proved to be more than a source of community information but also a catalyst that drove its readers towards activism and protest. With the “free and equal citizenship” rhetoric surrounding the War, it became common for people within the African American community to push for what was referred to as the “Double V”; victory against fascism in Europe and against racism at home. Unfortunately, the only victory would be in Europe and the African American community continued to push for civil rights throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

Activists like Charlotta Bass did not focus their efforts solely on issues of housing but also sought to allow African Americans to have access to all the same opportunities as their white counterparts including employment. Despite the economic boom that arose out of the Second World War, African Americans nationwide faced racial discrimination when it came to employment opportunities. Bass wrote that while Los Angeles “offered sunshine, open space, and the possibility of home ownership, it did not initially offer

⁴⁹ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 616.

⁵⁰ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 616.

much access to industrial jobs.”⁵¹ Much of the work done towards equal employment opportunities would arise out of the war industry boom of the 1940s.

During the World War Two period, Bass worked closely with Reverend Clayton Russell, and through the *California Eagle*, they had been able to organize readers in a fight for workers’ rights and African Americans’ right to work. Bass and others demanded that unions become more open, thus allowing for African Americans to have equal access to employment opportunities. Anti-discrimination committees were launched in hopes of allowing more African Americans to participate in the growing labor market.⁵² Bass and others in Los Angeles had sought to guarantee African American workers’ rights and opportunities that they had previously been denied.

Bass also addressed the specific predicament of African American women. Women around Los Angeles had written to the *California Eagle* to ask for help gaining employment during the war time boom.⁵³ They hoped that a prominent activist like Bass could lead them towards meaningful and equal employment opportunities. In 1942, the United States Employment Service branch in Los Angeles made the claim that “black women preferred domestic work to jobs in the defence industries.”⁵⁴ This statement was meant as a way to encourage the exclusion of women by employers, despite the need for workers in industrial sectors.⁵⁵ In response, Bass, along with the Independent Church of Christ, first organized a spiritual meeting.⁵⁶ However, they did not leave all their hopes up to prayer. The following day, Bass and the other women “converged on the U.S. Employment Service headquarters in protest and successfully convinced officials to lift

⁵¹ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 620.

⁵² Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 621-622.

⁵³ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 622.

⁵⁴ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 237.

⁵⁵ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 237.

⁵⁶ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 622.

the ban against hiring black women in the war industries.”⁵⁷ While Bass and her group of women were successful in changing the legal barriers that faced women in Los Angeles, this did not mean that attitudes changed as quickly as the laws. While new prospects now existed for both African American men and women, they were still under-represented in the industrial growth that coupled the arrival of the Second World War. The end of the war brought a shift in civil rights politics and means of protest that in some instances hindered the efforts of civil rights activism.

Post-World War Two Civil Rights Activism

The end of the war also marked an end to how African American activists operated in the United States. The Red Scare changed how these organizations presented themselves and their objectives to the public and Bass and her paper were not exempt from the over-reaching hand of anti-communist sentiment. Many historians have in fact looked to Bass as a guide as to how Pacific coast civil rights politics organized themselves in the pre- and post-war era.⁵⁸ Bass’ journalism revealed to historians the concerns of the African American community during the 1920s through to the 1940s and how community members unified the fight for racial equality. New organizations, such as the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), founded in 1946, proved to be extremely popular in post-war California.⁵⁹ More specifically, the city of Los Angeles would become host to one of the strongest and most popular CRC branches in the United States.⁶⁰ The CRC would attribute its rise in popularity to Bass’ newsletter since the newsletter had become

⁵⁷ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 621.

⁵⁸ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 625.

⁵⁹ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 243.

⁶⁰ Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses: 1988), 45.

increasingly critical of older organizations such as the NAACP. For its part, the NAACP began to be perceived as out of “touch with community concerns and more noted for its hesitancy than its militancy.”⁶¹ Bass frequently noted in her paper that the ideologically leftist CRC was much more active within the community, and this support for the CRC would not go unnoticed. Bass, too, would be targeted in the post-war years for sympathizing with “communist” organizations like the CRC.⁶² The Red Scare would force many civil rights organizations to reshape their methods for combating racism by confining themselves within more conservative and patriotic social standards.

Many civil rights activists were now fearful that they, and their efforts, would be accused of promoting socialist or communist agendas, resulting in members distancing themselves from the organizations and even legal persecution for some groups. Concerned that their efforts to bring about equality would backslide, those who had formerly associated themselves with leftism now attempted to work within the more conservative framework that had been established by Senator Joseph McCarthy and organizations like the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). HUAC had been created in order to investigate and prosecute people and organizations that were taking part in subversive activities.⁶³ Any organization believed to be in aligned with communists or promoting communist doctrine was placed under surveillance by the United States government. The CRC would not be exempt from such persecution, and two years after its founding, was placed under HUAC surveillance. In the minds of HUAC members, the CRC was part of a revolutionary conspiracy, whose goals were to

⁶¹ Freer, “L.A. Race Woman,” 626.

⁶² Horne, *Communist Front?*, 72.

⁶³ John Earl Haynes & Harvey Klehr, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 134.

“carry communist theory into the practical sphere of workaday relations.”⁶⁴ The Committee would ultimately argue that the CRC had been merely using civil rights as a front to push Communist doctrine to the masses.⁶⁵ These slanderous accusations were made in hopes of deterring African Americans from joining the organization or supporting it financially. However, the CRC would thrive until the mid-1950s despite the organization’s alleged Communist connections.

The CRC, like Bass, would become a major player in defending worker’s rights in the African American community. Originating in New York City, the CRC had made its way to California by 1946. They represented “the rights of labor, minority groups, and the Negro in particular.”⁶⁶ To develop further support from the African American community, they claimed to defend issues of economic exploitation and racism, which were used to help repress African Americans. When the CRC was established in Los Angeles, the city had been experiencing a significant increase in its African American population. The six year period prior to the CRC’s inaugural year, the African American population had increased by 108 percent or by roughly 70,000 people.⁶⁷ This growth coincided with an increase in the war industry in California. This helps explain why organizations like the CRC, who claimed to fight for the rights of workers, gained popularity during the post-war period. The CRC, unlike the NAACP which had experienced a downturn in support during the post-war period, was immensely popular due to the wide range of issues the organization promised to address.

⁶⁴ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 235.

⁶⁵ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 235.

⁶⁶ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 240.

⁶⁷ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 234-237.

The CRC would become known for its legal efforts in California. They had been one of the first organizations to attempt to address the blatant police brutality experienced by many African Americans. The CRC published a survey in 1949 detailing African Americans experiences with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The survey, conducted primarily in the neighbourhood of Watts, found that many people within the community felt discriminated against by law enforcement officers. The survey was conducted primarily in the Watts area. The survey revealed that “[w]ell over half [...] testified to having been lined up on the sidewalk and frisked for no apparent reason; 54 percent had been ‘slapped, kicked, etc.’, by the police, and 47 percent maintained that police had entered their homes without warrants and without explanation.”⁶⁸ Seeing that police brutality was an issue within Los Angeles, the CRC decided to dedicate some of its efforts and finances to fighting legal cases for the African American community.

Prior to the CRC, other organizations like the Southern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the NAACP had acknowledged issues of false charges and police violence against the African American community. Nonetheless, ACLU and NAACP organizers felt their organizations were either ill-prepared to deal with the cases or, in the case of the NAACP, were simply “overwhelmed by the magnitude of wartime migration and taken off-guard by the accompanying rise of racial hostility.”⁶⁹ However, when the CRC was launched in Los Angeles, it soon became popular amongst African Americans who sought legal advice or legal representation. During the summer of 1948, the CRC “received requests from at least twenty African Americans to file suit against the LAPD for alleged abuse or misconduct, which included

⁶⁸ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 235, 238.

⁶⁹ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 239.

verbal abuse, beatings, and ‘frame-up’ arrests.”⁷⁰ Compared to other CRC branches, the L.A. office was considered to have the most successful lawyers. In April, 1950, the CRC had a total of fifty-three lawyers on staff, who had been successful in closing thirty-five of forty cases favourably.⁷¹ This success rate only made the CRC more popular amongst African Americans.

While the CRC predominantly championed the rights of African Americans, other minority groups also sought its aid. The summer of 1948 saw ten to fifteen cases where “African and Mexican Americans sought the CRC’s help in combating discriminatory practices in stores and on public transportation.”⁷² While the exact number of cases has been debated, the CRC’s work in 1948 demonstrates two points. First, that racism, whether legal or de facto, had been significant enough in California that both Mexican Americans and African Americans had been seeking counsel. The second is that with the resources granted to them by the CRC more and more people of color began to fight back. The growing support for discrimination cases for Mexican Americans would prove to be unique. It is one of the few examples, prior to SNCC’s work with the NFWA, where civil rights organizations extended their resources beyond the African American community to the Mexican American community in California. The relationship between SNCC and the NFWA will be discussed further in chapter three.

Prior to the CRC, many organizations like the ACLU and the NAACP had generally been unwilling to take on cases involving minor offenses or where legal representatives felt certain that their clients were guilty of the crimes they had been charged with. The CRC ultimately decided to represent all people, regardless of their

⁷⁰ Horne, *Communist Front?*, 59.

⁷¹ Horne, *Communist Front?*, 59.

⁷² Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 240.

guilt, stating that “no case was too small.”⁷³ The defence stance they presented to the courts is also noteworthy. In cases where defendants were most likely guilty, the CRC attempted to bring attention to the factors that may have forced the individual to commit the crime. As Emil Freed, a former field organizer for the CRC recalled, the organizations also held meetings to discuss the incident in question in an attempt to make it a community issue. It was an attempt to bring awareness to the court and to the community about the impact one’s neighborhood could have on one’s social behaviour.⁷⁴ If the majority of an individual’s life was spent in poverty and oppression, some crimes occurred only as a response to the unjust society in which that individual lived. It was the racist and oppressive environment, not inherent dispositions, that made some people criminals.

Along with an increase in social consciousness, the post-war period also saw a rise in the role that churches played in the civil rights movement. The SCLC had not been the first organization to gain backing from religious institutions. The CRC in particular advocated for local religious institutions to become more involved in the campaign for civil rights. Often, pastors were sent memos by the CRC asking to allow church members who represented the CRC to speak to their congregations.⁷⁵ It would be the death of a local civil rights activist, Herman Burns, at the hands of LAPD to prompt several religious institutions to speak out against police brutality and campaign for civil rights. In August, 1948, Herman Burns and his brother John Burns had attempted to seek medical assistance for their other brother, Julius Burns, following a scuffle at a local dance hall. While heading to the hospital, the three brothers were stopped and brutally beaten by

⁷³ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 235.

⁷⁴ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 235, 246.

⁷⁵ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 249.

white LAPD officers, resulting in the death of Herman Burns. Reverend Clifford Spears would help organize the “Justice for Burns Citizens Committee” which launched an inquiry into the Burns case after a judge dismissed the police of any wrong doing.⁷⁶ The ‘Justice for Burns Citizens Committee’ also had prominent members of the community involved in their initiative, including Charlotta Bass.⁷⁷ The committee raised funds for the remaining members of the Burns family, who shortly after Herman’s death were arrested for “disturbing the peace.”⁷⁸ Despite numerous attempts to overturn the first ruling, the Committee was unable to bring justice for the Burns family but the case did allow more religious leaders to become involved with the fight for civil rights.

Californian civil rights organizations not only fought against racism within their communities but frequently battled accusations of harbouring communists or being subversive organizations themselves. In 1940, the United States Congress passed the Smith Act, which allowed the government authority to detain anyone who they suspected being capable of or plotting a rebellion to overthrow the American government.⁷⁹ Originally, the Smith Act was meant to be used those suspected of being Nazi or Japanese supporters but after the Second World War, the Smith Act would be used to detain those suspected of being or of supporting Communism. Many civil rights organizations that had been operating during this period experienced an array of difficulties due to accusations of communist sedition. In July 1951, four residents of Los Angeles were arrested under the Smith Act, including Rose Chernin who had been the executive secretary of a CRC

⁷⁶ Sides, “You Understand My Condition,” 247.

⁷⁷ Stevens, *Radical L.A.*, 288.

⁷⁸ Stevens, *Radical L.A.*, 288.

⁷⁹ Maurice Isserman, *If I Had A Hammer: The Death of the Old left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1987), 4.

affiliated organization.⁸⁰ These arrests led to organizations like the CRC becoming increasingly concerned over communist accusations directed at the organization. It would be during this hostile period that the CRC would start to lose support among its California members. The increase of arrests made against those who were suspected of Communist acts was one prominent reason for the decline in membership. After the first charges were laid against members of the CRC, the organization shifted its efforts towards fighting the government and legal system against false accusations of subversion.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the fight against communist allegations proved to be too much and the Los Angeles branch of the CRC disbanded by early 1950s. As the years progressed, many African Americans living in California felt that their demand for equality was continuously ignored. As the Red Scare passed, many African Americans and civil rights organizations experienced an increase in oppression at the hands of local law enforcement for superficial reasons. This targeting by various law enforcement agencies resulted in communities such as the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Watts exploding in protest against racism and oppression by the mid-1960s.

The Watts Riot of 1965

The Watts neighbourhood had been a predominantly African American neighbourhood in the city of Los Angeles. Since the 1950s, African Americans living in Los Angeles had not experienced any sort of economic rise like their white counterparts. The average family in Watts made approximately \$3,771 per year, which was half of

⁸⁰ Sides. "You Understand My Condition," 253.

⁸¹ Sides. "You Understand My Condition," 256.

what the white families of Los Angeles were making during the same period.⁸² Part of the reason for this economic disparity was a result of unequal access to jobs for African American males. More women were employed than men in the Watts neighbourhood due to the perception that African American women were better employees than their male counterparts and as many as 30 per cent of the residents of Watts relied on welfare as their main source of income.⁸³ As was the case in many other parts of the United States, Watts's residents often encountered racism when they attempted to collect their welfare cheques. Many of those who had been receiving welfare felt that officials were "more concerned with bureaucratic red tape, saving the taxpayers' dollar, efficiency and regulations, and harassing unmarried couples, than with providing jobs and welfare funds for those who needed them."⁸⁴ As many residents explained, it was a degrading experience, especially when employees at the welfare office "cross-examined them to see if they were 'cheating' the system by working."⁸⁵ These largely negative experiences created tension between government officials and Watts residents.

This mistrust of the government and the city extended to the LAPD as well. While this was not a sentiment unique to Watts, or California, it may have been felt more widely than in other cities. For example, only 41 percent of those surveyed in the Watts curfew area post-riot felt that they could trust the police, while 92 percent of their white counterparts felt that the LAPD was there to protect them. This distrust was not unfounded after one survey revealed that roughly one third claimed to have personally

⁸² James O'Toole, *Watts and Woodstock: Identity and Culture in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 51.

