1. Introduction

1.1. The Wave or the Ocean?

"I never thought about the [civil rights] movement in terms of King. It never occurred to me to think about the movement in terms of King. I lived and breathed the *movement*." African-American social activist Robert Parris Moses of the civil rights organization SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) spoke these confrontational words at a 1986 symposium celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. To stress his point, he used the following metaphor: "Consider that the movement is an ocean of consciousness, protest, rebellion, organizing…The movement was this ocean and we were out there; we were the waves on the ocean. Let us shift our attention from the wave to the ocean, because the wave is not the ocean. Even if it's a tidal wave [like King], it has no meaning apart from that ocean." "Likening the movement to an ocean," historian Nathan Irvin Huggins later commented, "implies that it has a constant flood and direction, which frees us from the endless wait for the individual leader" for salvation. In this bottom-up view, countless ordinary people could thus justifiably be marked as the true instigators of social change. They were, in Moses' analogy, the ocean that made waves like King possible.[1]

Considering Moses' movement history, his plea to explain the origins of the movement through the collective endeavor of numerous, faceless people was not surprising. He exemplified an approach for social change that historian Charles Payne called the "community organizing tradition." This complemented the media-centered "community-mobilizing tradition" associated with Martin Luther King, which "focused on large-scale, relatively short-term public events," like marches or other direct action protests. While both methods made sizeable contributions to the movement, only the first stressed local empowerment and individual agency on a long term basis. In this approach, the role of civil rights organizers was to develop local initiatives and local leadership, not to take all important decisions on behalf of local people. As Moses put it in 1965: "Most political movements depend on a few people who work very hard; we want maximum participation of the people. King doesn't put people in motion. He has separate campaigns."[2]

Nevertheless Moses was seen as a significant wave himself—much to his own dismay. Historian Taylor Branch contended that "[i]n Mississippi, Bob Moses was the equivalent of Martin Luther King." SNCC-workers and locals alike revered him. One worker thought him to be "Jesus Christ in the flesh"; another believed that "if there would have been no Bob Moses there would have been nothing." Huggins insists that "individuals do make a difference," and that "it is foolish to imagine that the individual actors were interchangeable parts and that, without [their] particular personality…someone else would have served as well." Moreover, he warned, "there is as much danger in romanticizing movements as in romanticizing individual leaders."[3]

The goal of this dissertation therefore is to bridge Moses' and Huggins' views on how social change for African-Americans was generated during 1960-1965 by analyzing the interaction *between* the

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[1] Robert Parris Moses, "Commentary," in *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Peter J. Albert and Robert Hoffman (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 72-73, 75-76; Nathan Irving Huggins, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (September 1987): 481.

[2] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*: *The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1997), 4; Minutes of Alabama SNCC Workshop, April 21-23, 1965, Box 3, Mary E. King Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

[3] Quote Taylor Branch in *New York Times Magazine*, February 21, 1993, in James J. Podesta, "Robert Parris Moses," Gale Contempory Black Biography, entry posted 2006, http://www.answers.com/topic/robert-parris-moses (accessed September 16, 2007); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing Up Poor and Black in the Rural South* (New York: Bentam Dell, 1968), 274; Mississippi's 'Freedom Summer' Reviewed, conference October 30-November 2, 1979, transcript, Session 2, Folder 3, Mississippi's Freedom Summer Reviewed Collection, Wisconsin State Historical Society; Huggins, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," 478.

wave and the ocean, that is, between Robert Moses and the grassroots movement in Mississippi. By doing so, new insight can be obtained into the *process*, or the nuts and bolts, of how 'facilitating indigenous leadership' worked in practice. This approach also clarifies the role that SNCC's unique organizational culture played in allowing individuals, like Moses, to thrive and in making 'facilitation' as an organizing approach work.

Bob Moses (b. 1935), a New York math teacher with a Harvard degree in philosophy, was one of SNCC's defining faces between 1961 and 1965. SNCC, which emerged from the 1960 sit-in movement and withered at the end of the decade, worked in eleven Southern states and enjoyed particular success in direct action and voter registration. Before it adopted a more bureaucratized structure and became a key advocate of Black Power from 1965 onwards, it operated through "group-centered leadership" and dealt with internal conflict through a quest for consensus. Because SNCC-workers felt they were held together by a shared sense of 'spirit' rather than a defined ideology, they tried to treat everyone's opinion as equally worthy of consideration. Although SNCC's loose organization at times hindered its effectiveness, it allowed for flexibility and diversity. Field experiments rather than policies planned in its central office in Atlanta determined its direction, although this sometimes made it difficult to pinpoint its objectives. "SNCC keeps reexamining its assumptions, changing its ideas," one reporter wrote in 1965, "Abstract theories about this volatile and kaleidoscopic movement quickly become as dated as last seasons' batting averages."[4]

In fact, SNCC did not see itself as an organization made to last but rather as a *movement* in which King's dream of the 'beloved community'—a society in which genuine interpersonal living based in justice as well as love was possible—was already acted out. According to SNCC-historian Emily Stoper, SNCC fit none of Max Weber's "ideal types" of leadership, that is, "bureaucratic, charismatic, or traditional." Founded on what SNCC-worker Mary King called "an existential theory of organization—you are what you believe," it rather fitted the description of a "redemptive organization," which scholar James Wilson defined as one that "seeks not only to change society and its institutions, but also to change its members by requiring them to exemplify in their own lives the new order."[5]

Martin Luther King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), pioneered the existentialist approach of suffering alongside local blacks during protests rather than remaining safely within their headquarters as previous black leaders had done. This distinguished the movement that emerged in the South after 1955 from the tradition of activism associated with the nation's oldest civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). SNCC took this idea to new levels. Unlike the NAACP or SCLC, which mostly worked in urban areas, it moved to the most dangerous rural areas in the Deep South—"the heart of darkness"—and vowed to stay there until change had come. Even Mississippi NAACP president Aaron Henry could not believe this boldness, which he characterized in 1965 as near madness: "[Only] fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Promoting action over words, SNCC-workers lived with the black poor on a daily basis, and refused to be intimidated by jail, violence, or death. Such incidents even became badges of courage, as evidenced by a 1962 *Saturday Evening Post* report of workers' "self-made 'diplomas' proclaiming that the holder has served time in a Southern prison." SNCC, one of its former workers noted, "set the pace in terms of commitment… [P]articipation in the struggle was to be based on a…willingness to risk life and limb…[Y]ou cannot

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4 Jack Newfield, *A Prophetic Minority*: *The American New Left* (London: Anthony Blondt, 1966), 99.

