5. Quiet Determination

5.1. Replicating McComb

During 1962-1963 Moses translated his McComb experiences into a solid method of organizing, and in the formation of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) he found an instrument to apply his approach across Mississippi. Fulltime volunteer groups moved in with locals for extended periods of time and implemented his technique of developing personal relationships with locals of all social backgrounds and helping them with whatever resources—skills, manpower, education—were lacking. Through a process of trial and error, they discovered, in Moses' words, "how you can move even if you are afraid." SNCC duplicated this in other states, realizing that an enlarged grassroots constituency was effective in the Deep South and that its volunteer basis distinguished it from the established civil rights organizations. This "set a pattern," *The Student Voice* claimed, "for other civil rights groups" in the scale and character of support that national groups bequeathed local ones. An analysis of this organizing approach in practice—what Ella Baker termed the day-to-day "spade work"—illuminates the interplay between fulltime activists and locals in producing social change. Yet SNCC-workers' duplication of his approach in Georgia and elsewhere notwithstanding, Mississippi could develop it most consistently, in large part due to Moses.[1]

In contrast to Moses' consistent commitment to voter registration as an overriding priority, most non-Mississippi SNCC-workers took up voter registration only after demonstrations in Jackson and in Albany, Georgia, proved the futility of direct action in the Deep South once again. For example, James Bevel and his wife-to-be Diane Nash tenaciously tried to revive the Jackson Nonviolent Movement, founded the previous summer with local black youth and students from nearby black colleges[2]. Moses himself moved to Jackson in early December. His main interest in Jackson, however, was to look after the expelled McComb students. But Bevel and Nash, he reflected in 1984, considered his method of organizing too slow. Bevel, a flamboyant 25-year-old Mississippi-born black trained as a minister and fond of making rabble-rousing speeches, did not have the type of personality that was suited for Moses' patient approach. He and Nash, a 24-year-old light-skinned Chicagoan, had been stalwarts of James Lawson's Nashville movement. They accordingly overlooked the results of the McComb demonstrations and instigated boycotts of Jackson buses and the State Fair.[3]

As Moses anticipated, the Jackson Movement had difficulty finding community support. Resentment among middle-class blacks grew with each direct action that netted few results because city officials refused to negotiate. "Jackson is not Nashville," Moses summarized the Bevels' error in 1993, "you don't have a Black, middle-class community which is going to support you and those that might are within the NAACP [but] the NAACP is not supporting [direct action]." Generational and ideological tensions between SNCC and existing organizations also exacerbated as both tried to influence local youth. Medgar Evers, who considered Jackson his home base, was caught in the middle: he appreciated any outside help

---

[1] Moses, "Questions Raised By Moses," April, 1965, in *Come Sit At the Welcome Table*, ed. Bond and Lewis, 722-724; "Freedom Summer Planned in Miss.," *The Student Voice*, Special Issue (Spring 1964): 1, 3, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 133, 135; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 237; Rothschild, *Northern Volunteers and the Southern 'Freedom Summers,'* 14.

[2] These included Luvaghn Brown and Tougaloo and Jackson State College students such as Dorie Ladner, Lawrence Guyot, and Douglas MacArthur Cotton.

[3] Cobb, *On the Road to Freedom*, 290; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 56-57; Untitled SNCC Document, Spring 1962, Box 3, Mary King Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 116-117, 123; Moses interview Dittmer, 1983; Lester McKinnie to James Forman, letter, April 6, 1962, File #0848, Reel 7, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Robert Parris Moses, interviews by Taylor Branch, July 30 1984, and March 13, 1988, Box 108, Folder 1, Taylor Branch Papers; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 559; Carson, *In Struggle*, 22.

the national NAACP refused, but saw his own work dissipate with conservative locals withdrawing from activism and NAACP-youth gravitating to SNCC. He also resented SNCC's 'brash' methods. CORE's Tom Gaither, who shared SNCC's Jackson office, likewise complained in a letter that "the whole SNCC operation seems too chaotically impulsive" and that "no effort has been made to get a real strong local movement."[4]