⁸³ O'Toole, *Watts and Woodstock*, 55.

⁸⁴ Sean McConahay, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 58.

⁸⁵ O'Toole, *Watts and Woodstock*, 55.

experienced police mistreatment.⁸⁶ Police brutality was not an issue recognized only by African Americans. White residents of Los Angeles acknowledged that some abuses of power occurred. Even Sam Yorty, the mayor of Los Angeles from 1961-1973, had originally run on a platform promise to end police brutality.⁸⁷ Much of the distain towards the LAPD would surface during the rioting, and many more instances of police brutality would be suffered by the Watts community.

It should be noted, however, that as much as the Watts area was ignored by the greater Los Angeles community, a strong sense of identity and loyalty existed within the urban neighbourhood. As those living within the community noted, “[t]here is a tendency for the people involved to act together [...]here are often strong kinship ties and organic interdependencies within the community and a degree of independence from the outside world.”⁸⁸ Thus, despite the forces that may have forced black Angelenos into the Watts area, they worked with one another in hopes of building not only a sustainable community but a friendly community. This unity would continue throughout the 1965 riot.

The community of Watts would be shaken one night in August that sparked five days of rebellion. On August 11th, 1965, Marquette Frye, a young African American living in the Watts neighbourhood, was stopped by the California Highway Patrol for apparently driving under the influence of alcohol.⁸⁹ Frye, when stopped by police officers, was merely a few blocks away from his mother’s home. The altercation between Frye and the Patrol officers led to a small crowd gathering to see what the commotion

⁸⁶ McConahay, *The Politics of Violence*, 56-57.

⁸⁷ Stevens, *Radical L.A.*, 315.

⁸⁸ O’Toole, *Watts and Woodstock*, 79.

⁸⁹ Anthony Oberschall, “The Los Angeles Riot of August 1965,” *Social Problems*, 15:4 (1968), 333.

was about. Frye's mother took notice of the commotion growing outside her home and shortly thereafter discovered it was her son being arrested by the police.⁹⁰ She soon confronted the officers, demanding to know why they were arresting her son while at the same time scolding him for his actions. The confrontation between the Frye family and the police escalated after the officers drew their weapons on Marquette Frye for resisting arrest, leading to Frye's mother to jump "on the back of the arresting officer."⁹¹ According to some bystanders, the Highway Patrol officers on the scene had used excessive force to detain the Fryes and to subdue the growing crowd. According to some bystanders, a Patrol officer "pulled out a shotgun and ordered the crowd to disperse."⁹² Crowds followed the California Highway Patrol officers to the station where many more people gathered to protest the Fryes' arrests.⁹³ While initially the LAPD had attempted to control the growing crowds, the number swelled until eventually a full scale riot had broken out lasting six days. Instances of police violence were so common within the Watts community that crowds often gathered in defence of those arrested. However, the violent response by law enforcement officers in the case of the Fryes likely contributed to the six day riot.

As far as many within the Watts neighbourhood were concerned, the police were an invading force and were only there to protect white businesses. The rioting had grown out from the intersection of Imperial Highway and Avalon Boulevard, where the first "hot spot" of rioting broke out. Chaos quickly spread throughout the city as "others decided to duplicate Imperial and Avalon in their own neighbourhoods." It was believed that

⁹⁰ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 174.

⁹¹ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 56.

⁹² Horne, *Fire This Time*, 55.

⁹³ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 56.

allowing only African American police officers to patrol the area would be the best course of action in terms of avoiding further unnecessary conflicts between white officers and African American rioters.⁹⁴ However, the rioters continued on and conflicts between law enforcement officers and community members became more frequent as the day progressed. By the second day of rioting, over 5,000 members of the National Guard had been called in to help control the situation.⁹⁵

The police force had pushed the African American community to retaliate against the wide range of injustices they had experienced over the years. Those who had been protesting outside the station of the California Highway Patrol did not disperse until the wee hours of the first morning of rioting.⁹⁶ However, things in Los Angeles would not subside for another several days. The following day, protests continued after a local supermarket was looted.⁹⁷ It is important to note that very specific, mainly white, stores were targeted during the riots.

There had been longstanding resentment to the various white owned stores in the Watts area for quite some time. Many African Americans believed that the white merchants in the area had been cheating the community not simply through inflated prices but also by denying them employment opportunities. Employment rates in the area fluctuated frequently. At any given time, the unemployment rate in Watts could be between 12 and 18 percent where the rate for Los Angeles as whole was approximately 3.5 percent in the 1960s. At the same time, white owned businesses operating in Watts were unlikely to hire community members and few businesses within the area were

⁹⁴ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 59, 61.

⁹⁵ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 82.

⁹⁶ Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 70.

⁹⁷ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 59.

operated by African Americans. In fact, about 80 percent of those employed were working at “[w]hite-owned factories in South-Central Los Angeles and white business outside the black quarter.”⁹⁸ These ‘local’ stores had little to do with the local community other than sharing the same space. During the Watts Riot, participants specifically targeted white owned stores and left African American owned businesses alone. Community members viewed this as a careful form of protest while law enforcement officers viewed their actions as wanton destruction and responded with violent repression.

The abuse experienced by the African American community during the Watts Riot not only resulted in violent beatings but also led to many unnecessary deaths. These deaths were perceived to be expressions of oppression by the police force rather than the usual suppression of the community. For African Americans, attacks by police symbolized injustice and a disregard for the lives of Watts residents. The first death during the riots was twenty-one year old Leon Posey. Posey had been shot by the LAPD outside a barber shop at 89th and Broadway on August 13th, 1965. His death, however, became a symbol of the Watts Riots but his death would be disregarded by courts as an accident during a trial several months later. Posey’s death only solidified the belief that the LAPD and other law enforcement agencies cared little for the lives of African Americans. George Adams Jr. and Calvin Jones would also be shot and killed by the LAPD later that same evening. Adams’ autopsy reported a total of twelve bullets in his body while Jones was thought to have been hit approximately five times.⁹⁹ These were not mere instances of police defending themselves from attacks; in many cases, the police presumed that the victims had weapons but later found none on their bodies. The three

⁹⁸ O’Toole. *Watts and Woodstock*, 55-56.

⁹⁹ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 70-71, 73.

year period prior to the Watts Riot sixty-five homicides committed by police were investigated with only one deemed unjustified. The coroner's report found twenty-seven instances where suspects were shot in the back, "twenty-five in which the victim was unarmed, twenty-three in which the victim was suspected of a non-violent crime, and four in which the victim was not suspected of any crime at the time of the shooting."¹⁰⁰ The LAPD had a history of killing African Americans prior to the Watts Riot without cause and participants understood that they could be targeted for simply fleeing from the police out of fear of violence. A medical report completed after the riot revealed that "one person was killed for every 40.6 injured."¹⁰¹ By the end of the rioting, a total of 34 people were dead, 1,032 were injured, and 3,952 arrested.¹⁰² Whether or not African Americans committed crimes during the riot, they were directly targeted by the LAPD and the National Guard, which led to such a large number of injured rioters. However, despite numerous casualties, some sections of the African American community perceived the riots as a successful rebellion against the repressive LAPD and racist white community.

Outsiders may have perceived the riot as the unorganized, leaderless, blatant, and unwarranted destruction of property. Yet much of the Watts community felt differently. Those involved in the rioting believed that they had put forward "(1) a purposeful symbolic protest (2) against legitimate grievances, (3) designed to call attention to blacks' problems."¹⁰³ Terminology used to describe the August event depended on an individual's perspective of the six day affair. In a survey done after the riot, 38 percent described it as a rebellion, insurrection, uprising or even a revolt. More importantly, many

¹⁰⁰ Bloom & Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 28-29.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Boskin & Victor Pilson, "The Los Angeles Riot of 1965: A Medical Profile of an Urban Crisis," *Pacific Historical Review*, 39:3 (Aug., 1970), 363.

¹⁰² Bloom & Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 30.

¹⁰³ McConahay, *The Politics of Violence* 160.

within the African American community refrained from labelling the August phenomenon as a 'riot' due to the negative connotations the word conjures in people's minds.¹⁰⁴ Some who witnessed the events described the riot as almost like a guerilla army.¹⁰⁵ Thus, at least within the Watts community itself, the riot was seen to have done more good than harm in terms of bringing attention to the problems of the African American community.

The Black Arts Movement and the Black Panther Party

The Watts Riot resulted in some dramatic shifts in local identity in Los Angeles and throughout California. One of the outcomes of the Watts Riot would be the founding and rise of the BPP philosophy, which based on preventing instances of police violence through self-defence and on working within communities in the hope of fostering change. Another community organization to develop after the Watts Riot was the Black Arts Movement. Both worked towards improving their communities but approached such improvements through different methods. The BPP decided to work with youth to educate them on how to defend themselves against the LAPD and other aggressive and oppressive law enforcement organizations. The Black Arts movement, however, situated itself in communities with the goals of developing art and music programs in the hope of improving and educating members through the expression of art. Both institutions, however, sought to give increasingly more radicalized and politicized youth a forum in

¹⁰⁴ McConahay, *The Politics of Violence* 160.

¹⁰⁵ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 57.

which they could express themselves and respond to the various forms of racism they faced on a regular basis.¹⁰⁶

Langston Hughes is considered to be one of the founding fathers of the Black Arts movement due to his activism and work throughout and before the 1950s. He had been working long before the Watts Riot in hopes of improving the African American community through literature and art. In his early activist years, Hughes had worked closely with numerous leftist organizations but after the Red Scare, had become “cautious about being publically identified with the Communist Party.”¹⁰⁷ While Hughes had been engaged in art and writing activism prior to the Watts Riot, it would be in the 1960s that he would become an even better known advocate for the Black Arts movement.

Hughes was involved in California’s black community in a variety of ways. One of the most influential and beneficial ways was through his general accessibility. Despite being a well-known and respected artist, he felt it necessary to show his support for the broader community by making himself accessible to all those who sought his help or knowledge. He often responded to fan letters, set up meetings between aspiring writers and artists, and frequently sent acclamations to newly published authors. Hughes also became an advocate for the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School, although this would prove to be a short lived project. Hughes’ involvement in the Black Arts movement helps show a general shift in the dialogue of African American artists. Much of the new Black Arts work emphasized self-evaluation as well as criticism of the current state of affairs. Hughes became infatuated with the new African American student movements and the revolutionary and anti-colonial spirit that encompassed parts of Latin

¹⁰⁶ James Smethurst, “‘Don’t Say Goodbye to Porkpie Hat’: Langston Hughes, the Left and the Black Arts Movement,” *Callaloo*, 25:4 (Autumn, 2002), 1225.

¹⁰⁷ Smethurst, “Don’t Say Goodbye to Porkpie Hat,” 1226.

America, Asia and Africa. His writing reflected this new found passion and many of his works began to take on distinct anti-colonial influences.¹⁰⁸ Still, the Black Arts Movement did not solely concern itself with the promotion of artistic expression. In Watts, and throughout California, Black Arts activists made strides to improve youth learning by offering community members tools and spaces where they could informally educate themselves on and through artistic expression.

African Americans in San Francisco also began to expand the idea of Black Arts culture in the post-Watts Riot period. Acclaimed poet Bob Kaufman sought to develop a wider audience for San Francisco's growing artistic collective. In San Francisco, Kaufman was considered "a crucial influence on the emerging New American Poetry circles in the city as a writer, as an organizer (he was one of the catalysts for the seminal West Coast journal *Beatitude*) and as a public figure of uncompromising resistance to aesthetic and political authority."¹⁰⁹ Kaufman's advocacy for the arts extended beyond literary circles; he also harboured close ties with the music community in San Francisco.

In the city of San Francisco, a particular form of post-bop jazz began to emerging, known as bebop. While there were many critics and opponents to this new form of jazz, Kaufman was particularly supportive of this new style of musical expressionism. He felt that bebop was "an organic part of the entire continuum of African American culture [...] not a break with black tradition but a return."¹¹⁰ In this respect, Kaufman promoted a sort of African American counter-culture, but one, he felt, that would reignite positive sentiments and a new awareness for African heritage. Although

¹⁰⁸ Smethurst, "Don't Say Goodbye to Porkpie Hat," 1230-1230.

¹⁰⁹ James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 265-266.

¹¹⁰ Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 271.

Kaufman had an eventual falling out of the literary scene, mainly due to drug use, his works and efforts in the San Francisco community for Black Arts were not disregarded. Kaufman is still seen as a crucial part of the Black Arts movement.

The Watts Writers Workshop was yet another community project designed to give African Americans space to engage in cultural and artistic expression. The Watts Writers Workshop had been founded shortly after the Watts Riot by a local author, Budd Schulberg. Many famous authors would eventually credit both Schulberg and the Watts Writers Workshop with supporting and nurturing their earlier efforts.¹¹¹ The Watts Writers Workshop had been initially launched to help promote black art and culture, it eventually would be used as a political tool; raising awareness about poverty and other related issues.¹¹² This politicization became the rule rather than the exception especially after the publication of the first pieces produced by the Watts Writers Workshop.

The first published works of the Watts Writers Workshop were used as an educational tool in an NBC television program dedicated specifically to the events that had occurred during the Watts Riot. NBC's *The Angry Voices of Watts* brought about some protest by those whose work was being showcased in the program. They felt somewhat misrepresented by the original title, since their sentiments were not characterized by one word; rather, they had hoped their work showed a reflectiveness, humor and self-analysis, along with some discontent. Despite the initial dissatisfaction with NBC's representation of their work, many found that this showcasing of Watts creativity brought attention to their cause and increased their programs' local

¹¹¹ Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 248.

¹¹² Widener, "Writing Watts," 666.

popularity.¹¹³ The Watts Writers Workshop and the Black Arts Movement were just two ways in which the African American community in California responded to the Watts Riots. However, other activists took on what some would describe as a more revolutionary method of action.

The second outcome of the Watts Riot had been the creation of the Black Panther Party for Self Defence. The BPP was one of many civil rights groups that had adopted the panther mascot of the Lowndes County Freedom Party, where it had been originally been chosen as a symbol that represented activists “fight to the death” attitude against racism and inequality.¹¹⁴ Formerly, there had been several Black Panther Parties in the state of California. The first BPP was launched by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California. It would outlast the San Francisco-based Black Panther Party of Northern California, headed by Ken Freeman. Freeman claimed that his group was to be more “political whereas the Oakland group was military.”¹¹⁵ Nonetheless by early 1966, Freeman’s San Francisco based BPP had disbanded.¹¹⁶ Finally, there was the Black Panther Party of Watts. All three Black Panther Party’s developed independently of one another “linked only through the shared inspiration of the LCFO.”¹¹⁷ Similarly to the San Francisco based Black Panther Party the Watt’s based organization did not last. With the newly found affirmation that the Oakland based BPP would be recognized the official Black Panther Party, Newton and Seale quickly moved to recruit members for their organization.