5 Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Quill, William Morrow, and Company, 1987), 483-484; Emily Stoper, "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: Rise and Fall of a Redemptive Organization," *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 1 (September 1977): 14-15; Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 71, 122. For King's views on the 'beloved community', see among others John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr. The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 90, 187.

find a national organization making struggle on this level a requirement for participation, a matter of national organizational policy."[6]

Moses exemplified this organizational philosophy. He presented himself as a facilitator of indigenous black leadership rather than a figure of authority, which projected a sense of humility as a leader that enhanced his moral influence. He promoted 'moral leadership by example,' electing to live under the same wretched conditions as the local people who formed the core of SNCC's work force. He thereby challenged conventional concepts of leadership and rejected the distinction between leaders and followers.

To facilitate the organization of local communities, Moses and SNCC not only built on the foundations laid by older local activists, mostly from the NAACP, but also implemented new techniques. The latter culminated in SNCC's most ambitious project, Freedom Summer, and the formation of the MFDP (Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party) in 1964. These projects brought widespread attention to conditions in the state and formed key incentives for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. They also, however, exacerbated SNCC's internal disputes over race, class, structure, and strategy. Greatly discouraged about future possibilities for change, Moses withdrew from SNCC in 1965. He briefly involved himself in the anti-Vietnam War movement before fleeing to Canada and then to Africa to avoid the draft. Although all historians acknowledge his significance for the civil rights movement, Moses' contribution has been the subject of only one, rather brief, biography.

1.2. Theoretical Framework: Debates in Civil Rights Movement Historiography

Questions about the role of leadership and organizations in the promotion of social change have always been at the center of movement studies. Yet over time scholarly interests have shifted, raising new questions regarding space and locality, reperiodization, and continuity in activism. The concept of the 'long civil rights movement,' a term Jacquelyn Dowd Hall coined in 2005, is now used to typify a large body of works that stress either one or more of these issues.[7] Generally speaking, however, one can divide movement historiography into two streams, a 'classical' and a 'revisionist' phase. The first two decades following the movement's peak in the early to mid-1960s represented the first phase and the last two/three decades the second. There are of course notable exceptions to this generalization and this shift has been gradual rather than abrupt.[8]

The first books on the civil rights movement, written in the 1960s and early 1970s, reflected analyses of how it was viewed at the time of its heyday, that is, "as spontaneous and discontinuous with previous struggles." Its participants, in particular national civil rights leaders and most notably King, were presented as saint-like figures. They were seen as distinct from ordinary blacks, as one contemporary

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[6] Aaron Henry, interview by KZSU Radio Station Stanford University, 1965, transcript, KZSU Project South Interview Collection, Microfiche 2479 (E), Library of Congress, Washington DC; Ben H. Bagdikian, "Negro's Youth's New March on Dixie," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 8, 1962; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed., *Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 183.

[7] See Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[8] For example see William H. Chafe's local study of Greensboro, North Carolina, as early as 1980 (*Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensoro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)) and Wesley Hogan's close-up research of SNCC as late as 2007 (*Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream For a New America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)). There are also historians that have explored both avenues, like Adam Fairclough who wrote a study of SCLC (*To Redeem the Soul of America*) and a local study of the civil rights movement in Louisiana (*Race & Democracy*). Clayborne Carson is known for his close-up analysis of SNCC (*In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981)), but he was also one of the first historians to plead for a bottom-up approach to the movement.

sociologist said, because they had a "higher awareness of the wider society" and were "more prone to develop the particular set of attitudes and perceptions that lead to protest." Their heroism was even more apparent in the midst of the gun-toting Black Power militancy and race riots that had swept the country by this time. Both found little understanding from a national audience. "The Black Power era," scholar Kathryn Nasstrom observed, then "serve[d] as a 'tragic epilogue' to the grand narrative, lacking the moral clarity of the earlier movement and without its efficacy."[9]

David L. Lewis' 1970 biography of King, although written to undercut his romantization, set the pattern of viewing the movement through King's life. For a long time, the dominant 'master narrative'—and the term 'civil rights movement' itself—referred to the years 1954-1965. This was seen as a unique episode in American history that started with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregated education and the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, which made King a national figure. It faded after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and died completely when King did. To scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, King and his like were attractive because their "sacrifices to transform their country…contrasted sharply with the prevailing Reagan-era mentality that glorified…personal wealth and ignored community health."[10]

Between the late 1960s to late 1980s historians usually focused on what scholar Bret Eynon called "organizations and events that had drawn national media attention during the 1960s." As historian Steven Lawson put it, they "conceived of the civil rights struggle as primarily a political movement that secured legislative and judicial triumphs," echoed by the word 'rights' in its name. Numerous studies pinpointed specific organizations and leaders, or local cases that had national significance.[11] The movement was thus explained through "top-down accounts that emphasized national issues" and its success credited to "King's charisma, white liberal politicians, northern white patronage, the labor-liberal alliance, and/or the media's televised exposure of southern racial violence."[12]

In the mid-1980s, following William Chafe's work on Greensboro, North Carolina, and Robert Norrell's 1985 study of Tuskegee, Alabama, scholars began to challenge this narrative. The notion "that King was not only the major national spokesman for the black struggle but also its prime instigator," historian Clayborne Carson asserted in 1986, contradicted the fact that "hundreds of southern communities were disrupted by sustained protest movements that lasted, in some cases, for years." He suggested substituting the term 'civil rights movement' with 'black freedom struggle'

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[9] Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (March 2007): 266; Clayborne Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson and London: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 21; Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History: Autobiographies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Writing of Civil Rights History," *Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 2 (May 2008): 325-364.

[10] Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April 1991): 456. For specific definitions of this 'classical phase' and its periodization, see above mentioned articles by Hall and by Cha-Jua and Lang.

[11] Examples of studies on specific leaders and organizations are August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's 1973 study of CORE, Clayborne Carson's 1980 history of SNCC, Mark Tushnett's 1987 work on the NAACP, and a large body of works on King and SCLC (e.g. David Garrow's 1986 *Bearing the Cross*, Taylor Branch's trilogy, Thomas Peake's history of SCLC (1987), and biographies of King by Lerone Bennett (1968), Stephen Oates (1982), and others) and examples of local studies include David Garrow's *Protest at Selma* (1978), David Colburn's study of St. Augustine (1985), and Joan Beifuss on Memphis (1985).