Moreover, Mississippi's effective response to nonviolence by imposing lengthy jail sentences quickly stopped all movement. "Few people," Moses analyzed in 1966, "were quite ready for that kind of long-term siege," especially if they had businesses or family to attend to. The 'jail-no-bail' tactic also had no concrete effects; one worker even compared it to "shouting in an empty forest." The Bevels were unable to counter this by successfully conveying the merits of nonviolence onto uneducated Mississippi blacks. To them Gandhi meant little, Moses charged in 1993: "They're into Jesus [and] carrying their guns. [What SNCC-workers were] talking about has got to somehow penetrate that and it never did." Just copying a technique was insufficient: "[W]hether [Lawson] could have done the same thing in Jackson has always been the question in my mind. You can't do that…on nonviolence as a technique. You [need] some kind of real commitment…to make the people real practical, and spiritual at once." But Lawson's group "lacked the spiritual discipline to sustain themselves" under Mississippi's "onslaught." He blamed Lawson for returning to college: "I often thought about that, because…he didn't for some reason think that his job was to actually come *with* the students in the field." The Jackson Movement's failure thereby reinforced Moses' commitment to moral leadership by example.[5]

Meanwhile in Albany, Georgia, SNCC had more success with direct action, but the short-term results were equally paltry. Although the Albany movement started out as a rural voter registration project along Moses' McComb example, it developed into something else in part due to the characters of its instigators, Charles Sherrod, a 24-year-old black Virginian minister and sit-in leader, and Cordell Reagon, a 18-year-old black Freedom Rider from Nashville. After their release from prison in McComb half-way October 1961, they intended to work in Georgia's dangerous southwest rural counties like Terrell and Baker, but found the time-consuming work Moses had done in such remote areas too demanding. They therefore relocated to Albany, a city of 60,000 people that was 40 percent black and relatively progressive for Georgia's standards. As Sherrod explained in 2010: "It was no trouble at all getting…a place to eat, a place to just lay down my head, transportation…And I'm going to leave that to go to Terrell?"[6]

Sherrod and Reagon established personal relations with locals by hanging out at black high schools and social clubs. However, they postponed their voter registration plans when the newly-formed Albany Movement—a coalition including SNCC, the NAACP, the black ministerial alliance, and black women's clubs—began a massive direct action campaign to integrate public facilities. When month-long sit-ins and marches led to the arrest of hundreds (including incoming SNCC-workers), the Albany Movement invited Martin Luther King to make a speech. King's presence pressured city officials and energized locals. As SNCC-worker Bill Hansen put it at the time: "[King] can cause more hell to be raised by being in jail one night than anyone else could if they bombed city hall." When King resolved to stay in jail after a march that incarcerated another 250 protesters, negotiations with city officials intensified. However, after he and other leaders posted bond, city officials reneged on a vague, unwritten agreement that had been negotiated in their absence. The Albany Movement resumed direct action, but the City

[4] Dittmer, *Local People*, 117-118; Tom Gaither, letter, December 10, 1961, Box 15, Congress of Racial Equality Records (hereafter cited as CORE Records), Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; Rothschild, *Northern Volunteers and the Southern 'Freedom Summers,'* 10.

[5] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Anne Romaine, September 1966/November 14, 1987, Anne Romaine Papers; MFDP orientation, recorded by KZSU Radio Station Stanford University, 1965, transcript, KZSU Project South Interview Collection, Microfiche 2479 (E), Library of Congress; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Charles Payne, August 1993, in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, Lawson and Payne, 180-181; Charles Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, July 30, 1984; Moses interview Carson, 1982.