¹¹³ Widener, “Writing Watts,” 666, 670.

¹¹⁴ Carson, *In Struggle*, 166.

¹¹⁵ Earl Anthony, *Picking Up the Gun: A Report on the Black Panthers* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), 4.

¹¹⁶ Anthony, *Picking Up the Gun*,” 4.

¹¹⁷ Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 121.

The BPP poised itself to become a revolutionary organization, striving towards freedom and equality for the African American community. The BPP promoted the philosophy of Black Power. For the BPP, Black Power represented “a deep radicalization of African Americans’ (and others’) struggle for equality with a focus on self-determination and self-defence.”¹¹⁸ Using this concept of Black Power, the BPP drafted a Ten-Point program which outlined what their demands and goals were for the United States. The Party’s manifesto can be summarized as a fight for freedom and equality for all African Americans.¹¹⁹ The BPP planned to achieve these goals by demanding the elimination of racist laws and by protecting citizens from oppressive law enforcement agencies. The BPP hoped to work towards developing programs that would grant greater employment opportunities for African Americans, and demanded funding to help build or restore schools in African American neighborhoods.¹²⁰ The organization also advocated for the release of incarcerated African Americans, claiming that many had not received fair trials, demanding that future defendants be granted a jury of their peers rather than by juries comprised of white Americans.

While many had perceived the BPP as primarily an armed militia bent on countering police brutality in California with further violence, the Party’s efforts countered these negative stereotypes and worked diligently to become positive fixtures with their communities. The BPP attempted to improve their neighbourhood schools by launching a breakfast program in 1967 to support African American children who could not afford lunches.¹²¹ The Party also helped those who were living in the ghettos to secure

¹¹⁸ Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 91.

¹¹⁹ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 109.

¹²⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 109.

¹²¹ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 109.

access to health services, and supported national initiatives like the campaign to end the war in Vietnam. In 1967, a variety of civil rights and peace organizations joined together to form a “Stop the Draft Week” (STDW) which had been officially supported by Huey Newton and the BPP.¹²² The BPP would become a popular institution and began to draw support from other civil rights groups.

Some of the more well-known activists for the BPP came from organizations like SNCC. Eldridge Cleaver would convert his future wife, Kathleen Neal, from a SNCC organizer to a BPP member and later communication secretary.¹²³ Even Stokely Carmichael, former Chairman of SNCC, had been appointed the position of the party’s Honorary Prime Minister. At a conference held in support of Huey Newton on February 17th, 1968, SNCC leaders such as Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael and James Foreman spoke at the Oakland rally. During his speech, Carmichael, unbeknownst to the BPP’s Central Committee, announced that SNCC would merge with the BPP. The alliance between the two organizations lasted until July of that same year. Differences in philosophies, history, and organizational goals left the two organizations unable to bridge the gaps that lay between a primarily rural based group and an urban orientated movement.¹²⁴ The BPP not only gained support from veteran civil rights groups and members, but they also formed coalitions with white leftist organizations from the California area.¹²⁵ Even though the BPP was a relatively new organization, it had shown quite quickly that many within and outside of California supported a new form of civil rights activism.

¹²² Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat: A Study in Depth of the Black Panther Party – Its Origins, Its Goals, Its Struggle for Survival* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1971), 93.

¹²³ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 110.

¹²⁴ Murch, *Living For the City*, 157-158.

¹²⁵ Major, *A Panther Is A Black Cat*, 93.

Some activists, nonetheless, felt that the BPP's self-defence tactics were too extreme. The BPP had been consistently watched by the local police and various branches of the federal government. They were frequently targeted by authority figures who hoped to put a dent in the revolutionary organization. In 1968, the BPP experienced a slew of setbacks. Two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Bobby Hutton, a seventeen year old Panther, was shot to death by the Oakland Police after a raid on a known BPP meeting house.¹²⁶ Along with the death of young Hutton came the arrest of eight BPP members, including Eldridge Cleaver, who had been wounded when Hutton was shot. Community members were saddened by the death of such a young revolutionary. Approximately 1,500 people attended Hutton's funeral, while another 5,000 attended a memorial service in his honor.¹²⁷ Still, members and non-members alike became wary of the BPP as the police continued to violently repress the organization.

While the BPP gained a significant following throughout the United States, their popularity had begun to decline by the 1970s. Differences on how to lead the party had negatively affected membership. Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton clashed on how the organization would proceed after Newton's release from prison. Newton wanted the organization to distance itself from the armed revolutionary image and focus more on political activism, while Cleaver felt that the party was on a successful course of action. Ultimately the BPP decided to follow Newton's vision, alienating some members and contributing to membership decline.¹²⁸ Pressure from government offices, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and its Counter Intelligence Program, commonly known as COINTELPRO, also played a significant role in the declining popularity of the

¹²⁶ Major, *A Panther Is A Black Cat*, 97.

¹²⁷ Major, *A Panther Is A Black Cat*, 97.

¹²⁸ Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 99.

BPP. The BPP had been under the watchful eye of the FBI from 1968 until 1971.¹²⁹ Fear of government reprisal led to some members distancing themselves from the organization, while the decline in popularity of the BPP coincided with a larger waning in civil rights activism throughout the country.¹³⁰ Many older civil rights organizations, like SNCC and the SCLC, had declined in membership by the late 1960s leaving the BPP with few allies to rely upon for support by the 1970s.

Though organizations fighting for civil rights still existed throughout the 1970s, membership for many of these groups had drastically reduced. However, for several decades, civil rights in California had worked and gained a considerable degree of progress for the African American community. California has a long and rich history of civil rights activism. The state has seen civil rights programs take on a variety of forms. Newsletters, art and writing programs, rebellions and radical action organizations have characterized the state's history and continued to do so well beyond the well perceived 1960s revolutionary era. African Americans throughout the history of the United States have used many means to fight back against racism, and experienced both successes and failures. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the dominate history of civil rights in California has largely excludes or downplayed the role of SNCC during the 1960s. The current history moves from the Watts Riot to the Black Arts Movement or towards the formation of the Black Panther Party. However, SNCC had branches in operation from late 1964 until shortly after the merging of SNCC and the BPP in 1968. SNCC's work in the state extended far beyond championing the rights and freedoms for African Americans as the organization became involved with the NFWA and the anti-draft

¹²⁹ David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, The Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 183.

¹³⁰ Pulido, *Black, Yellow, Black, and Left*, 100.

movement. The following chapter will analyze SNCC's work in California and demonstrate their numerous efforts to obtain equality and freedom in the Golden State.

Chapter Three: “It Had Little To Do With What My Country Wanted Me To Be”:
The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of California.

Most researchers and historians have defined SNCC by its work in the Southern United States. However, SNCC’s activism stretched far beyond these traditional geographical boundaries. The influence and popularity of the organization had reached as far west as California. SNCC’s work had been made evident through the publication of its local newsletter, *The Movement*. From 1964 to 1970, *The Movement* was distributed throughout California. Although after 1968, the newsletter would be taken over by other student organizations in the area, namely SDS. *The Movement* covered an array of local, national, and international issues and fostered discussion among its wide readership. Initially published by the SNCC San Francisco branch, the newsletter grew throughout the 1960s, becoming a new source of information for those looking to educate themselves on the progress of civil rights initiatives, activist events, and Californian news. *The Movement* reported on the work of many other civil and social rights organizations, student activists, labour unions, and even more radical protest groups. This chapter will conduct an in depth study of *The Movement*, in order to demonstrate the role and impact that the Californian SNCC branches had on a local and national level. This chapter will help reshape the traditional view of SNCC, shifting its identity from a student civil rights organization primarily focused on projects such as voter registration in the American South to an organization whose work and influence spanned the country.¹³¹ It will also

¹³¹ On SNCC’s voter registration activities, some of which were covered in *The Movement*, see Mike Miller, “The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: Race Has Kept Us in Poverty,” *The Movement*, (May, 1965), 2; Jimmy Garrett, “Bloody Sunday,” *The Movement*, (April, 1965), 4-7; “ILWU Local Gives Truck to SNCC,” *The Movement*, (July, 1965), 7; Francesca Polleta, “It Was Like a Fever,” 153; Randy Finley, “Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 65, no. 2, (Summer 2006), 124; Wesley Hogan, “How Democracy Travels: SNCC, Swarthmore

demonstrate the importance of the organization in California through the many projects members engaged in. Finally, this chapter will try to reshape historians understanding of SNCC by exploring the organizations projects throughout the state.

SNCC's Emergence in California

SNCC branches in California began publishing *The Movement* towards the end of 1964. While *The Movement* would become the main source for the work done by SNCC in the state, another newsletter had been documenting some of the SNCC related activities prior to the release of the California newsletter in 1964. Historians have examined extensively the national newsletter published by SNCC, entitled *The Student Voice*. Launched in 1960, *The Student Voice* provides some of the first examples of SNCC related activism in California.

It is important to note that the discussion of California student work in SNCC's national newsletter did not reference any particular SNCC branch in the state. Rather, the articles in *The Student Voice* concerned themselves with general examples of student activism in California. While mention of SNCC's work was minimal at first, there were a few examples of the group's presence within the state even before official branches were opened. The earliest examples of West Coast support appeared in the early 1960s. The writers of the newsletter drafted a small, two inch section in the newsletter, titled "*West Coast News*." These small blurbs, which appeared sporadically throughout the first four year period of publication, documented the beginning of SNCC activism on the West Coast.

Students, and the Growth of the Student Movement in the North, 1961-1964," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 126:3, (July, 2002), 445; Payne, *I've Got The Light of Freedom*, Chapter 5.

The first example of Californian support came through the support of a local activist, Tom Rose, who had been fundraising for the student organization from San Francisco. Rose had been selling buttons that said “Support Southern Students” while the words “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee” circled the outside of the button. Rose, along with his friend Willie Thompson, had volunteered to sell SNCC buttons to anyone willing to back the student’s work in the South. As *The Student Voice* reported, Rose helped sell over 1,000 buttons in roughly a two week period. The buttons would grow to be quite popular in the Bay area and the profits from them went to fund the newsletter as well as the organization.¹³² Rose, while a supporter of SNCC, was acting independently and had not been directly connected with any particular SNCC branch, or even a Southern based office.

While Rose had been working to financially support SNCC and its Southern projects, he was not a member of SNCC at the time the article was published. Eventually, Rose did become a SNCC member and coordinator in San Francisco, but this was not the case when *The Student Voice* began reporting on his fundraising efforts. The next mention of California within the newsletter would not come again until 1963. In the August edition of *The Student Voice*, writers described another supporter of the organization. Harvey Richards had helped produce a short film on SNCC, titled *We’ll Never Turn Back*. In the film, Richards chronicles the work that SNCC had undertaken in Mississippi.¹³³ Only a small portion of the four page newsletter was dedicated to the description of the film and California appeared as a small highlight in the blurb. The authors briefly stated that

¹³² Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Student Voice*, (Westport, Meckler, 1960), 17, 28.

¹³³ Carson, *The Student Voice*, 71.

the film was produced in Atherton, California by Richards, a Californian native.¹³⁴ Once again, we see that while California natives were not always at the forefront of SNCC activism, they were taking small steps towards becoming more involved in the organization.

In the February, 1964, issue of *The Student Voice*, the authors reported on a protest that took place in Jackson, Mississippi. One of the four hurt during this protest was from California. Students and members of the Communist Party of the United States were protesting against police brutality and white privilege after a college basketball game, where SNCC students had been handing out leaflets. In an attempt to break up the throng of over 1,000 people, police started firing warning shots into the crowd. One of the young students hit was a man named Jess Morris, originally from Compton. Fortunately for Morris, the wounds he suffered were not fatal. He had been shot in the left arm and was taken to the University Hospital for treatment.¹³⁵ *The Student Voice* article on the events is quite significant. It helps demonstrate the growing interest in organizations such as SNCC to Californian youth. Activists such as Morris were likely to have been recruited to work in the South for SNCC. While SNCC had yet to establish an official branch in California, the mention of several people from the state becoming involved indicates a growing interest in the organization.

Another article, published May 19th, 1964, continued to demonstrate connections between SNCC and Californian students. An article titled “SNCC Worker Released in L.A.,” reviewed the conviction of Dion Diamond, a young man who had been convicted of anarchy in Los Angeles. Diamond had been sentenced to 60 days in jail and held on

¹³⁴ Carson, *The Student Voice*, 71.

¹³⁵ Carson, *The Student Voice*, 114.

\$7,000 bail. Diamond had previously been convicted of disorderly conduct in 1961 and had served 59 days in jail for the charge. *The Student Voice* interviewed Diamond after his release, when he stated that he would return to the South and continue working for SNCC in Mississippi.¹³⁶ What is unclear about this particular article is whether Diamond had been arrested on charges pertaining to work with SNCC or if his arrest was a result of events entirely separate from the organization. The justifications behind his arrest would lead to a better understanding of whether SNCC had opened branches in California at this time. It is possible that he had been arrested for his SNCC-related work in Los Angeles, since by the end of 1964 the Californian branches had launched their own newsletter. A better understanding behind Diamond's arrest would establish a more coherent time line of SNCC's arrival to California.

Early Editions of *The Movement* and SNCC Activism

In their first year of publication, *The Movement* frequently printed the addresses of local SNCC offices. The San Francisco regional office, originally located on Page Street, moved several times throughout the five years that the newsletter was in publication. In fact, it would appear that several SNCC offices changed locations in the early years making it difficult to determine longevity of some of these branches. Since it seemed to be a common occurrence for offices to change location, the newsletter attempted to keep the addresses as current as possible. During most of 1965, the San Francisco office was located at 1316 Masonic Avenue.¹³⁷ The office would eventually move to 449 14th Street

¹³⁶ "SNCC Worker Released in L.A.," *The Student Voice*, (May, 1964), 3.

¹³⁷ *The Movement*, (May, 1965), 4.

in February 1966 and remain there until October, 1968.¹³⁸ A number of other offices proved to be as inconsistent as the San Francisco office. This proliferation of offices during the first year of the newsletter's publication demonstrates just how popular SNCC had quickly become in California by 1965.