[12] Bret Eynon, "Cast upon the Shore: Oral History and New Scholarship on the Movements of the 1960s," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (September 1996): 560; Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 456, 457; Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 266; Adam Fairclough, "State of the Art: Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 3 (December 1990): 393.

in order to emphasize its broad and diverse agenda, and to underline the "continuity between the period before 1965 and the period after," the Black Power era.[13]

Reflecting this insight, historians then shifted their attention. "King and the other well-known players would not disappear from view," Lawson noted, but they now took "a back seat to women and men who initiated protests in small towns and cities across the South and who acted according to their own needs rather than those of central organizations headquartered in New York, Washington, or Atlanta." This led to a body of works, pioneered by sociologist Aldon Morris, that stressed the 'resource mobilization theory,' that is, how "preexisting indigenous African American social networks and organizations," like the black church, historically black educational institutions, and black business and civic organizations, formed the basis from which the 1960s movement sprung. It also produced an abundance of studies on specific cities or states, including several works that treated civil rights struggles in the North.[14] Moreover, in extending their purview to the North, scholars Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang noted, some questioned "the distinctions earlier scholars made between southern *de jure* and northern *de facto* segregation," and even placed the "black freedom struggles for fair employment, open housing, quality education, and equitable criminal justice outside the South at the forefront" of the overall struggle. Historians Joseph Crespino and Matthew Lassister, for instance, openly called to reject "the framework of Southern exceptionalism" that treats "southern history in false opposition to an idealized national standard" by diminishing regional characteristics to mere "differences of degree."[15]

In an extreme example of this revisionist reading, sometimes called 'the local people approach,' historian J. Mills Thornton even argued that during the civil rights struggles in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma, Alabama—which ascertained King's reputation as a national civil rights leader—the role of 'outside' organizations and leaders was negligible. Instead he described social change as a mere outgrowth of local perceptions, assumptions, and interests dependent on municipal political culture. He thereby treated the struggles as if they occurred in a vacuum, unaffected by cosmopolitan influences or changes: "Just as local politics was essential to the creation of southern segregation, so local politics was the crucial factor in creating the circumstances that ended it."[16]

By emphasizing local communities, previously unknown or little known local leaders, and historical black institutions, scholars found that their stories often had to start well before 1955 and continue well past 1965. Some noted that nationalism and self-defense were already evident during the movement's 'classical' phase, which led to a new appraisal of the 'Black Power' era, exemplified in the works of Timothy Tyson, Lance Hill, and Joseph Peniel. Others, like Jacqueline Dowd Hall, contended that the movement's origins were to be found in the 1930s and 1940s, and disputed the conventional wisdom that the movement died in the late 1960s—hence Hall's term 'Long Movement.' "From the caldron of the Great Depression and crested in the 1940s," Hall wrote, a "powerful social movement" came into being, "sparked by the alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, progressive New Dealers, and black and white

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[13] Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Eagles, 23-26, 28. See also above mentioned article by Steven Lawson.

[14] Examples of these are John Dittmer's *Local People* (1994), Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1995), Adam Fairclough's *Race & Democracy* (1995), Todd Moye's *Let the People Decide* (2004), Emilye Crosby's *A Little Taste of Freedom* (2005), Hasan Kwame Jeffries' *Bloody Lowndes* (2009), and the essay-collection *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (2005) edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard. Examples of studies on civil rights struggles in the North are Martha Biondi's study of post-war New York City (2003) and Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* (2008).

[15] Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 457; Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), xii; Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 267, 268; Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8-12.

[16] J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 3, 9, 12-13.

radicals." As such, they turned the activism of the 'Old Left'—the overarching term used for the combined group of these, often Marxist-related, activists—into the "decisive first phase" of the modern civil rights movement. Scholars highlighting this trend[17] emphasize the so-called 'civil rights unionism' or 'Black Popular Front' of the 1930s and 1940s that "sought to combine protection from [racial] discrimination with universalistic social welfare policies and individual rights with labor rights."[18]

In doing so, however, such academics offered a controversial political reading of the movement. Following Robert Korstad's and Nelson Lichtenstein's 1988 key publication,[19] some, like Roger Horowitz, Glenda Gilmore, and Jacqueline Dowd Hall, even claimed that the Communist-based leadership in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) made the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) the cutting-edge of the racial struggle. Indeed, without the red-baiting of the Truman-Eisenhower years, they assert, the labor movement could have gone a long way towards altering American society's racially discriminatory structure. "For a few short years in the late 1940s," one wrote, "the American people had more political options than they would ever have again. McCarthyism destroyed those." In reappraising the role of the CPUSA and emphasizing the importance of civil rights unionism, they subsequently criticized the 'classical' civil rights movement of 1955-1965 as too legalistic, too middle-class, and too conservative. According to Hall, civil rights unionism provided a "more robust, more progressive, and *truer* story" of the black freedom struggle, even though Eric Arnesen, Manfred Berg, and others have persuasively critiqued these scholars for "ignoring the [CPUSA's] less savory practices, and neglecting or minimizing non-communist and anticommunist activists."[20]

The CPUSA, Arnesen for instance objected, was "from the outset, fatally flawed by the party's antidemocratic structure and its subservience to the Soviet Union." Despite its laudable commitment to racial discrimination in the Scottsboro case[21] and its support of anti-lynching bills and 'Don't Buy Where You Can't Work'-campaigns, it could never be the driving-force behind the 1930s and 1940s civil rights movement at large. "Its ideological twists and turns on the race question," Berg pointed out, were simply too "extremely erratic." Its decision that the "victory over fascism had to take precedence over all other objectives, including the civil rights struggle" after Hitler's breach of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact for instance testifies to this. Internal factional rivalries and financial struggles additionally hampered its effectiveness.[22]

Moreover, as scholar Robert Allen already critiqued in the 1980s, blacks often flirted with the CPUSA for pragmatic reasons and a genuine relationship could never really bear fruit as the Party, especially with its secular, anti-institutionalized religion stance, was too alienated from the black community as a whole. It neither fully understood African-Americans' historical experience nor their desire for a black-led movement. Treating American racism as a mere capitalist creation in order to divide workers that could be overcome by a white-led working class revolution, it "responded to racism organizationally instead

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[17] Examples are Maurice Isserman's *If I Had A Hammer* (1987); Michael Honey's *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* (1993); Roger Horowitz' *"Negro and White Unite and Fight!"* (1997); Bruce Nelson's *Divided We Stand* (2001); Robert Korstad's *Civil Rights Unionism* (2003); and Glenda Gilmore's *Defying Dixie* (2008).