In the April 1965 issue, the newsletter published the addresses of the 15 offices that were official SNCC branches throughout California.¹³⁹ However, the newsletter inconsistently listed certain branches and thus it is difficult to determine exactly how many branches were consistently in operation. Between July and August alone there was somewhere between 15 and 22 offices. In September, 1965, 19 offices were listed and by November, 1965, 18 were remaining.¹⁴⁰ Throughout the year, some offices were initially listed but their addresses would not be reprinted until much later. This is the case with the San Jose State office which was listed in the April edition but the address would not be reprinted again until the November newsletter.¹⁴¹ There were, however, over a dozen offices that stayed consistent throughout the period in which *The Movement* was frequently listing branch addresses. The newsletter categorized the various offices into the San Francisco and Los Angeles regions. Head offices for each area were located in the city centers, while some, like San Francisco, would have several offices located throughout the city. For example, the regional office, where the newsletter was published, was located in San Francisco but SNCC offices also existed at San Francisco State College and the University of San Francisco.¹⁴² There were also offices in the Santa Clara Valley, at San Jose State, in Stockton, Claremont, Long Beach, San Diego, Marin,

¹³⁸ *The Movement*, (Feb., 1966), 7; *The Movement*, (Oct., 1968), 2.

¹³⁹ *The Movement*, (April, 1965), 4.

¹⁴⁰ *The Movement*, (July, 1965), 8; *The Movement*, (Aug., 1965), 8; *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 8; *The Movement*, (Nov., 1965), 8.

¹⁴¹ *The Movement*, (April, 1965), 4; *The Movement*, (Nov., 1965), 8.

¹⁴² *The Movement*, (July, 1965), 8.

Fresno, and Santa Barbara.¹⁴³ These offices were consistently listed in the newsletter yet there remained numerous offices that were infrequently listed. The range of offices located throughout the state demonstrates just how involved and popular SNCC had become.

The Movement stopped publishing a comprehensive list of addresses of local chapters and support offices after 1965, making it difficult to ascertain how many of them continued after that point. However, what can be drawn from this is that SNCC had significant influence in California from a very early point even if at first these branches worked primarily to support Southern offices. The newsletter would continue to publish addresses of regional offices for the San Francisco and Los Angeles, but city offices were not listed. These offices would, however, contribute to the content of the newsletter throughout its five years of publication.

The Movement released its first newsletter at the end 1964, published by the San Francisco office but included articles and activities published by various branches, including the Los Angeles office, as SNCC's popularity began to grow. The Californian based SNCC newsletter began publishing in October, 1965, mainly relaying articles that were originally published in *The Student Voice*.¹⁴⁴ In the early editions of the newsletter, little was published on what had been occurring within California. This, however, was not due to a lack of activism in the state as organizations such as the FSM also took off in 1964. More likely, this inattention to developments in the state was due to the slow, but steady, growth of SNCC's popularity. The student organization likely began recruiting first, developing support before undertaking projects that, without community support,

¹⁴³ *The Movement*, (July, 1965), 8; (Aug., 1965), 8.

¹⁴⁴ "To Our Readers," *The Movement*, (Dec. 1966), 2.

may have led to failure. SNCC's philosophy emphasized the development of community relations before launching community projects. Nonetheless, as SNCC began to garner a following among students, the local newsletter began to publish more and more stories related to SNCC's work in California.

One of the first ways in which SNCC tried to engage the community was by frequently publishing educational articles. In April, 1965, the newsletter's editors discussed HUAC which had been targeting those involved in civil rights organizations. As *The Movement* explained, the government allowed HUAC to keep tabs on those working for supposedly subversive organizations in the civil rights movement. As the authors pointed out "[i]t would be almost impossible for a person to have done anything constructive to right the world's wrongs and not have a 'citation' in HUAC files."¹⁴⁵ These types of reports clearly sought to expose the kind of corruption and repression that the government exercised over American citizens. However national issues were not the only political analysis the student organization took on.

Writers for *The Movement* also expanded their focus to include analysis of local politics. A 1965 article, for instance, offered a short, almost biographical, description of Harlan Hagen, a congressman for the state of California. Hagen, as the article informs, represented the Delano district as a member of the Democratic Party.¹⁴⁶ The newsletter attempted to sway reader opinions of Hagen by informing them that he had not been in favor of farm worker unions, which ran counter to local support for these organizations. According to *The Movement*, the Delano area had approximately 37,000 acres devoted to grape growing and Hagen had supported big business over farm workers' rights, urging

¹⁴⁵ "HUAC and Bigotry Arm in Arm," *The Movement*, (April, 1965), 4.

¹⁴⁶ "Profile of a California Congressman: Harlan Hagen," *The Movement*, (Dec., 1965), 5.

companies to “ignore the unions, organize the workers on their own and determine wages and working conditions unilaterally.”¹⁴⁷ This would allow corporations operating in Delano county to work together to keep wages low. Hagen also permitted and encouraged large farming corporations to break outside labour unions and install ones more favourable to business. Hagen continually supported projects that would offset the cost for businesses and let tax payers shoulder payments, such as government sponsored water canals that were constructed to direct the majority of water to large corporate farms while awarding businesses subsidies amounting to approximately \$600 per acre.¹⁴⁸ *The Movement* was dedicated to raising awareness of such issues because they believed community issues were everyone’s concern. This focus on farm workers issues would increase as SNCC became more popular in California. The organization would eventually move beyond simply educating reader on farm workers issues and begin to actively engage in protests to support farm workers. The budding relationship between students and farm workers will be discussed later in the chapter.

Initially, SNCC’s Californian branches focused its attention towards what some historians may consider traditional civil rights issues during the organizations early years. *The Movement* reported on SNCC’s support for housing issues African Americans faced living in San Francisco and the growing demands for Freedom Schools in Los Angeles. Both of these issues had historical roots in the state of California. As discussed in the previous chapter, Charlotta Bass worked diligently throughout the 1930s. While SNCC branches in the Southern United States worked for several years developing Freedom

¹⁴⁷ “Profile of a California Congressman,” 5.

¹⁴⁸ “Profile of a California Congressman,” 5.

Schools across the nation.¹⁴⁹ In the Yerba Buena housing project, tenants were attempting to establish a union that would help them defend their rights as tenants.¹⁵⁰ SNCC supported the formation of a tenants union and demonstrated its support through the newsletter, but did not participate in the protests, at least not any that the newsletter reported on. SNCC was more involved with the fight for Freedom Schools and worked in some cases alongside parents. In Los Angeles, parents had been fighting for the development of schools that would place a greater emphasis on African American culture and history, like those that had been launched in Mississippi.¹⁵¹ A year later, SNCC organizers attended a rally in Haight-Ashbury and arranged for Stokely Carmichael to speak to students and parents addressing issues of racism, education, and discrimination.¹⁵² Issues of education and housing discrimination continued to be important issues for SNCC. However, as the Californian branches gained greater support and membership, students branched out from these more traditional topics of civil rights and developed a more unique agenda.

After several issues, SNCC publishers realized that their earlier editions had not thoroughly explained what SNCC's initiatives were, nor had they outlined the sort of activism and projects they anticipated developing in the state. Thus the June edition of the newsletter was in part dedicated to announcing what the student activists intended to do. While primarily a civil rights organization, SNCC's San Francisco branch recognized that it was comprised of community organizers, whose role had not been clearly defined. As one article explained, an organizer "operates on the principle that people in the streets, in

¹⁴⁹ "Mississippi Prepares for Summer Project: Legal Barriers to Greet Workers," *The Student Voice* (June, 9th, 1964), 2; Finley, "Crossing the White Line," 129.

¹⁵⁰ "Housing Tenant Union Challenges Authority," *The Movement*, (May, 1965), 1.

¹⁵¹ "We Need Freedom Schools in the North," *The Movement*, (May, 1965), 1.

¹⁵² "Parents Boycott Busses, Hold Freedom Schools," *The Movement*, (Feb., 1966), 1.

the neighbourhoods, in the fields, in the plants, on the unemployment lines, on the welfare rolls know better than he [the organizer,] what they want and what they need – but don't know how to get it.”¹⁵³ SNCC activists believed that the best approach to change was through engaging in conversations with members of the community and developing projects based on what their community perceived their needs to be. SNCC workers would then help develop these projects for the community in which they were working. Not all community projects would be the same, as needs would vary based on a given community. SNCC workers did not merely facilitate discussion, but rather attempted to combine direct action with community consultation.¹⁵⁴ Primarily, SNCC activists sought to help African American communities but their work, especially within California, would not be limited to this demographic.

Reporting on Local Issues

By 1965, SNCC branches had firmly established themselves throughout California. The local newsletter was slowly shifting away from reports and stories about events occurring outside the state and worked diligently to report on issues that affected local communities. The first major news story that *The Movement* focused their attention on had been the Watts Riot. The numerous articles reporting and reflecting on the riot had not been traditional pieces of journalism. Rather, the articles *The Movement* published attempted to educate the reader on root causes. SNCC also represented a counter narrative to the national media, which largely reported on the incident in a negative light. *The*

¹⁵³ “What Is An Organizer?,” *The Movement*, (June, 1965), 1.

¹⁵⁴ “What Is An Organizer?,” 1.

Movement stood in a special position to be able to bring a different, and hopefully more accurate, representation of the events of the August Riot.

The Watts Riot was the outcome of many different political and social forces coming to a head in August, 1965. Issues concerning police brutality, poor living conditions, and frustrations with the perceived slow progress towards civil rights efforts all contributed to the August events.¹⁵⁵ Confrontations between young African Americans and the local law enforcement increased as they began to protest more physically against police oppression.¹⁵⁶ For many within the Watts community the August Riot was neither surprising nor an unexpected event. Throughout the early sixties, and even in the months leading up to the Watts Riot, Los Angeles saw “mini-riots” occur as African Americans fought back against police.¹⁵⁷ For those living in Watts, the events of that August were not unforeseen as there was a precedent for the African American community to gather in protest against unjustified arrests.

The September 1965 edition of *The Movement* would be almost exclusively dedicated to Watts. The first article, “What Have We Learned From Watts?,” analyzed the riot and attempted to demonstrate that it had not merely been a form of reckless destruction, but rather an active protest against police brutality and government repression. As the author states, despite popular belief, “Watts is not, nor is any ghetto, ‘unorganized’.”¹⁵⁸ Many local leaders had emerged during and after the riots to help organize the community in the various protests and destruction of white owned business, but the SNCC reporter made it clear that the riots carried a clear message and were not

¹⁵⁵ Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 30.

¹⁵⁶ Sides, *L. A. City Limits*, 173.

¹⁵⁷ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 174; Horne, *Fire This Time*, 49.

¹⁵⁸ “What Have We Learned From Watts?,” *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 3.

unwarranted acts of violence and rebellion against the city of Los Angeles and the LAPD. Participants had protested against the lack of urban renewal programs, schools that lacked proper funding, denial of health care, lack of relief for low income families, and the need for greater financial protection for those living in housing projects. Those involved in the riots believed that a clear message had been sent. Even more important to the African American community, there was a belief now that real political action, economic and social growth could take place since it now had been made abundantly clear that the residents of Watts would not put up with further government inadequacy.¹⁵⁹ Since it had been a community based riot, and due to the largely negative reports by the national media sources, the writers may have felt an obligation to report and interview people to gain a local perspective.

There were several other articles that attempted to enlighten readers as to the goals of the Watts Riot and the potential future outcomes. One article compared the political atmosphere in Oakland to that of pre-Watts Riot. The article concluded that Oakland was also on the cusp of rebellion due to the turmoil between residents and local law enforcement.¹⁶⁰ Another article transcribed the statements released by police Chief William Parker prior to the Watts Riot, in which Parker characterized Los Angeles as devoid of the problems of other large cities, and as “the most progressive city in the nation as far as the assimilation of its minorities are concerned.”¹⁶¹ Much of what was transcribed simply demonstrated Parker’s, and possibly the rest of the LAPD’s, misconception of his own city and race relations, the reality of which was made acutely clear during the riot.

¹⁵⁹ “What Have We Learned From Watts?,” 3.

¹⁶⁰ “Oakland Is A Powder Keg,” *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 4.

¹⁶¹ “Chief William Parker: The Man on Top,” *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 5.

One of the most intriguing pieces to come out of the numerous Watts Riot reports was a reflective piece written by a SNCC worker who lived in Watts during the rioting. One of the main points the author presented was that “[d]uring the revolt in the Negro ghetto there was a unity among black people unprecedented in Los Angeles.”¹⁶² In another piece, from the same issue, this unity and sentiment was reiterated: “the prettiest thing [the author] ever saw was a whole block burning and one Negro store sitting untouched in the middle.”¹⁶³ In both of these articles, the authors discussed their fear of the violence occurring outside their homes, but also their understanding that the riot was the tool needed to improve the conditions Watts residents found themselves in. More importantly, the authors noted that the rioters did not target black businesses but rather focused their destruction on white owned business.

SNCC’s concern for how the Watts community would move forward after the riots was well documented in *The Movement*. In the months that proceeded, *The Movement* often published articles designed to inform readers on the progress that had been and continued to be made in the neighbourhood. In October 1965, authors followed up on the arrests that had been made during the rioting. The article explained that over 4,000 residents were arrested and charged with crimes ranging from burglary to public drunkenness. The ACLU, as the newsletter reported, undertook the responsibility of defending over 700 people who had requested the organization’s aid after the riot.¹⁶⁴ On the anniversary of the Watts Riot, Terrence Cannon followed alongside the Watts Community Alert Patrol (CAP) and documented the organization’s nightly routine. CAP

¹⁶² Jimmy Garrett, “SNCC Field Secretary’s Report: The Negro Revolt in L.A. – From the Inside,” *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 6.

¹⁶³ Terry Cannon, “Watts: A Conversation,” *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 3.

¹⁶⁴ “Rights of Citizens Overlooked by Judges, Public Defenders,” *The Movement*, (Oct., 1965), 3.

organizers patrolled African American neighbourhoods and gathering spots in Los Angeles in search of confrontations between law enforcement and community members.¹⁶⁵ The goals of the organization were to prevent possible confrontations between African Americans and local law enforcement officers. Cannon's article reported on the operations of CAP while a second article in the same newsletter outlined the organization's goals and its progress in the Watts community. CAP was designed to observe officers in action to ensure they did not abuse their authority by arresting citizens under false pretenses or using unnecessary force.¹⁶⁶ As the second article explained, many residents in Watts were quite welcoming to CAP. The organization did not only focus on issues of police brutality but also tried to improve the community itself by fixing broken street lamps and painting pedestrian crossings.¹⁶⁷ The special attention paid towards Watts speaks to SNCC's concern for its community. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Watts became an important historical event for African Americans living in the state of California.