[18] For a full criticism of the 'Long Civil Rights Movement' reading of the movement, see Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 265-288, Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (November 2000): 815-848, Fairclough, "State of the Art," 387-398, and Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 456-471.

[19] See Robert R. Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December, 1988): 786-811.

[20] Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,'" 1235; Manfred Berg, "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War," *Journal of American History* 94, no.1 (June 2007): 76; Eric Arnesen, "Reconsidering the 'Long Civil Rights Movement," *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 2 (April 2009): 33.

[21] In 1931 nine black boys were falsely accused of and sentenced to death for raping a white girl in Alabama. The CPUSA played a significant role in their prolonged battle for justice (they were tried 3 times), leading to the release of four of them.

[22] Arnesen, "Reconsidering the 'Long Civil Rights Movement,'" 33; Berg, "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism," 77-78.

of ideologically." While it put racists in its own ranks on trial or expelled them, it did little to educate its members. On average, CPUSA-historian Harvey Klehr indicated, the latter were white blue-collar workers below the age of 40, often of Eastern-European descent. These were exactly the type of workers that labor-historian Bruce Nelson claimed characteristically fought for a place in the employment hierarchy by exacerbating racial and ethnic identities, that is, by trying to become accepted as "white." A long-term alliance between blacks and the CPUSA leading to fundamental social change was therefore just as "utterly unrealistic" as that between black and white workers "[g]iven the notorious racism of the American labor movement."[23]

As such, Manfred Berg asserted, arguing that anti-communist attacks by moderate civil rights organizations like the NAACP or black leaders like A. Philip Randolph had no validity and merely amounted to 'redbaiting' is flawed reasoning. Even without McCarthyism it was a questionable move for the NAACP "to align itself with a political force with which it had often clashed in the past, whose key ideological commitments it did not share, and that was widely viewed with suspicion." Neither did (black moderates') anti-communism abort the infant civil rights movement. As Berg demonstrated, "critics grossly exaggerate the [NAACP's] participation in the anticommunist crusade" and it "consistently supported liberal social policies that would benefit not only blacks, but all poor Americans." Trying to safeguard its survival "under constraints that defy all political and moral certainties," its discursive politics in fact "helped prevent the cause of civil rights from being discredited along with Communism" and thereby "laid the foundations for the achievements of later years." Likewise the work of non-leftist black unions like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the National Negro Congress kept the fight for racial equality alive throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Accordingly "'long movement' scholarship," Arnesen agreed, "runs the risk of substituting a romantic and overly celebratory narrative for a much messier and more complicated civil rights past."[24]

Today the 'Long Civil Rights Movement' has nonetheless become a popular phrase in historical scholarship, and even, to quote scholars Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "the dominant theoretical interpretation of the modern 'Civil Rights' and 'Black Power' movements." Yet historians employ the concept in different ways. To some the phrase highlights the way that the Old Left fought against racial discrimination and economic inequality in the 1930s and 1940s. To others the phrase stresses chronological continuities of all kinds that link the movement's 'classical' phase with what came before and what came after. This approach plays down, for example, the distinction between the civil rights movement and Black Power. Finally, historians use the "long movement" concept to underline the importance of local leaders as the initiators of social change. The 'Long Movement' is thus something of a 'catch-all' phrase that is used to differentiate older studies that put the responsibility for social change on exceptional individuals and specific organizations from ones that recognize the "black freedom struggle," in Clayborne Carson's words, as a bottom-up, "locally based mass movement" with a multiplicity of agents, voices, and goals.[25]

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[23] Ibid. Berg; Robert Allen, *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1983), 216-226; Harvery Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1984); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[24] Arnesen, "Reconsidering the 'Long Civil Rights Movement,'" 32-33; Berg, "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism," 76-79, 81, 83-89.

[25] Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 265, 267, 269; Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1233-1263; Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Eagles, 23; Albert and Hoffman, eds., *We Shall Overcome*, 6. See also works by Jeffrey Ogbar, Komozi Woodard and Jeanne Theoharis, and Lance Hill's *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (2006), Timothy B. Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (1999), and Joseph Peniel's *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights—Black Power Era* (2006).

1.3. The Place of Robert Parris Moses in Civil Rights Movement Historiography

Discussions of Robert Moses within civil rights movement historiography have consistently emphasized at least one of three points: 1. his representation as a legendary figure (stressing the 'Bob Moses mystique'), 2. his personification of SNCC's public's image of group-centered leadership, and 3. his embodiment of community organizing. Studies also tend to portray him as a tragic hero: an idealist so disillusioned by the movement's inability to produce lasting social change, and so unhappy with the hero-worship of his persona that he stopped speaking to whites and left for Africa. As such, his life is almost a parable of SNCC's and the overall movement's demise.

Books that appeared in the mid-1960s generally highlight the 'Bob Moses mystique.' While meaning different things to different people, on the whole this concept refers to Moses' exceptional personality traits, which are said to include his bravery, intellect, sensitivity, and calmness. These traits were real enough: all the movement veterans interviewed for this dissertation indicated that the 'Bob Moses mystique' was authentic, readily apparent upon meeting him. Yet this aspect of Moses' activism seems particularly prominent in the work of (Northern) white middle-class authors, in contemporaneous times but also in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

White liberal authors in the 1960s generally identified with the student movement. They connected SNCC to the overall emergence of young people/students as a major political force in the 1960s, as exemplified by the National Student Association and other groups. Characterized by its roots in universities, churches, and existentialist philosophies, this movement became known as the 'New Left,' to differentiate from the old activism of the 1930s and 1940s based on socialism, Marxism, and labor unions. Several such authors, like historians Howard Zinn and Staughton Lynd and journalist Ben Bagdikian, were activists themselves, and some even closely linked to SNCC, which gave their work a certain level of authority. Nonetheless, in order to promote SNCC's politics they followed a particular pattern of how to view the movement, stressing the students' youth, idealism, and spontaneity at the cost of previous generations. As Zinn put it: "All Americans owe [SNCC-workers] a debt for…releasing the idealism locked so long inside a nation that has not recently tasted the drama of social upheaval…Theirs was the silent generation until they spoke." Consequently, local activists and continuity in civil rights activism were hardly present in their work. In addition SNCC-workers were described as a homogenous group, often motivated by religion, with the same goals: "[T]hey are young, they are Negro, they come from the South, their families are…of the working class, but they have been to college…[T]hey have no party, no ideology, no creed [but] know clearly that the values of present American society—and this goes beyond racism to class distinction, to commercialism, to profit-seeking, to the setting of religious or national barriers against human contact—are not for them."[26]