The Watts Riot occurred with SNCC's first year in California when the organization was still operating as a support organization rather than directly participating in or having developed any projects. Organizations such as CAP had been developed shortly after the riot. This would help explain why SNCC had not been directly involved in the development of post-Watts Riot groups but worked hard to educate others on what followed the six day riot. While the student organization represented and advocated nonviolence, many within the organization understood that for those living in Watts the

¹⁶⁵ Terrence Cannon, "A Night with the Watts Community Alert Program," *The Movement*, (August, 1966), 1.

¹⁶⁶ "There is a Movement Starting in Watts," *The Movement*, (August, 1966), 3.

¹⁶⁷ "There is a Movement Starting in Watts," 3.

riot had been a way to combat the oppression they faced on a daily basis. SNCC's core philosophy ran counter to the Watts Riot, but it is clear through the many articles in *The Movement* that SNCC supported community members.

Collaborative Efforts with the National Farm Workers Association

As SNCC continued to garner greater support from students and other activists, it began to expand community involvement efforts. This resulted in a meaningful collaboration with the California Farm Workers Union in Delano County. Editors of *The Movement* began to cover the farm workers strikes extensively in early 1965 but it appeared that students had not become actively involved in the farm workers campaign until the following year. From 1965 until 1966, almost every issue of *The Movement* reported on the progress and projects of the Delano strikers, who had unionized with the help of Cesar Chavez's NFWA. The writers of the Californian newsletter worked diligently to educate their readers not only on the protests hosted by the NFWA, but also on issues surrounding the protests, the powers behind the corporations that workers were protesting against, and even reprinted product boycott lists in order to demonstrate its support. First, however, it is important to understand how SNCC members and *The Movement* garnered support from the African American community for local farm workers.

A short article in August, 1965 explained to readers why SNCC needed to support the striking farm workers. The front page article, titled "The Voice of the Farm Workers Same as the Negro", the writers drew parallels between the struggles of African Americans fighting for civil rights and the farm workers who had been picketing for

better wages and working conditions.¹⁶⁸ An examination of the relation between SNCC and the NFWA demonstrates the growth of SNCC as a student organization. They were expanding their efforts beyond the plight of African Americans and began to focus their attention and efforts towards collaborative work with other ethnically based organizations. The NFWA was primarily Mexican American and collaboration with non-civil rights organizations was rare. Detailed interviews with Cesar Chavez and other leaders were printed in 1965 to help educate readers about the NFWA as well as farming conditions.¹⁶⁹ Collaborating with the NFWA also aligned with SNCC's core values of allowing communities to establish projects they believed would foster the greatest positive impact.¹⁷⁰ These clear connections made it easy for writers to gain sympathy from the African American community.

By November, *The Movement* reported on the Delano farm workers strike which had been organized by the NFWA. The authors explained that the strike was growing with outside support coming from students and even ministers joining the NFWA on the picket line.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, a special report was issued to the newsletter for publication. The report detailed the background history of the Delano farmers and justifications for the Delano strike.¹⁷² While this article educated readers about the strike and also addressed ways that SNCC members could support the farm workers, SNCC did more than simply spread the word of the farm workers' plight. During the Delano strikes, SNCC members lent the organizers walkie-talkies to help them communicate and regulate the strike. Originally, SNCC had been loaned the radios by CORE, but as the radios were only on

¹⁶⁸ "The Voice of the Farm Workers Same As the Negro," *The Movement*, (Aug., 1965), 1.

¹⁶⁹ "Cesar Chavez Talks about Organizing and the History of the NFWA," *The Movement*, (Dec., 1965), 6.

¹⁷⁰ Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 78.

¹⁷¹ George Ballis, "44 Arrested: Strike Gets Wider Support," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1965), 1.

¹⁷² Wendy Goepel, "The Battlefronts in Delano," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1965), 4.

loan for the month they eventually had to be returned to CORE organizers.¹⁷³ SNCC members decided they would start a fundraising campaign in order to buy their own set of radios with the intention of lending them to strikers like the Delano farm workers when needed. SNCC workers felt that the NFWA would eventually need their own equipment, so they simultaneously fundraised for radios to donate to the NFWA.¹⁷⁴ The newsletter did not assume that readers would simply donate to an organization simply because they were located in California. Rather, authors of *The Movement* conducted research into the farm workers' cause and diligently informed readers of the farm workers' history and their goals through the NFWA.

In February, 1966, authors had drawn up an extensive map to show how much of Kern County, where many of these farmers worked, had been granted to these large corporations. In this article, SNCC focused on the Kern County Land Company (KCL), a sister organization to the Delano Empire. George Ballis, a SNCC field worker, prepared a map for *The Movement* to visually show its readers how much of the Kern Delta area was owned by KCL.¹⁷⁵ The article drew attention to the numerous ways that KCL controlled a large portion of California farm land. The article reported that KCL owned approximately 1.8 million acres across the United States, and in Kern County alone, the company owned approximately 380,000 acres of land which had been used for a variety of commercial activities.¹⁷⁶ The enormous list of companies and a detailed map demonstrated simply how much influence KCL held over residents and workers of California. KCL had been merely one of several companies in California that exploited the political system to gain

¹⁷³ "SNCC Radios Go To CORE, Delano Strike", *The Movement* (Dec., 1965), 2.

¹⁷⁴ "SNCC Radios Go To CORE, Delano Strike," 2.

¹⁷⁵ George Ballis, "Who Owns California? The Kern County Land Company Today," *The Movement*, (Feb., 1966), 4.

¹⁷⁶ Ballis, "Who Owns California?," 4.

subsidies for their vast array of factories and processing plants. While the NFWA had not been picketing KCL and their subsidiary corporations, SNCC writers had simply used them as an example of how large farm companies operated in California. There were clear parallels between KCL and the Di Giorgio Company that the Delano farm workers were protesting against. Both companies had used their policies to oppress their work force.

In addition to educational and editorial articles on the NFWA, *The Movement* also ran advertisements for protests and fundraisers held by the Delano workers and other NFWA branches. The March 1966 newsletter ran a small advertisement recommending that readers boycott Cutty Sark, Ancient Age, and I.W. Harper products since these companies had been suppressing the striking farm workers.¹⁷⁷ The June 1966 edition of *The Movement* saw a large portion of the newsletter dedicated to the picketing farm workers. A march led by Chavez saw the farmers walk the 250 miles from Delano to Sacramento to garner support and awareness for the grape pickers' struggles.¹⁷⁸ In the June 1966 edition, a two page supplement was included that exclusively covered the Di Giorgio boycott. The supplement delineated the reasons why NFWA union members were striking in Delano.¹⁷⁹ Also included was an extensive list of subsidiary companies that supporters were urged to boycott, including the Tree-Sweet Fruit Juices, Sun Vista Foods, C & T Premium, and Jolly Farmer.¹⁸⁰ The supplement provided instructions on how to make the boycott of Di Giorgio, and its subsidiary companies, more successful. In the seven step list, boycotters were directed to educate others on the farm workers' issues

¹⁷⁷ *The Movement*, (March, 1966), 5.

¹⁷⁸ Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 78.

¹⁷⁹ "The Di Giorgio Struggle," *The Movement*, (June, 1966), 5.

¹⁸⁰ "Boycott Check List," *The Movement*, (June, 1966), 6.

and to approach their local stores to request that they refrain from purchasing Di Giorgio products.¹⁸¹ Finally, a small order form was provided to readers so that they could order more copies of the boycott supplement to distribute to friends, neighbours, and family members.¹⁸² While *The Movement* had been successful in gaining support from SNCC members, no other civil rights organizations publically came to support the grape growers of California.¹⁸³

As previously mentioned, in 1965 SNCC organizers had been fundraising for the NFWA to help them purchase new radios for the Delano strikers.¹⁸⁴ By the following July, SNCC branches had begun participating in more fundraisers to demonstrate its support for the NFWA. *The Movement* informed its subscribers of two different campaigns that they could support to help picketing farm workers. The first was a fundraiser was launched by the San Francisco NFWA branch. The San Francisco chapter had been organizing a food drive in order to help feed the numerous workers and their families who had been losing income. The NFWA requested specific items such as rice, coffee, meat and flour for the strike kitchen.¹⁸⁵ Readers were also encouraged to participate in the next march against Di Giorgio. NFWA leader Cesar Chavez had organized a march on July 9th, starting at Drum and Market and making its way to the Civic Centre Plaza where, afterward, short speeches would be given to the awaiting crowd. Interestingly enough, those involved in the march were also asked to go into local markets to picket there as well as at the Civic Centre.¹⁸⁶ SNCC had not been responsible for organizing either of these two events. SNCC philosophy dictated that branches were

¹⁸¹ "Boycott Instructions," *The Movement*, (June, 1966), 6.

¹⁸² *The Movement*, (June, 1966), 6.

¹⁸³ Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 90.

¹⁸⁴ "SNCC Radios Go To CORE, Delano Strike," 7.

¹⁸⁵ "Delano Needs Food," *The Movement*, (July, 1966), 1.

¹⁸⁶ "Di Giorgio Boycott March," *The Movement*, 1.

to act as support for community projects and provide leadership and guidance where needed. Advertising for boycotts and marches was of equal importance to SNCC as actually participant in the marches and boycotts.

As 1966 progressed, SNCC became increasingly more involved in the farm workers' plight. The front page of the November newsletter focused entirely on the strike outside the Di Giorgio offices which led to the subsequent arrest of several labour officials as well as *Movement* editor and SNCC member Terence Cannon. From October 20th to 21st, a total of 13 people would be arrested, including Cannon, six labour officials, and six picketing farm workers.¹⁸⁷ The Arvin farmers had gone to the main offices of Di Giorgio to protest the company's refusal to allow workers to select and vote for their own union representatives. On the second day of protesting, over two hundred workers arrived outside the corporate office. Shortly after their arrival, picketers had been informed that company owner Robert Di Giorgio would be present to help oversee negotiations between labour and company officials. However, despite the presence of top level managers during the first day of negotiations, labour representatives felt little progress had been made. Cannon, who wrote the article, claimed that the impasse had been primarily due to Di Giorgio's conceding first to some demands, then quickly revoking decisions. Unfortunately, things would only get worse before the farmers labour representatives saw any form of improvement. Shortly after 2pm, local police were brought in by the Di Giorgio Company to deal with labor officials and protestors. As Cannon explained, much to the dismay of Di Giorgio representatives, police officers had proved reluctant to make any arrests. Despite the police presence, disgruntled farm workers, labor officials, and

¹⁸⁷ Terence Cannon, "Arvin Workers Win Right to Di Giorgio Election: Farm Workers, Labor Officials, SNCC Editor Arrested," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1966), 1.

Cannon waited inside the Di Giorgio building, under the assumption that, as before, negotiations would eventually resume. However, negotiations would not resume after as Edward Gallagher, the manager of the building, arrived with Police Captain Charles Barker and demanded the arrest of 13 labour officials and SNCC member, Terrence Cannon for trespassing. Bail was set at \$110 each, and even though the bondsman had paid bail by 4 pm that same afternoon, the accused would not be released until 10 pm.¹⁸⁸ In spite of the arrests organizers felt that substantial progress had been made. By the end of the day, farm workers had gained a significant wins: they had won the right to hold their own union election. The first union election was held on November 4th, and approximately 45 days later, they entered into contract negotiations with Di Giorgio.¹⁸⁹

As previous articles have demonstrated, it was not uncommon for SNCC to become involved in an array of community causes. What was most interesting about this particular case was that Cannon was not a worker but a sympathetic student. He had been willing to face incarceration for the farm workers rights, and had been involved with the negotiation process between the labour members and company officials, even though he was not a member of the NFWA. Members like Cannon demonstrate how involved and committed SNCC workers had become with the community campaigns they associated with. Even more interesting is the commitment of SNCC towards the NFWA. Cannon's arrest also demonstrates how important workers' rights had become to the Californian branches. During this same period, many Southern SNCC branches had begun collaborating and developing political parties to represent African American needs. In

¹⁸⁸ Cannon, "Arvin Workers Win Right to Di Giorgio Election," 1.

¹⁸⁹ Cannon, "Arvin Workers Win Right to Di Giorgio Election," 1.

Mississippi, members of SNCC had left the state to aid in local elections in Alabama.¹⁹⁰ Since SNCC members, like Cannon, believed that their involvement would help reshape their communities for the better, they were willing to see through such projects, even if it meant facing legal consequences. However, the students would start to lose support for their cause in 1966 when the national committee officially called for the dismissal of all whites from the student organization.

The discharge of white students from SNCC proved to be a pivotal moment in the organization's history. Some historians have attributed the decline of SNCC to the removal of whites from operations in the South. Nonetheless, authors of *The Movement* seemed to pay little attention to the organizational reshuffling. Only a few articles released in 1966 addressed the split, and some reprinted articles on the subject from other newsletters or newspapers.¹⁹¹ *The Movement* and SNCC's Californian branches kept their attention focused on local issues, continuing to work with their Mexican American counterparts and increasingly concerning themselves with the Vietnam War. SNCC's nationalist turn did not appear to be important for the Californian offices since they continued to work with the NFWA and continued to allow white students like Terry Cannon to remain members of the organization. The West Coast branches lack of concern regarding the dismissal of whites could stem from a number of factors that made the Californian branches unique. First, the branches were more geographically isolated from their Southern counterparts making the need to expel whites from the predominately African American civil rights group less important. Second, SNCC's relationship with the

¹⁹⁰ Sue Sojourner and Cheryl Reitan, *Thunder of Freedom: Black Leadership and the Transformation of 1960s Mississippi* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 242.

¹⁹¹ Stokely Carmichael, "Integration is Completely Irrelevant To Us: What We Want is Power for People Who Don't Have It," *The Movement*, (June, 1966), 4; Mike Miller, "Is There A Change in SNCC? 2 Years Ago: A White SNCC Worker Talks About Black Power," *The Movement*, (July, 1966), 4; Bruce Detwiler, "Role of Whites In Black Power," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1966), 7.

NFWA would also lead to the organization's indifference to expelling members who were not African American.¹⁹² SNCC's Californian branches were already sanctioned by the Coordinating Committee to work with the NFWA, and subsequently the Mexican American community. As such, in 1966 when Stokely Carmichael announced the dismissal of whites from the student organization, the West Coast branches may have seen such a shift to be more alienating and detrimental to the students' work than for their Southern counterparts.

Eventually, SNCC did drift away from the NFWA by 1967 when the students became more involved with the anti-war movement. Some historians may attribute the separation of the student organization from the NFWA to the 1966 separation from white activists creating tensions between the two organizations after two Mexican SNCC members were dismissed from the Southern branches.¹⁹³ However, the move away from the NFWA may be a result of an unhappy relation between both organizations. In April 1967, *The Movement* published an interview with Cesar Chavez that reflected on the NFWA's growth over the past year. The article addressed the NFWA's decision to join the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which alienated students from the farm workers' cause. Chavez defended the NFWA's decision to join the AFL-CIO due to funding issues the farm workers group faced. However, the article explained that some students interpreted the move that would lead to the power the workers had fought hard for falling back into the hands of Delano farm owners.¹⁹⁴ It is likely that both organizations after 1966 had some misgivings towards one another, leading to both groups moving on to other projects. For SNCC members, this

¹⁹² Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 96.