White liberals' work therefore often resembled near hero-worship of the SNCC students. Bagdikian called them "one of the most fiercely united, dynamic and optimistic social movements of our time." Zinn concurred: "The nation has suddenly become aware that the initiative today is in the hands of these 150 young [SNCC] people who have moved into the Deep South…To be with them…is to feel the presence of greatness." Within this student body, however, Bob Moses was singled out as exceptionally heroic. In *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965), southern-born novelist Robert Penn Warren—a onetime defender of racial segregation—highlighted the "powerful appeal of [Moses'] personality" and his "extraordinary calmness." He underscored this observation with a story of how Moses had fallen asleep during a car chase by armed whites. Howard Zinn, in *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (1965), and journalist Jack Newfield, in *A Prophetic Minority* (1966), pictured Moses as an almost larger-than-life, modern-day Lucky Luke on a mission down South. When relating his dangerous, lone ventures in Mississippi, they

[26] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 2, 10, 13.

stressed his acts of courage, as he "planned a campaign to dismantle, stone by stone, the prison that was Mississippi." Moses even emerged as a romantic existentialist hero, resembling figures like Albert Camus, whose philosophies he took with him to Mississippi and who had cult-status among white liberals. Newfield idealized Moses as the personification of Camus' concept of action; he described his first trip to Mississippi as "the most creative and heroic single act anyone in the New Left has attempted." Newfield even claimed that act to be the basic inspiration for the New Left as a whole: "Certainly much of the subsequent history of the New Left has flowed from that existentialist act of [Moses] disappearing alone into the most violent and desolate section of Mississippi."[27]

However, in associating Moses with the predominantly white and mainly Northern New Left, Newfield and others projected onto Moses what they wanted to see rather than giving an accurate assessment of who he was. Their work does not offer any analysis of his daily activities or the influences from the black community that shaped his ideas. It seems that what made Moses appear exceptional to these writers was his Northern and (white elite) academic background; they were less interested in the nuts-and-bolts of his activism than in the fact that he gave up a relatively comfortable life for a dangerous mission. Moses embodied what Staughton Lynd called the ideal of the 'scholar-activist' in the tradition of American heroes like Ralph Emerson who followed, as C. van Woodward said, the credo that "the intellectual must not be alienated from the sources of revolt" and had "thrown themselves into the popular movements of their day."[28]

The 1980s/early 1990s offered renewed interest in SNCC and Moses, after a lull in the 1970s.[29] In the 1980s SNCC regained its place in academic debates following the publication of several SNCC-veterans' memoirs[30] and the appearance of studies that treated SNCC in depth. This provided for a more extensive analysis of Moses' leadership. Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle* (1981), Emily Stoper's *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee* (1989), and Taylor Branch's *America in the King Years*-trilogy (1989, 1998, 2006) all highlighted Moses as the personification of SNCC and its ideals. "Ironically," Branch noted, "it was Moses, so mindless of image and self-advancement, who shaped the public perception of the early SNCC," because "Moses was the anti-King within SNCC. By immersing himself for years in the persecution of rural Mississippi, and subordinating his Harvard education to folk wisdom, he acquired stature that defined grassroots SNCC culture." According to Carson, Moses' approach was "the most singular part of SNCC's legacy" and set "SNCC's radicalism apart from most other reform or revolutionary organizations." SNCC's departure from this approach for a more hierarchical structure and a racially exclusive ideology, Carson believed, was an understandable yet regrettable mistake. This view is echoed in later studies like Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1997) and Hogan's *Many Minds, One Heart* (2007).[31]

By depicting Moses as *the* symbol of leadership by example, however, some writers overemphasize his existentialist quest for individual freedom. Branch, for example, asserted that he "was a mystical purist.

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[27] Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 2, 15, 62, 65; Ben H. Bagdikian, "Negro's Youth's New March on Dixie," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 8, 1962. Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 48-49, 114, 403; Newfield, *A Prophetic Minority,* 73, 78.

[28] Staughton Lynd. "SNCC: The Beginning of Ideology," August 1964, Box 1, Mary King Papers. Lynd quotes from C. Van Woodward's 1959 essay "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual."

[29] This silence can partly be attributed to the aftermath of the general condemnation of the Black Power era, the nation's preoccupation with the Vietnam War, and partly to historians' focus on Martin Luther King.

[30] These include James Forman's *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1985), Mary King's *Freedom Song* (1987), Cleveland Sellers' and Robert Terrell's *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (Jackson and London: University of Mississippi Press, 1990) and Sally Belfrage's *Freedom Summer* (Charlotte and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

[31] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 519; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 30; Carson, *In Struggle*, 303.

He valued SNCC for the succor it provided to like-minded people, but he remained aloof from the more pragmatic functions of an organization, such as fund-raising, discipline, and publicity." While there are elements of truth in this, in practice Moses had a significant hand in the day-to-day operations of projects. Stoper even described him as an "exponent of anarchist ideas," a characterization that Moses himself would scarcely recognize.[32]

In typifying Moses as an 'anti-leader,' all three writers dwell upon his ambivalence about the "worshipful cult" he acquired in SNCC. Branch recorded how Moses "tumbled through doubts that his anti-leadership convictions merely shielded him from inevitable responsibility" and how "his self-effacing reluctance enlarged his mystique and the hunger of people to follow him." All three emphasized this as the main reason why Moses left the organization in 1965. In doing so they attributed immense personal influence to him. Carson insisted that no-one was able "to fill the leadership vacuum created by Moses' withdrawal," implying that his decision to turn away at one of SNCC's most crucial crossroads proved pivotal for the organization. Stoper concurred: "Largely because of Moses' leadership role, the Mississippi project was for a long time the nucleus of SNCC's program and outlook….After Moses left the state in January 1965, Mississippi quickly waned as a center of SNCC activity."[33]

These authors depict Moses as *the* driving force behind the production of social change in Mississippi; he holds the initiative, rather than a two-way stream of others influencing him and vice versa. Neither is a history of prior activism in the state recorded. Carson and Stoper portray him as "the mastermind" behind numerous local movements' endeavors and Branch slipped into sentences like "by lifting up the innate capacities of all citizens, he helped *discover*…leaders such as an unlettered orator from Mississippi, Fannie Lou Hamer."[34]

The only biography of Moses to date, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them* (1994) by attorney Eric Burner, reinforces this image of Moses. Burner's interest is in how Moses' "presence and leadership style offer an entrance…into a decade that set radicals to pursuing purity and to practicing, at times, a democracy of incessant action." He emphasized Moses' embodiment of group-centered leadership and attributed epic characteristics to him: he represented "a leader who encouraged but did not command" and who sought "not to be reborn but simply to do right" by "working unobtrusively and with unostentatious courage among the wretched." This depiction is further enhanced by his general exclusion of other (local and professional) activists. Burner's account of how social change is produced thus seems to revolve around exceptional individuals. Because he mostly described rather than analyzed, he did not provide any strong arguments or explicit conclusions regarding Moses' life, activism, or leadership. Although he conceded that Moses could be pragmatic—he was "not an idealist removed from daily, tangible business" and could "effectively act as a liberal social scientist and liberal bureaucrat"—Burner's somewhat romanticized depiction of Moses dominates his biography.[35]

Local studies of the Mississippi movement, most notably John Dittmer's *Local People* (1994) and Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1995), both altered and confirmed the established image of Moses. By emphasizing the activism of dozens of professional or ad hoc local organizations and individuals in Mississippi from the 1940s to the 1980s, these studies found that SNCC's and Moses' experiences were hardly unique. They demonstrated that civil rights activism existed before, during, and after SNCC's presence. This implied that although Moses' departure may have weakened SNCC, it did not mark the end

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[32] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 518; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 107.

[33] Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 78, 83-84; Carson, *In Struggle*, 140, 156-157, 242, 303; Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 55, 222; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 519; Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 30.

[34] Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 30. Italics in the word 'discover' are mine.

[35] Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 4, 8, 31, 47, 53-4, 69-70, 90, 92-93, 105, 112, 206-207.

of the Mississippi movement. While providing new insight into Moses' daily activities, Dittmer and Payne portray him less as a leader than a facilitator of local activism, treating his decisions predominantly as an outgrowth of his commitment to grassroots leadership.[36]

Payne especially expanded this reading of Moses and SNCC, which he captured as a group that "built on and elaborated that legacy" of organizational and intellectual continuity that local activists supplied. SNCC's job is shown as "simply building relationships," and therefore the "proper measure of [its] work is the extent to which the people they helped bring into political activity became leaders themselves." Moses is used to verbalize an alternative view on the production of social change: "The leadership is there. If you go out and work with your people, then the leadership will emerge…We don't know who they are now; we don't need to know...the leadership will emerge from the movement that emerges." While Payne admitted that Moses "was responsible for much of what made the Mississippi movement distinctive," he is described as bringing unique organizing skills, but applying them in humility. Payne and others present him as a product of the black community and have relatively little to say about the cosmopolitan influences on his life.[37]

Since local studies by their format generally exclude SNCC-projects and civil rights activism in other states, however, the image of the decentralized, community organizing Mississippi branch of SNCC as representative of *overall* SNCC is maintained. By extension, since Moses played a visible role in the Mississippi movement, he hence continues to represent (the best of) SNCC's public image. Yet what's different is that he and SNCC are no longer placed in the forefront of social change; they are 'following' more than 'leading.'

Moses himself seems to embrace this version of history most. His semi-autobiography *Radical Equations* (2001) does not tell a story of an exceptional individual, but solely of an instrument for indigenous leadership whose potential had always been present. He for instance tells the story of his beating in McComb—a heroic act that many scholarly works describe in detail—in a single page. Rather than dwelling upon himself, he underlined the courage of the locals with him: "It is remarkable that the two men didn't flee and I still find it difficult to know what they reached into for the courage."[38]

Yet *Radical Equations* provides little new insight into Moses, apart from providing some new information about his family background. This is because it is not a traditional autobiography. First, Moses had a minor role in writing it; SNCC-worker Charles Cobb was the dominant author, and Cobb mostly transcribed Moses' answers from earlier interviews. Second, only half of the book deals with Moses' experiences in the civil rights movement; the other half treats his Algebra Project (see chapter 11) which he developed in the 1980s. The part on the movement, moreover, is only a stepping stone to the story of the Algebra Project. Consequently, no room is given to his views on many of the important events of the movement. The story even stops short after 1964, avoiding any discussion of his departure from SNCC.

Moses' view of himself as a facilitator, however, contrasts starkly with the picture that emerges from many of the memoirs of SNCC veterans. These resemble earlier 1960s accounts, burnishing the image of a respected and trusted leader who had a clear vision for the movement. Moses, as Cleveland Sellers indicated, was "a special SNCC person" who had "something about him…that seemed to draw all of us to him." James Forman recollected how his "admiration for Bob Moses and his band of guerrilla fighters swelled up" and Stokely Carmichael noted he was "influenced by him in fundamental and lasting ways." When Moses asked him to be the director of Mississippi's Second Congressional District he "was moved, overwhelmed as much by the responsibility as by Bob's confidence. To be appointed to that job, and by

[36] John Dittmer, *Local People*: *The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 319.

[37] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 3-4, 180, 238, 243, 332.

[38] Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 26.

Bob? I couldn't believe it." Mary King even described feeling "a sudden rush of exhilaration" whenever she saw Moses: "He inspired me and touched me. I trusted Bob implicitly and felt deep affection for him. He was only thirty years old but I considered him prophetic." Such admiration even went so far that it creates doubts about the factual degree of group-centered leadership in SNCC. Moses was "the one man in SNCC who was respected and trusted enough to actually be embraced by most of our membership as a 'leader,'" its chairman John Lewis claimed, "If there was one thread that might have held it all together, it would have been Bob Moses."[39]

1.4. Problem Areas in Civil Rights Movement Historiography and Moses' Place in It

The 'revisionist' phase in movement historiography added valuable new perspectives on the role of individual leaders and organizations in the civil rights movement. However, this study of Moses and SNCC incorporates traditional as well as revisionist approaches in movement historiography, in the belief that the 'Long Civil Rights Movement' concept is in danger of being stretched too far. As Cha-Jua and Lang contend, while 'classical' phase "civil rights historians made a fetish of movement discontinuity" by turning the 1955-1965 into an exceptional era, 'revisionist' scholars go "too far in the opposite direction." "[T]he Long Movement's major flaw is its ahistorical *totalizing perspective*," they argue, meaning its "tendency to flatten chronological, conceptual, and geographic differences." The danger in this, historian Adam Fairclough agrees, is that history becomes "a homogenized mush, without sharp breaks, and clear transitions and transformations."[40]