¹⁹³ Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 97.

¹⁹⁴ "Cesar Chavez: 'Nothing Has Changed,'" *The Movement* (April, 1967), 6.+

meant moving forward with the anti-draft and anti-war campaign. *The Movement* published numerous articles before its split from the NFWA regarding the Vietnam War and would continue to foster support against the war. In 1967, SNCC would launch its largest project and collaborated closely with other anti-war and anti-draft groups to execute the week long protest.

Launching an Anti-Draft Campaign

During the height of the Vietnam War, many organizations, some newly established, others with older roots, demanded that the United States government put an end to the military draft and withdraw American forces from South East Asia. Civil rights, worker's rights, and peace activists nationally and internationally demanded that the government end what they saw as an imperialist war against the Vietnamese people, and focus instead on internal conflicts that affected U.S. citizens. It should be noted that not all organizations were fighting the same anti-draft fight. Some civil rights groups were particularly irate over the draft process, believing that minority groups had been unequally targeted for the draft. Others remained hesitant to announce any official position concerning the Vietnam War due to fear of possible government backlash. When many of them did speak out against the war they often declared it an extension of racist policies from home. The state of California became a hotbed for anti-draft, anti-war, and anti-government movements that had been launched in opposition to the Vietnam War. SNCC would be at the forefront of the anti-draft movement through a collaborative effort between civil rights, peace, anti-war, and anti-draft groups. The STDW would be SNCC's biggest project in California but also its last.

The Movement had been covering the war in Vietnam since the newsletter's founding in 1964. Nonetheless, the official stance of SNCC towards the war, and subsequently the draft, would not appear until the February 1966 newsletter. The authors announced in a short article that SNCC would not support the war and would actively campaign for its end.¹⁹⁵ While the Vietnam War had been openly discussed and documented in *The Movement*, SNCC as a national organization had not announced a clear stance until 1966. Rather, many earlier articles concerning the war and the draft had been editorial submissions or opinion based pieces. Many items, like 1965's "Viet Nam: A Poem," made direct connections between the injustices experienced by both African Americans and the people of Vietnam at the hands of the United States government. The anti-draft and anti-war position SNCC took had not been very surprising to readers of *The Movement*. An overarching theme expressing the hypocrisy of the Vietnam War had been published in the many pages of the newsletter. Readers and authors alike expressed their belief that the United States should not attempt to "liberate" people in other countries, freeing them from what the United States government viewed as an oppressive ideology if they could not accomplish the same goals within its own national boundaries.

As SNCC became more popular in California, articles and editorials concerning the Vietnam War and the draft continued to surface more frequently. In the March, 1966 newsletter, four San Francisco residents were interviewed about their thoughts concerning the Vietnam War. All four interviewed agreed that the United States should not be involved in the war at all. Similarly, they all agreed that the money spent funding the war should be put to better use within the nation by helping the poor or "build[ing] something

¹⁹⁵ "Fire, Praise for SNCC Statement on Vietnam," *The Movement*, (March, 1966), 2.

that takes jobs.”¹⁹⁶ In the July edition of the same year, SNCC Field Secretary Ivanhoe Donaldson wrote a short article expressing his views on where he felt the civil rights movement was headed and how SNCC planned to work within its continuously evolving needs. In this paper, Donaldson specifically addressed SNCC concerns regarding the war. He wrote that the Vietnam War was no different than the economic tyranny that the U.S. had imposed on South Africa.¹⁹⁷ Donaldson’s beliefs were that the Vietnam War and U.S. relations to South Africa were two sides of the same coin. He did not fully develop this theory in this article but continued to explain that SNCC in the future would need to help develop programs opposed to the Vietnam War, the draft, and begin to address racism abroad like the apartheid regime in South Africa. He felt that SNCC workers needed to become more knowledgeable about international politics so that they may be better suited to fight these injustices.¹⁹⁸ Donaldson, however, had not been the only contributor to *The Movement* for greater international awareness. Jack Minnis, a contributor to *The Movement*, shared similar views with Donaldson. His articles appeared frequently, almost on a monthly basis, in 1966. On two separate occasions during this period, he specifically addressed the issues surrounding the Vietnam War. In both instances, his opinion was quite unfavorable towards the United States government and its decision to invade the Asian country. In both articles, he explained how he believed that the war in Vietnam was not about subduing communism but about economic exploitation. Through an examination of Minnis’ work, readers can better understand *The Movement* and SNCC’s position on the Vietnam War.

¹⁹⁶ Ivanhoe Donaldson, “Some San Francisco Residents Talk About the War in Vietnam,” *The Movement*, (March, 1966), 2.

¹⁹⁷ Ivanhoe Donaldson, “We Need to Radically Confront America,” *The Movement*, (July, 1966), 5.

¹⁹⁸ Donaldson, “We Need to Radically Confront America,” 5.

In the October article, Minnis explained that some of the main supporters of the Vietnam War were companies who stood to make a large profit from the government's military spending. He claimed that local businesses like Chase Manhattan, controlled by the Rockefellers, and Morgan Stanley & Co. would be receiving royalties from the production and use of napalm.¹⁹⁹ While the people of California were concerned about the location of napalm factories, Minnis stated that activists should focus their attention on the nation that not only allowed the production of such products but a government that allowed that industry to thrive.²⁰⁰ In December 1966, Minnis published an article that examined the "business opportunities" that arose after the launch of the Vietnam War. In this particular piece, Minnis explored the possibility of the exploitation of Vietnamese workers after the United States withdrew. He described how American businesses had already worked their way into other Asian countries where worker's rights had been non-existent and that businesses within the United States were priming to move into Vietnam to help "stabilize" the country after the war. He cited an article from *Monthly Review* which "goes on and on, recounting the benefits of South Asia for American business and how businesses must tap into the excellent and inexpensive labour force."²⁰¹ As Minnis demonstrated, there were large economic benefits to a very limited number of people which also drove the United States to engage in warfare with Vietnam. It had been clear through the publication of articles such as Minnis' that *The Movement* hoped to garner further support for the anti-war and anti-draft movement. Such articles aid in understanding of the California SNCC branch, and its increasing focus on the Vietnam

¹⁹⁹ Jack Minnis, "People and Power: Who Gets the Money for the Napalm?," *The Movement*, (Oct., 1966), 8.

²⁰⁰ Minnis, "People and Power: Who Gets the Money for the Napalm?," 8.

²⁰¹ Jack Minnis, "People and Power: Why Are We In Vietnam? For 'Business Opportunities,'" *The Movement*, (Dec., 1966), 12.

War. As SNCC drifted away from the NFWA and worker's rights over schooling, SNCC shifted its energy towards the anti-draft movement. *The Movement*, in an attempt to convert readers to their new anti-draft campaign, began to align with other student based organizations in California in the hopes of drawing new students into SNCC and fostering support for the anti-draft movement.

By 1967, SNCC's California branches began developing their largest campaign since the organization's arrival on the West Coast. True to their manifesto, SNCC continued its work in the community, collaborating with other local anti-draft and anti-war organizations to create a large scale anti-draft awareness demonstration. The STDW would be a weeklong event, operating primarily out of the University of California Berkley Campus, with different organized activities each day, ranging from marches to speaking engagements. SNCC organizers planned to demonstrate to the government that American citizens did not support the continued occupation of Vietnam and sought America's immediate withdrawal.

Advertisements for the October events ran throughout the September, 1967, issue of *The Movement*. An article titled "Hell No We Won't Go" outlined the importance of student participation and cooperation in the anti-war movement. The STDW was supported by an array of different civil rights and anti-war organizations with representatives from SNCC, the Oakland Peace and Freedom Centre, the National Mobilization-Draft Resistance Project and SDS.²⁰² The STDW Committee had been formed with the hope of extending its work beyond simply a one week anti-war movement and developing a more lasting coalition of student activists. The STDW Committee began to develop "an extensive campaign in the high schools and college in

²⁰² "Hell No We Won't Go," *The Movement*, (Sept., 1967), 12.

the Bay Area, using a mobile theatre group and speakers to bring the anti-draft message to young people.”²⁰³ STDW events had been launched in numerous other cities across the nation as well, allowing each city to develop its own agenda. Anti-draft campaigns and events would be held in cities such as in Los Angeles, Boston, New York, Seattle and Portland. The authors of one article provided each city’s main contact, including phone numbers to allow prospective volunteers to contact organizers.²⁰⁴ From the student perspective, the STDW campaign would be considered a success despite the backlash from police during the week’s events. Not surprisingly, *The Movement* dedicated many pages to covering the STDW.

While the STDW events were well received by the student community, they had been met with great hostility by local police. The front page article of the October issue of *The Movement* spoke directly to this hostility in an article titled “Cops ‘Armed Mercenaries,’ says Ex-Cop.”²⁰⁵ The article reflected primarily on the first clash between anti-draft protestors and the police during the march to the recruitment office in San Francisco. Still, for some the violent experiences were seen as terms of endearment by the authors and activists attending the event. Terrence Cannon, a prominent writer for *The Movement* and SNCC member, detailed the week’s events and clashes with the police for those readers who had not attended the weeklong campaign.

Cannon’s “Barricades in Oakland,” for example, documented the STDW from its beginnings to the final march to City Hall at the end of the week. On first day, Monday October 16th, SNCC workers held a “Teach In” day where 6,000 students arrived at the steps of Sproul Hall of UC Berkeley. Upon their arrival, the students were denied

²⁰³ “Hell No We Won’t Go,” 12.

²⁰⁴ “Hell No We Won’t Go,” 12.

²⁰⁵ Steve Lindstedt, “Cops ‘Armed Mercenaries,’ Says Ex-Cop. *The Movement*, (Nov., 1967), 1.

entrance to the auditorium. Instead, university officials sought to redirect students towards a more academic discussion, led by faculty members, rather allowing students to develop their own program. After some back and forth between organizers and the administration, students were eventually permitted into the hall and continued with the planned event.²⁰⁶ The second day of the STDW saw SNCC activists, and others, assembled outside the draft office in Oakland. Students began to arrive around 4 am for the daylong event. The protest, however, only lasted until 7am when police broke through the growing crowd with clubs and mace.²⁰⁷ Despite these setbacks, SNCC and STDW organizers assured participants that the week's future plans would still go on as planned.

Similar projects were set for the next two days, including what organizers called a "non-violent hour [where] peaceful picketing and demonstrations were held in front of the Induction Centre."²⁰⁸ These peaceful expressions of dissent were nonetheless met with violent police backlash. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Wednesday's demonstration resulted in approximately 91 protesters arrested outside the Oakland Army Induction Centre for trespassing and disturbing the peace.²⁰⁹ Still, the largest, and most publicized, event organized by SNCC and the STDW Committee had been set for Friday, October 20th. SNCC and numerous other organizations had arranged a final march to the Draft Center where students were to set up a blockade to prevent draftees from entering. Friday's events had been previously discussed in the first pages of the November edition. However, Jeff Segal, a reporter for *The Movement*, expanded on the clash between STDW activists and police.

²⁰⁶ Terence Cannon, "Barricades in Oakland," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1967), 3.

²⁰⁷ Cannon, "Barricades in Oakland," 3.

²⁰⁸ Cannon, "Barricades in Oakland," 3.

²⁰⁹ Daryl E. Lembke, "Third Day of Oakland Antiwar Protests Results in 91 Arrests," *The Los Angeles Times*, Oct., 3, 1967, 3.

The STDW had been deemed one of the most successful campaigns by many members of the Californian SNCC branches. *The Movement* dedicated a substantial portion of its November newsletter to reflecting on the October project. He examined the week long demonstration, describing it as one of improvement but focused primarily on Friday's march. Segal described how organizers had learned several lessons from the week's first encounter with police and quickly implemented changes, allowing the final march to be executed with greater success.²¹⁰ Organizers changed the path of their demonstration, dividing protestors during the march, thus forcing the police, as Segal explained, to "fight on our grounds instead of us fighting on the cops' ground." SNCC and STDW participants involved in earlier events that week had been anxious to get out again and face the repressive police force on their own terms. Upon their arrival to the Oakland Induction Centre, protestors built barricades and equipped themselves with helmets and shields in the event that the police felt any further need to use their clubs.²¹¹ Local media showed little sympathy for the protesting students, claiming that their actions were "a deliberate move to violate the law and to provoke an official reaction."²¹² While the Oakland Police used force to disperse the student demonstration, Segal reported that STDW activists had become more unified and prepared for the police backlash.

Although SNCC members were proud of the success of the STDW, many acknowledged that improvements could be made from the lessons learned during the week long protest. A lengthy article, entitled "Stop the Draft Week: A Political Analysis," served as a critical analysis of the STDW events and of the STDW organizing committee. Beginning with the origins of the event itself, Segal and Cannon who had both served on

²¹⁰ Jeff Segal, "Pop-Art Guerilla Warfare," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1967), 7.

²¹¹ Segal, "Pop-Art Guerilla Warfare," 7.

²¹² "Protest for Provocations Sake," *The Los Angeles Times*, (Oct., 18, 1967), B4.

the organizing committee heavily criticized the planning process of the week long demonstration. They revealed that committee members could not agree among themselves whether they should allow participants to use violence as a means for self-defence in the face of police violence.²¹³ While not singling out any one organization, they claimed that some organizations' representatives sought to sanction the use of violence for self-defence. The majority of committee members did not agree to the use of violence even as a means to self-defence, believing it could possibly alienate current and potential members who had been dedicated to a non-violent resistance. In order to preserve a unified front, the authors of these articles protected the anonymity of those involved in the organizational debates. Nonetheless, the Progressive Labour Party (PL) was one organization that seemed to drive SNCC and other members into constant conflict. On several occasions, as Cannon and Segal explained, PL attempted to derail the efforts of the STDW organizing committee. One major instance of conflict occurred the day before the launch of STDW. PL members had distributed flyers throughout the University of California at Berkeley campus that "accused the STDW leadership (of which they are a part of) of 'white chauvinism', [and] of manoeuvring to get the cops to attack the demonstration."²¹⁴ The other STDW organizers were left questioning why the PL had been attempting to undercut a demonstration which they had helped plan. This sort of public conflict between organizers would only weaken the unified front STDW committee members had hoped to present. Many of the organizers and participants became unhappy with the PL's involvement in the STDW. Nonetheless, organizers felt that the week long protest proved successful.