The period 1955-1965 saw civil rights activism developing new ideas, styles, and methods. Two new organizations, SCLC and SNCC, transformed the civil rights struggle in the South and gave it a fresh dynamism. The modern movement "*was* distinctive," Eric Arnesen concurs, "It was significantly larger than its predecessors; it was visible nationally and consistently in a way unmatched by earlier organizations; it attained a genuinely mass character; it provoked a violent backlash of unprecedented proportions; and it ultimately succeeded in toppling legalized segregation and enfranchising black Southerners." The 'classical' civil rights movement, Cha-Jua and Lang agree, "was an earthquake." There had always been grassroots activism in the South, but what was new in the 1960s was the scale and character of the support that national groups bequeathed local ones, with SNCC setting the pace.[41]

An overemphasis on local activism, moreover, implies that blacks in the South disposed of sufficient resources themselves—organizational, financial, political—to wage the civil rights struggle with minimal outside assistance. The contrary, in fact, was the case. The presence of *full-time* civil rights workers—indigenous or not—made a decisive difference. Without Robert Moses and SNCC it is impossible to imagine a Freedom Summer, which had a local *and* national character. To argue that a national organization like SNCC merely had to facilitate grassroots leaders begs the question why facilitation was needed to begin with. An investigation into *how* and *to what extent* this facilitation occurred will reveal the degree to which SNCC's entrance in the state constituted a break with prior activism, as well as expose continuities with what had gone before.

This study also contributes to the historiographical discussion over the relationship between North and South. 'Classical'-phase historians depicted the North as a mere supporter of the struggle in

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[39] Sellers, *The River of No Return*, 82-3, 194; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 278, 419-420; Stokely Carmichael and Michael Ekwueme Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 310-14; John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego and New York: Hartcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 302-303; King, *Freedom Song*, 146.

[40] Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 273; Fairclough, "State of the Art," 388.

[41] Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 269, 273, 275; Arnesen, "Reconsidering the 'Long Civil Rights Movement,'" 34.

the South, whereas 'Long Movement' historians "are interested in undermining the trope of southern particularity." Seen through the eyes of a Northerner working in a Southern-based organization, this dissertation exposes real and perceived differences in North-South continuity.[42]

In addition, Moses' Ivy League background complicates historiographical debates over the relationship between ideas and activism. By stressing indigenous black institutions, 'revisionist' historians have emphasized organic influences over cosmopolitan ones. While earlier accounts of Moses highlighted his attraction to French existentialism and downplayed black stimuli on his thinking, later ones did the opposite. In a similar way, Steven Lawson argued, books on Martin Luther King have "create[d] an either/or proposition that lines up a predominantly Western intellectual tradition against an African-American religious heritage" rather than "a both/and situation." This suggested that he was a typical Southern black Baptist preacher, whereas his education clearly set him apart.[43]

The same observation can be applied to some leaders in SNCC that most defined its direction apart from Moses, like James Forman, and, to a lesser extent, James Lawson and Tim Jenkins. They were not only older than most, but had also been exposed to international experiences, life in the North, secular or non-traditional Christian viewpoints, and high quality education in the white world. This contrasts starkly with SNCC-leaders like John Lewis, Charles Sherrod, and Fannie Lou Hamer, who were reared in impoverished Southern towns, were highly religious, and had either an average to low quality (black) college education, a limited high school education, or no formal education at all.

'Revisionist' accounts of the civil rights movement focus on this second cultural strand in SNCC at the expense of the first. Despite all its explanatory value, the 'local people' approach, by stressing the indigenous southern base of the civil rights movement, fails to acknowledge that cosmopolitan influences were crucial for SNCC's direction. They were vital not just in bringing practical skills, but also in the articulation of a wider political vision, in terms of ideas and strategies. Even the students from black Howard University, who according to Mary King were "disproportionally influential" in SNCC, combined their organic experiences with intellectual theorizing spurred by visits from cosmopolitan-educated (black) activists like Bayard Rustin. As Moses acknowledged, the Howard students were "radicalized on the one hand by the movement and they're radicalized on the other hand by intellectuals who are interested in these kinds of movements."[44]

By stretching the movement's periodization and accentuating continuities in tactics and goals (particularly self-defense and economic justice) some 'long movement' historians have additionally flattened the importance of "the intellectual and cultural dimensions" of the movement at specific moments in time. By turning the movement chiefly into an incessant quest for rights and (political) power from the 1930s to the 1980s, ideology and discourse are rendered less relevant in both explaining and producing social change. This suggests that locals' motives for instance were disconnected from or unaffected by King's dreams of a "beloved community," or by events in the wider world. By analyzing social change in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma as a logical outgrowth of municipal politics, J. Mills Thornton for example diminished the Montgomery Bus Boycott as "not a revolution, merely an extension of the negotiations." Many participants, however, attributed more meaning to it than that, as Mother Pollard, a 70-year old black woman who refused to ride the bus during the boycott, stated: "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested." Moreover, perceptions of the world changed over time, even for people who were isolated and poorly educated. Black Mississippians visited family members in the North; they fought as soldiers in Europe, the Pacific, and Korea; they watched newsreels, read newspapers, and sometimes joined national organizations. As Cha-Jua and Lang maintained, "the theoretical and ideological lenses through which people viewed their actions matters as much as what they actually did." It is therefore

[42] Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 281.

[43] Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 460-461; Dittmer, *Local People*, 429.

[44] King, *Freedom Song*, 313; Robin J. Hayes, *'I Used the Term 'Negro' and I Was Firmly Corrected': African Independence, Black Power and Channels of Diasporic Resistance* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2006), 160.

necessary to look at the "goals, strategy, ideology, and especially the discourse and symbols" of a given time period because even if "'freedom' may have been the consistent goal in each case, the meanings of 'freedom' and its articulations reflected the specificities of particular historical movements."[45]

By reintroducing 'classical' approaches next to 'revisionist' ones, this dissertation attempts to find a balance between the wave and the ocean. The accent here on an individual leader is not intended to belittle the contribution of ordinary people to the success of the civil rights movement. Rather, a study of their interaction can lead to a better understanding of what constitutes a "movement" to begin with, and how this one related to previous ones. Balancing 'classical' and 'revisionist' approaches also provides a more realistic assessment of Robert Moses himself. Moses was neither the existentialist hero emphasized in earlier accounts nor the unassuming facilitator prominent in later ones. Like any human being he had his own views, preconceptions, skills, and background influences that played a part in the decisions he made. Historians' treatment of Moses as the personification of grassroots activism for instance downplays how atypical he really was for Mississippi's grassroots realities. In an unconscious echo of the 'outside agitator' theme so beloved of white Southerners, Mississippi NAACP leader Aaron Henry emphasized this disconnect: "SNCC spokesmen, particularly Bob Moses, reasoned that as long as the upper and middle class held the wealth of the country, the poor people would never get their share. This thinking did not emerge from the cotton fields of Mississippi. These were theories brought into the state by various highly educated people." By outlining Moses' work with both local people and national organizations, this study throws fresh light on the leadership role that Moses actually played.[46]

1.5. Research Question

To uncover answers for these problems in civil rights movement historiography and the place of Moses and SNCC in it, the dissertation operates from the following primary research question: *What distinguished Moses' understanding of organizational leadership and to what extent did his own leadership reflect these views in practice?* By treating Moses as a subject in his own right, this study aims to fill the gap in historical knowledge concerning his activities, leadership style, and legacy, making it the most detailed account of his activism to date. However, this is not a traditional biography. The objective is to analyze through Moses SNCC's ideals and pragmatics (the process of facilitation in theory and practice). In this way the dissertation contributes to 'classical' accounts of SNCC by including what happened at the local level, and to 'revisionist' ones by assessing the relation between local activism to the national civil rights movement. This allows for addressing questions about the nature of movements, like: What constitutes a "movement"? Is it organizational presence or is something else needed? Who was "selected" or stepped forth to be a leader? Who are "local people"? If its definition is "ordinary people," then what is "ordinary" and when does one cease to be it? When does "facilitation" become "influencing" and how relevant were internal shifts in SNCC (structure, ideology, membership) for the continuation of local movements?

1.6. Sources

The dissertation's sources are threefold: secondary sources, primary sources, and oral history. Secondary sources consist of academic studies (books, articles, and dissertations) on SNCC and Moses, but also on civil rights in a broader spectrum. To provide a sense of how outsiders witnessed movement activism, contemporary newspaper articles are featured, while being aware, as Clayborne Carson warned,

[45] Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 277-280; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 85-86; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 149.

[46] Aaron Henry and Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 201-202.

"that the civil rights groups may have influenced the news reporting by directing reporters' attention to activities in which the group was involved and that the reporters themselves may have had difficulty assessing the nature of organizational involvement in protest activity." These range from the sympathetic liberal white and black press—newspapers like the *New York Times* and magazines like *Jet* and *Saturday Evening Post*—to pro-segregationist papers such as the *McComb Enterprise-Journal* and the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*.[47]

The primary sources can be divided into two groups. One consists of memoirs by former SNCC members, such as Moses, Lewis, Sellers, Forman, Carmichael, King, and others associated with the group. The latter include Freedom Summer volunteers like Sally Belfrage, but also members of other organizations, for example Aaron Henry. Included in this group are also transcripts of panel discussions held at SNCC reunions, like those captured by Cheryl Greenberg in *A Circle of Trust* or my own recordings of SNCC's 50th anniversary conference in Raleigh, NC, during April 15-18, 2010.

Because oral history interviews have been recorded over a period of almost fifty years, they raise the question of reliability. Later interviews are likely to contain factual errors or memory lapses. Moreover, many movement veterans have obtained prominent positions in mainstream American life, in educational institutions, government agencies, and other organizations. They may therefore omit or downplay less pretty or more radical aspects of their activism. John Lewis, now a US Congressman, is a good example. He acknowledged to one interviewer that his "current legislative career is the outgrowth of his involvement in the movement, and the continuing trajectory of that career may precipitate shifts in his memory, interpretation, and evaluation." Furthermore, SNCC has an active veteran community which still plays a dominant role in shaping history and conceptualizing the movement through conferences, books, and talks at schools and other venues. Interpretations of pivotal incidents in SNCC's history, like the events in Albany or Atlantic City, accordingly have been repeated over and over, even by workers who were not present as they became part of a collective 'SNCC identity.'[48]

Civil rights memoirs, Kathryn Nasstrom argued, therefore are but "selective reconstructions informed by present-day circumstances." Those circumstances "include the existing scholarly and popular histories of the movement. These narratives act as a foil, or the touchstone, against which memory is drawn," meaning that the authors' "impulse to respond to existing narratives shapes and limits, in turn, what is recovered from memory." Earlier movement accounts also "serve a productive role in autobiography as they authenticate and even generate memory," with some activists quoting historians "to bolster [one's] own interpretation." Furthermore, Nasstrom asserted, "[c]ivil rights autobiographies… have often been a place to champion partisan positions and settle old scores."[49]

To minimize these risks, great emphasis upon contemporaneous documentary sources is placed within this dissertation. The latter consists solely of material produced during the movement's heyday, that is, the late 1950s to mid-1960s. Its principal source is the *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, which includes correspondence, project files, reports, and minutes of meetings. Other key sources are the personal papers of SNCC-workers or advisors—such as Ella Baker, Howard Zinn, Mendy Samstein, James Forman, Mary King, and others—and those of other organizations related to SNCC, like the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SDS. Government sources include correspondence, transcripts of President Johnson's telephone conversations, and files from the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Another 'official' source consists of reports by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC), a state government agency created to spy on, and stymie, the civil rights movement. The MSSC files were released in 1998, but so far have been little used by civil rights scholars. The MSSC has several notable 'investigative' files on SNCC and Moses that provide valuable insight into their opponents' state of mind.

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47 Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Eagles, 29.

48 Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History," 325-364.

49 Ibid.

Oral history interviews provided a method of testing my own views and filling in gaps in my knowledge. Interviews with former SNCC-workers were conducted in person or via email. However, I generally accord greater weight to oral history interviews from contemporary times on the assumption that these memories would be fresher. Examples include Howard University's oral history collection recorded in the late 1960s, Anne Romaine's interviews with workers after Freedom Summer, and the 1965 Project South interviews conducted by Stanford University's KZSU radio station.

Another reason to use oral history is because Moses has kept his personal records private. While Eric Burner's claim that "even the most painstaking searching has uncovered no detailed archival evidence" on Moses' activism is an overstatement, it is true that much knowledge pertaining to his background (chapters 2-3) and evaluations of movement events are captured primarily in the rare interviews he granted to historians such as Clayborne Carson, Taylor Branch, William Chafe, and Charles Payne. These interviews, which are part of the public record but hardly used by historians, are the closest instruments available to getting at Moses' core. Added to these are my own interviews with Moses. I was grateful to have his cooperation, but it must be noted that this is an independent scholarly work and not a sanctioned biography. Nevertheless, wherever possible the emphasis will be on his words documented at the time.[50]

[50] Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 8.