²¹³ Terry Cannon & Jeff Segal, "Stop the Draft Week: A Political Analysis," *The Movement*, (Nov., 1967), 4.

²¹⁴ Cannon & Segal, "Stop the Draft Week," 4, 5.

Despite several negative critiques towards its own program, SNCC authors did point towards some beneficial outcomes from the STDW. For Cannon and Segal, the STDW brought about the unification of senior activists with newer students. Many of the original organizers were representatives from various organizations at UC Berkeley, and subsequently had prior experience organizing on campus.²¹⁵ The majority of the STDW organizing committee had been composed of members of SNCC and authors of *The Movement* who brought forward their knowledge and experiences of non-campus organizing.²¹⁶ The special skillset, the authors noted, benefitted the STDW in terms of broadening its potential audience and allowed it to draw from a larger pool of volunteers. Overall, Cannon and Segal agreed that the STDW campaign worked to unite the various student and activist organizations of San Francisco. SNCC helped organize an anti-war campaign that not only brought attention to issues concerning the war and the draft but also brought attention to ways in which non-violent tactics could be implemented in demonstrations. Still, there would be legal repercussions as a result of STDW. *The Movement* would follow the development of these legal battles as they progressed.

The front page article of the February, 1968 edition of *The Movement* reminded readers of the consequences of the October protest. Seven organizers and protesters of STDW were indicted in late January.²¹⁷ Now called “The Oakland Seven”, all but one had been a part of the STDW organizing committee. The activists facing legal charges were:

Frank Bardacke, a graduate student in political science at UC, Berkeley; Reese Erlich, recently suspended from UC for anti-draft activities on campus and subsequently elected to the student government; Steve Hamilton and Mike Smith, both former UC students dismissed for campus anti-war work;

²¹⁵ Cannon & Segal, “Stop the Draft Week,” 5.

²¹⁶ Cannon & Segal, “Stop the Draft Week,” 5.

²¹⁷ “Stop the Draft Conspiracy Charges,” *The Movement*, (Feb., 1968), 1.

Jeff Segal, national officer and traveller for the SDS; and Terry Cannon, formerly of SNCC and an editor of the MOVEMENT.²¹⁸

Readers had now been made aware of the serious legal consequences of STDW but also a surprising outcome from the legal charges. It appears that, shortly after his indictment, Terry Cannon had begun to disassociate himself from SNCC. While previously a former leader and activist in the organization, his work with SNCC ended shortly after his arrest. Why Cannon decided to leave SNCC remained unclear, as only a few months earlier he had written an article about STDW as a representative of SNCC. Despite his separation from SNCC, *The Movement* continued to report on and support for its former colleague.

The Decline of SNCC in California

Writers in *The Movement* declared their hopes of launching a second STDW later in 1968. Many felt that there was still more that student activists could do to stop the draft, and that a new group of organizers would hopefully take over the new STDW campaign.²¹⁹ Anti-war activist Morgan Spector, for instance, acknowledged that future organizers realized the possibility of encountering further police repression, and while Spector hoped for a second STDW, the subject was quickly dropped from the pages of *The Movement*. Other newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* all reported on STDW events held in December 1967, with the *Tribune* reporting that anti draft protesters were turning in draft cards dipped in blood to the United States attorney's office.²²⁰ For its part, *The New York Times* mentioned that 800 people in San Francisco gathered outside the Federal Building, and collected

²¹⁸ "Stop the Draft Conspiracy Charges", 1.

²¹⁹ Morgan Spector, "Stop the Draft Week II: Why Go Back," *The Movement*, (April, 1968), 4.

²²⁰ United Press International, "Stop the Draft Week Opened Thruout U.S.," *Chicago Tribune*, (Dec., 5, 1967), 20.

approximately 90 draft cards to be mailed back to Washington, while *The Los Angeles Times* made no mention of any STDW activity occurring in the city or state, focusing rather on the events in New York and Philadelphia.²²¹ None of these articles mentioned SNCC, but rather referred to the STDW as a collaboration of anti-war groups. With no reports appearing in *The Movement*, it would appear that if the Californian branches of SNCC were involved in a second STDW campaign, their presence was limited.

By mid-1968 SNCC's involvement and presence in the monthly newsletter diminished. Based on the articles published by *The Movement*, the STDW appeared to be the last venture that expressly involved SNCC's activity in California. SNCC organizers also seemed to have removed themselves from the newsletter shortly following the STDW as well. By July 1968, the newsletter had stopped publishing under the name *The Movement: Affiliated with SNCC and SDS*.²²² The July 1968 newsletter released an editorial piece that condemned SNCC for aligning itself too closely with "white liberals," while advancements in civil rights could only be achieved by organizations comprised of only African Americans, like the BPP.²²³ It appears that some authors of *The Movement* believed SNCC to be a doomed organization and began to align themselves with other civil rights organizations. The newsletter continued to publish until 1970 but would never claim to represent any other civil rights or student organizations after that point.

In February 1968, former chairman Stokely Carmichael attended a rally in support of Huey Newton in Oakland, California led by the BPP. At the rally, Carmichael announced that SNCC would merge with the BPP in an effort to create a civil rights

²²¹ Homer Bigart, "Week of Protest Against the Draft Started By Antiwar Groups," *The New York Times*, (Dec., 5, 1967), 24; "Protest: Police Balk Anti-Draft Moves," *The Los Angeles Times*, (Dec., 10, 1967), F5.

²²² *The Movement*, (July, 1968), 1.

²²³ "Editorial – Radical Response to Racism," *The Movement*, (July, 1968), 2.

collation. Carmichael was recruited by BPP leaders and asked to establish “revolutionary law, order, and justice east of the continental divide with the Panthers holding authority west of the Rocky Mountains.”²²⁴ The BPP had grown from a group of African American youth responding to police oppression in Oakland, California, to a civil rights organization with branches throughout the United States in just over a year.²²⁵ The merging of the two civil rights organizations might explain why SNCC’s presence in California diminished after 1967. Little in SNCC’s newsletter indicates any collaborative efforts with the BPP. However, nationally SNCC was losing popularity amongst African American students during a period in which the BPP was experiencing rapid growth. By the time the two organizations merged, it was largely understood that SNCC, as a civil rights organization, had begun to collapse.²²⁶

While SNCC appears to have continued to operate in California in some small sense, few articles were released to direct historians towards the organizations efforts after the STDW. A small press release was issued in the August edition of *The Movement*, which informed readers that SNCC’s leadership was being restructured due to recent arrests of various civil rights leaders like the former SNCC chairman H. Rap Brown and BPP co-founder Huey Newton. The press release announced that SNCC would continue to focus its attention on projects such as “(1) creation of a national political party, (2) anti-war, anti-draft activity, (3) formation of liberation schools, [and] (4) [S]outhern student unions.”²²⁷ It appeared that, nationally, SNCC had turned its focus towards more Southern branch projects. This push by SNCC organizers to focus their efforts towards

²²⁴ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of Racial Frontiers: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 305.

²²⁵ Taylor, *In Search of Racial Frontiers*, 305.

²²⁶ Bloom & Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 113.

²²⁷ “SNCC Press Release: SNCC Reorganizes,” *The Movement*, (Aug., 1968), 14.

the American South might help explain the decline in SNCC involvement in the West Coast branches. The shift in SNCC's attention would also align with the separation of SNCC from *The Movement* and the decline in visibility of SNCC following the first STDW. In January 1969, *The Movement* reported that SNCC activists had officially announced an alliance with the National Black Liberators (NBL). Leaders of SNCC claimed that the merger had been a result of both organizations hoping to establish greater unity between all civil rights organizations.²²⁸ This January article, nonetheless, would be the last mention of SNCC in *The Movement*, and the newsletter was defunct by 1970.

What ultimately led to the separation of SNCC from the newsletter remains unclear. Any number of issues could help explain why SNCC branches in California began to distance themselves from their own newsletter. Debates about the use of violence in instances of self-defence, the perceived success or failure of the STDW, the increase in police repression of civil rights organizations, or possibly the rise in popularity of more militant organizations such as the BPP all proved contentious. Nonetheless, the divorce of SNCC from the newsletter occurred shortly after the STDW, possibly indicating student discontent with the events of the week long protest. While I am unable to conclusively determine what may have caused SNCC to fall out of favour with students in California, this chapter has hopefully demonstrated several other important facts regarding SNCC. First, that the student civil rights organization had popular branches operating outside the traditional geographical locations previously associated with SNCC demonstrated by the organizations engagement in California. Secondly, that these branches were successful, popular, and dedicated to the communities members and to

²²⁸ Clayborne Carson, ed., "SNCC Alliance," *The Movement*, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1993), 529.

pursuing civil rights. Students involved with SNCC in California were a group of dedicated youth volunteers, who, through a newsletter, worked diligently to educate readers and garnered interest not only toward its own efforts but for many other civil rights and social protest movements. SNCC's work with the NFWA also presents historians with a unique case study of the civil rights organizations.

As previously stated, many SNCC branches worked almost exclusively with civil rights organizations. SNCC offices in the Southern United States worked with community members but these communities were almost exclusively African America. The Californian branches relationship with the NFWA differed from its Southern counterparts. Much of the Californian offices work related to its support of the Mexican American community. SNCC workers understood that issues of racism were experienced by all ethnic minorities and was not directed exclusively towards African Americans. For the organization to thrive in California, SNCC began to support the Mexican American based organization that fought for the same rights and freedoms the students tried to represent. SNCC still worked with African Americans in California through initiatives like Freedom Schools and detailed analysis and reflections on the Watts Riot but they did not restrict its work entirely to African American issues when it came to civil rights. SNCC's presence in California was not that of an obscure organization operating during a period in which many successful and unsuccessful grassroots groups were in abundance. Rather, SNCC's work with schools, the local farm workers unions, the anti-draft movement, and with other organizations made notable contributions to California freedoms struggles. An analysis of the student groups work in California also contributes to the growing historical discussion of civil rights outside the traditional geographical boundaries.

Chapter Four: A Comparative Analysis of West Coast and Southern U.S. SNCC

Branches

SNCC, like many civil rights organizations, operated under a doctrine that promoted community participation in the development of civil rights projects. SNCC hoped to act as an intermediary, guiding community members through the development and implementation process of their projects. SNCC's philosophy saw the student volunteers supported by a national organization but with the freedom to promote independent initiatives. Nonetheless, when projects proved to be successful, students shared their ideas and methods with other SNCC members. Campaigns for voter registration, for example, became the signature venture of the student organization after it was popularized in Mississippi. The goals of SNCC, regardless of the branches' geographical location, remained the same: building equality for disenfranchised African American citizens. The majority of SNCC branches operated from 1960 until 1965. Still, SNCC witnessed the development of branches well into the late 1960s. States like California saw SNCC take root in late 1964 and remain a prominent fixture in the state until 1968. While some of its California branches programs and projects drew upon the experiences of its Southern counterparts, SNCC's West Coast activists backed initiatives that were unique to the region. This chapter will examine the similarities and differences that existed between the California and Southern United States branches. A thorough examination of the differences between the Southern and West Coast branches demonstrates how the organization evolved throughout the 1960s. At the same time, a comparative study provides historians with a better understanding as to how this civil rights organization integrated itself into communities. Finally, establishing similarities that existed between SNCC branches sheds light into initiatives that student activists

believed to be the best response to racial problems that were experienced throughout the United States.

SNCC Origins and Work in the Southern United States

SNCC's rise in popularity has been well documented in the vast literature published by civil rights historians. As we have seen, SNCC was founded on April 17th, 1960, following the student-led sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. There had been a feeling among some students that many of the more established civil rights groups lacked a direct action approach, and this new student organization sought to remedy this tactical deficit.²²⁹ While SNCC members agreed that direct and non-violent action were to be the founding principles of organization, they continued to debate how they were to properly execute their philosophy.

SNCC members held heated discussions regarding how they would begin to integrate themselves into the broader civil rights movement. Some sought to align SNCC with CORE, the Freedom Rides through the South, and with voter registration. CORE members also worked to educate African Americans about their voting rights and aided them in the registration process in their respective counties.²³⁰ Participants in the Freedom Rides also hoped that their efforts would shed light on the persistence of segregated transportation facilities where "Whites Only" and "Coloured" facilities remained prominent.²³¹ The violence that met the Freedom Rides led to apprehension among some

²²⁹ Carson, *In Struggle*, 26.

²³⁰ David J. Garrow, *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989), 183.

²³¹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 265.

SNCC volunteers, but despite violent repercussions, the student organization eventually agreed to participate in the voting registration project.

The Freedom Rides quickly became popular among SNCC members. Many students dedicated entire summers to organizing and actively participating in the Freedom Rides. Some students even withheld from college registration in order to allow them to commit to SNCC and the Freedom Rides.²³² Many students concluded that despite the real possibility of violent suppression stemming from their participation, increasing voter registration was necessary for the progression of civil rights.²³³ SNCC members persevered through the often dangerous Freedom Rides, working to desegregate and register African Americans voters in the Southern United States. Nevertheless, some students believed that the Freedom Rides came only as a short term solution to the larger problem regarding voting inequality.

SNCC members agreed that voter registration and the Freedom Rides yielded positive results, but not all agreed on SNCC's continued involvement in such endeavors. Factions began grow within the organization, in which some SNCC activists argued that some "tactics, though well suited for assaults on segregated facilities, were probably not sufficient to register millions of black adults."²³⁴ While educating and registering voters was necessary, some SNCC organizers felt they should focus their attention towards more community based needs, and less on the civil resistance of the Freedom Rides. Ultimately, the two sides came to a resolution which gave branches the freedom to aid communities in meeting goals set by locals rather than the students themselves.²³⁵

²³² Garrow, *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement*, 183.

²³³ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 265.

²³⁴ Carson, *In Struggle*, 39.

²³⁵ Carson, *In Struggle*, 42.

SNCC's community orientated style of activism allowed individual branches to pair with locals while also granting students a national organization to rely on. SNCC became known for this individualistic style of activism, and branches throughout the United States often undertook a similar approach.

Newsletters as a Means of Unification

One of the similarities between the Southern branches of SNCC and the California branches had been each region's effort to publish a monthly newsletter. *The Student Voice* acted as a national newsletter for the organization whereas *The Movement*, while distributed across the United States, focused primarily on the efforts of SNCC and other civil rights organizations in California. The first several issues of *The Student Voice* were drafted to inform and educate readers about the numerous SNCC ventures, about other civil rights organizations, and about other related topics. The first edition of *The Student Voice* presented readers with a mission statement that outlined the organization's goals and philosophy. *The Student Voice* also printed detailed reports of meetings and conferences that members held during the early stages of SNCC's development.²³⁶ The national newsletter acted as a forum that kept branches throughout the United States informed about the organization's activities. Contributors to *The Student Voice* worked diligently to publish on a weekly basis but experienced ongoing funding difficulties. Despite some irregularities, *The Student Voice* became a popular feature among SNCC members, peaking in 1964 with approximately 40,000 copies printed weekly.²³⁷ Still, SNCC experienced difficulty keeping up with weekly printing costs. *The Student Voice*

²³⁶ *The Movement*, (July, 1968), 2.

²³⁷ Carson, *The Student Voice*, vii.

printed its final newsletter on December 20th, 1965 by which time the publication was approximately \$14,000 in debt.²³⁸

The California branches of SNCC funded their own newsletter, *The Movement*, which covered the activities of local and out of state branches. For SNCC members in California, *The Movement* worked to fill the gaps left after *The Student Voice* ended publication. The Californian newsletter, while dominated by local events, continued to report on projects and events undertaken by all SNCC branches. At the national level, SNCC encouraged branches to share with one another stories of successes, and of difficulties, as a means of unifying different branches.

The California branches of SNCC had come to prominence while many of the Southern SNCC offices had declined in support and popularity. Although it is difficult to determine what led to SNCC's increased involvement in California, it is clear from the previous chapter that between 1964 until 1968, students in the state had become quite enchanted with the organization. As SNCC gained popularity in the American South, its influence eventually spread to students in California. By 1964, SNCC had branches throughout California, operating on and off many university campuses. According to *The Movement*, by November 1965, California had approximately 18 SNCC branches along with two state headquarters located in Los Angeles and San Francisco.²³⁹ Coinciding with the establishment of official SNCC branches, California members of SNCC began to publish their own newsletter, *The Movement*.

The Movement was initially designated as an official publication of the SNCC branches of California. However, in 1966 the staff removed the sub-heading that listed

²³⁸ Carson, *The Student Voice*, vii.

²³⁹ *The Movement*, (Sept., 1965), 8; *The Movement*, (Nov., 1965), 8.

the newsletter as a SNCC related publication. The majority of articles published by the newsletter were written by Californian members and not all had been sanctioned by SNCC's national office. Simply put, the authors of *The Movement* did want to misrepresent the organization with their opinion pieces.²⁴⁰ They reassured readers that *The Movement* was still operating in conjunction with Californian SNCC branches, and publishers sought to avoid conflicts with the national office. The newsletter's subheading changed once more by November, 1967, to note that *The Movement* was by then working with both SNCC and SDS.²⁴¹ *The Movement* continued to publish monthly newsletters until 1970, but after July, 1968 would refrain from referring to the newsletter as a publication associated with SNCC.²⁴² The newsletter had been a creation of the Californian branches and was a reflection of SNCC's desire to create a more informed network of students and civil rights organizations. The newsletter primarily focused on SNCC's work in the state and nationally but always included reports on numerous other organizations such as the BPP, FSM, and the NFWA. It is not surprising then, that even after SNCC branches closed, the newsletter continued to publish even if under a new student organization.

The Student Voice and *The Movement* aid our understanding of SNCC's desires for their numerous branches. The executive council of SNCC expected that, in time, branches would work together to document local projects and news. The organization's hope was to allow branches to develop a network where they could easily exchange news and project ideas, believing the publication of local newsletters to be the most effective

²⁴⁰ "To Our Readers," *The Movement*, (Dec. 1966), 2.

²⁴¹ *The Movement*, (Nov., 1967), 1.

²⁴² *The Movement*, (July, 1968), 1.

method to accomplish this goal.²⁴³ It appears, however, that only the California branches published a state based newsletter. This printed record helps historians understand what motivated the California branches to begin publishing a state based newsletter, even though *The Student Voice* was still printing when *The Movement* got underway. Without the California newsletter, it would be difficult to determine why Californian SNCC branches had been the only chapters to publish a newsletter, especially considering SNCC's popularity in states like Mississippi or North Carolina. These publications also guide historians toward another commonality between branches operating in the southern United States and those branches operating in California. Both *The Student Voice* and *The Movement* documented SNCC's efforts to educate and inspire young African Americans and their supporters. Southern SNCC branches also shared with their California counterparts a desire to develop education reforms throughout the United States, as the group's enthusiasm for Freedom Schools demonstrated.

Differences between Southern and West Coast Branches

As previously mentioned, SNCC's work in the Southern United States differed greatly from the programs launched in California. SNCC's Southern branches were concerned primarily with voter registration initiatives and with the development of Freedom Schools in states like Mississippi and Arkansas.²⁴⁴ As well, SNCC's Southern offices aligned themselves primarily with other civil rights organizations like the SCLC

²⁴³ *The Movement*, (July, 1968), 1.

²⁴⁴ "Freedom Schools," *The Student Voice*, (Aug., 5, 1964), 2. For more on SNCC Freedom School activities, see "Los Angeles: We Need Freedom Schools in the North," *The Movement*, (May, 1965), 1; Jimmy Garrett, "How an Organizer Works: Some Rambling Guidelines for Freedom School Organizers," *The Movement*, (August, 1965), 7; "Freedom Schools," *The Student Voice*, (Aug., 5, 1964), 2; "Mississippi Prepares For Summer Project: Legal Barriers to Greet Workers," *The Student Voice*, (June, 9, 1964), 2; Finley, "Crossing the White Line," 129.

and CORE to accomplish these goals. However, this was not entirely the case in California where SNCC members fought for farm worker's rights and against the draft. The Californian branches also worked primarily with Mexican Americans rather than with other civil rights organizations. SNCC, then, not only moved beyond the South. It also adapted to local racial conditions as it did so.

The shared similarities such as the newsletter and Freedom Schools might have previously muted the importance of the California branches. SNCC's philosophy allowed for offices to operate relatively independently from the national office. Branches were to develop programs based on each individual community's needs.²⁴⁵ This explains why the offices in California chose to align themselves with the NFWA. SNCC's work with the NFWA demonstrates how the student organization had moved away from focusing primarily on civil rights for African Americans and began to support the development of civil rights for other minority groups.

Historians like Josh Sides have implied that the relationship between African Americans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles was often strained. According to Sides, it had been Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" program which Mexican Americans believed disproportionately benefited African Americans that caused some of the animosity between the two ethnic groups.²⁴⁶ However, the examination of SNCC's work in California adds a new side to historians understanding of Mexican American and African American relations during the 1960s. SNCC's work with the NFWA, albeit primarily north of Los Angeles, shows that African Americans had been concerned with the Mexican American community and worked hard to alleviate the problems they faced.

²⁴⁵ Bond, "SNCC," 19.

²⁴⁶ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 178.

Prior to SNCC's move to the West Coast, the student organization did not appear to have a history of collaborative work with organizations other than those representing civil rights for African Americans. In California, the opposite had been true. SNCC had been the only civil rights organization that worked alongside the NFWA.²⁴⁷ By understanding SNCC's work in California, historians can see the growth of the student organization beyond African American civil rights towards defending civil rights for other ethnic groups. In fact, based on articles written in SNCC's newsletter, the organization did not work often with other civil rights organizations. The BPP, which had been in operation during SNCC's later years in California, did not appear to be a main ally for the student organization. SNCC supported the BPP as much as it had support other civil rights organizations. *The Movement* often printed articles detailing the BPP's work in California but there is little in the newsletter to indicate that the student organization, until the official merger was announced in February 1968, had much interaction with the BPP.

SNCC branches operating out of the Southern United States focused their efforts towards registering eligible African Americans voters. The West Coast and Southern offices had not operated completely separate from one another. Both organizations published newsletters in an effort to keep members updated on events and projects operating locally and throughout the nation. The differences that existed between the branches were part of SNCC's unifying theme to allow communities to influence development. Examination of both the California branches and the Southern branches allows for a deeper understanding of SNCC and how these students sought to advance civil rights in the United States.

²⁴⁷ Araiza, "Complicating the Beloved Community," 90.

Conclusion

The work done by the Californian branches adds a new level to historians understanding of SNCC. African Americans living in the Southern United States and California during the 1960s often experienced hostility and racism in their everyday lives. It is not surprising then, that SNCC branches in California and in Southern states launched similar programs to aid locals in combating that racism. Voter registration initiatives, Freedom Schools, and newsletters were just three of the most popular examples of projects undertaken by these Southern branches. The projects launched by the Californian offices, such as collaborative protests with local farm workers and coordinating with international student organizations, demonstrate how SNCC adapted to each individual community. The doctrine of SNCC dictated that branches must enter communities with open minds and work with community members to develop a program that met their needs. Californian SNCC workers believed their efforts were best put towards supporting the NFWA and towards the anti-draft movement. In many instances, Californian students saw distinct correlations between farm workers' fight for social justice and African Americans' struggle for civil rights.

This examination of SNCC's work in Californian also helps us rethink the black and white binary paradigm that exists in some historical narratives. In some cases, the history of the civil rights struggle has been told as one that exclusively pits the African American community against the white community. In this paradigm, the story of civil rights is a fight launched by the African American community seeking rights only for other African Americans. However, as demonstrated in chapter three, SNCC's Californian offices work with the NFWA counters this narrative, as the organization worked closely

to fight for the rights of workers. Only two decades earlier, it is possible that many of these students' parents fought for their right to fair and equal employment.²⁴⁸ It is easy to see how easily the students could have sympathized with the NFWA. It is likely that many of these students did not see the fight for the farm workers as a struggle only for workers' rights but also as the Mexican American community's struggle for civil rights. SNCC's work with the NFWA demonstrates how civil rights was not an issues for only African Americans fought by African Americans but was a complex struggle fought by many different minority groups working together.

SNCC's role in California, while a short one, is important to our understanding of California's civil rights history. The student organization, while operating only for a brief period of time, worked closely with numerous organizations to create meaningful change along the West Coast. SNCC worked with the NFWA to fight for workers' rights, they launched a large scale anti-draft campaign, and worked hard to educate Californians on an array of issues. This examination of the students' work also adds to our understanding of SNCC and how the organization adapted on the West Coast. SNCC's efforts show historians how the student organization had begun to also include fighting for rights of other minority groups. An analysis of SNCC in California is important to historians' understanding of the student organization and to civil rights in California.

²⁴⁸ Freer, "L.A. Race Woman," 621-622.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Movement
The Student Voice
The Los Angeles Times
The New York Times
The Chicago Tribune

Secondary Sources

Anthony, Earl. *Picking Up The Gun: A Report on the Black Panthers*. New York: Dial Press, 1970.

Araiza, Lauren. "Complicating the Beloved Community." In *The Struggle in Black and Brown: African American and Mexican American Relations During the Civil Rights Era*, edited by Brian D. Behnken, 78-103. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

Barnett, Bernice McNair. "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the civil rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class." *Gender and Society* 7:2 (June 1993): 162-182.

Bloom, Joshua & Waldo E. Martin. *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Bond, Julian. "SNCC: What We Did." *Monthly Review* 52:5 (October 2000): 14-28.

Boskin, Joseph & Victor Pilson. "The Los Angeles Riot of 1965: A Medical Profile of an Urban Crisis." *Pacific Historical Review* 39:3 (August 1970): 322-341.

Carmichael, Stokely & Charles Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Random House, 1967.

Carmichael, Stokely. "Toward Black Liberation." *The Massachusetts Review* 7:4 (Autumn 1966): 639-651.

Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Carson, Clayborne, ed. *The Movement*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Carson, Clayborne, ed. *The Student Voice*. Westport: Meckler, 1990.

Cunningham, David. *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, The Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

- Freer, Regina. "L.A. Race Woman: Charlotta Bass and the Complexities of Black Political Development in Los Angeles." *American Quarterly* 56:3 (September 2004): 607-632.
- Garrow, David J. *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement*. Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989.
- Flamming, Douglas. *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Finley, Randy. "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65:2 (September 2006): 116-137.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1984.
- Hall, Simon. "The NAACP, Black Power, and the African-American Freedom Struggle, 1966-1969." *The Historian* 69:1 (March 2007): 49-82.
- Haynes, John Earl & Harvey Klehr. *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.
- Hogan, Wesley. "How Democracy Travels: SNCC, Swarthmore Students, and the Growth of the Student Movement in the North, 1961-1964." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126:3 (July 2002): 437-470.
- Horne, Gerald. *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1988.
- Horne, Gerald. *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville: Da Capo Press, 1997.
- Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. "The 1960s and the Transformation of Campus Culture." *History of Education Quarterly* 26:1 (Spring 1986): 1-38.
- "Huey Newton Talks to the Movement." In *Roots of Rebellion: The Evolution of Black Politics and Protest Since World War II.* ed. Richard Young. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970. 370-389.
- Isserman, Maurice. *If I Had A Hammer: The Death of the Old left and the Birth of the New Left*. New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers; 1987.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. & Betsy Esch. "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution." *Souls* 1:4 (Fall 1999): 6-41.

- Klimke, Martin. *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West German and the United States in the Global Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.
- Matusow, Allan. *The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984.
- Major, Reginald. *A Panther is a Black Cat: A Study in Depth of the Black Panther Party*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1971.
- McConahay, Sean. *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973.
- Murch, Donna Jean. *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Oberschall, Anthony. "The Los Angeles Riot of August 1965." *Social Problems* 15:4 (Winter 1968): 322-341.
- O'Toole, James. *Watts and Woodstock: Identity and Culture in the United States and South Africa*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.
- Payne, Charles. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition in the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Polletta, Francesca. "It Was Like A Fever...": Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45:2 (May 1998): 137-159.
- Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Segrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. New York: Random House Publishing, 2008.
- Sides, Josh. *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Sides, Josh. "You Understand My Condition": The Civil Rights Congress in the Los

Angeles African-American Community, 1946-1952." *Pacific Historical Review* 67:2 (May 1998): 233-257.

Smethurst, James. "Don't Say Goodbye to Porkpie Hat": Langston Hughes, the Left and the Black Arts Movement." *Callaloo* 25:4 (Autumn 2002): 1224-1237.

Smethurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Sojourner, Sue & Cheryl Reitan. *Thunder of Freedom: Black Leadership & the Transformation of 1960s Mississippi*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013.

Stevens, Errol Wayne. *Radical L.A.: From Coxe's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009.

Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of Racial Frontiers: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Urban, Dennis J. Jr. "The Women of SNCC" Struggle, Sexism and the Emergence of Feminist Consciousness, 1960-66." *International Social Science Review* 77:3 (2002) 185-190.

Widener, Daniel. "Writing Watts: Budd Schulberg, Black Poverty, and the Cultural War on Poverty." *Journal of Urban History* 35:665 (March, 2008): 665-687.