[6] Carson, *In Struggle*, 56-65; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 524-561; Charles Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010.

remained intransigent. Compared to McComb, the Albany Movement gained more adult support and generated a broad-based vehicle for activism in black community. SNCC's Martha Norman therefore called Albany a victory, not a failure: "They were the first Black Belt community to launch a citywide protest in the sixties. They were the model."[7]

Albany proved another turning point for SNCC. Most notably, it intensified its rivalry with SCLC. It resented King's sudden departure and accused SCLC of "taking over" the coalition. This strengthened SNCC's convictions of avoiding shared working areas and that relying on celebrity power stifled locals' growth even if it initially intensified it. Albany also strengthened the reluctance of the NAACP's national officials to work with SNCC. They complained that SNCC's Charles "Jones just about controls" the Albany Movement's Executive Committee. Jones, for his part, grumbled that the NAACP's Georgia field secretary "insists on working alone." In July and August 1962 interorganizational conflicts intensified when King's return to Albany to face trial for his march renewed nonviolent protests. SNCC-workers watched in frustration as locals deferentially followed King's lead. Unable to gain concessions, the Albany Movement returned to voter registration, leaving some in SNCC convinced that nonviolent moral suasion had outrun its course.[8]

Moses refused to let the Albany protests distract him. He did not heed calls to flood Albany with SNCC-workers, although he regularly had contact with the Georgia workers at Atlanta SNCC meetings[9]. Such rashness did not suit his personality and interfered with his single-minded Mississippi goals. He said in 2011 he still considered his "primary relationship with Amzie" and described himself as just being "my mother's son, quietly self-circumscribed now in the space SNCC carved out in Mississippi." SNCC-workers did not hold this against him, which demonstrates the strengths of SNCC's organizational culture celebrating diversity.[10]

Moreover, to Moses the Albany demonstrations confirmed his analysis of the events in McComb and Jackson: programmatic and organizational unity were vital for the fledgling Deep South movement. Programmatic unity had to come through voter registration. Whereas the federal government could do little in direct action cases, he reasoned, the 1957 Civil Rights Act had authorized it to investigate and prosecute racial discrimination in voting. This provided a theoretical "space to crawl in…so they can't just arrest you" without risking federal involvement. Most SNCC-workers now agreed. As Marion Barry explained in 1965: "[W]e looked at how much you put into a situation and what you get out of it. [A] lot of energy, and money, and head-beatings…just wasn't worth it, compared to…the long run [gains] of a political thing." An extra incentive was a low-key New York voter registration fundraiser that Harry Belafonte organized, where Moses, Bob Zellner, Tim Jenkins, Charles McDew, Charles Jones, and Charles Sherrod commented on their work.[11]

---

[7] Ibid.; SNCC News Release, December 1961, Box 1, Folder 3, Howard Zinn Papers; Charles Sherrod, interview by Blackside, Inc., December 20, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Bill Hansen to SNCC, Field Report July 1962 (private collection Adam Fairclough); Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 186.

[8] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 173-219; Nostrum, "Between Memory and History," 354; Ruby Hurley, Vernon Jordan and Gloster Current, telephone conversation, December 18, 1961, Albany City Archives, and SNCC Staff Meeting, minutes, June 3, 1962, and Bill Hansen to SNCC, Field Report July 23, 1962 (private collection Adam Fairclough).

[9] In 2010 Sherrod said they frequently often "talked individually, one on one, me and Bob…there was always cross-currents of thoughts." The Albany SNCC-office's front door even featured a poster of Moses. (Charles Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010; Faith S. Holsaert, "Resistance U," in *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, Holsaert et al., 185)

[10] Charles Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010; Robert Parris Moses, email interview by author, March 10, 2011; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, March 13, 1988, Taylor Branch Papers.

[11] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Anne Romaine, September 1966/November 14, 1987, Anne Romaine Papers; Marion Barry, interview by Howard Zinn, December 18, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, July 30, 1984, Taylor Branch Papers; Moses interview Carson, 1982.

The formation of the VEP (Voter Education Project) provided another boost for Moses' strategy. Directed by the Southern Regional Council (SRC) and funded by the Edgar Stern Family Fund and the Taconic and Field Foundations, the VEP furnished civil rights groups with money for voter registration drives. Between April 1962 and November 1964 the VEP helped register 688,000 blacks in eleven southern states. The VEP agreed to finance part of SNCC's operations, giving it $24,000 in 1962-1963[12].[13]

Although grateful for such help, the promotion of the VEP by officials from the Kennedy administration fuelled SNCC's estrangement from the federal government. SNCC's understanding was that the administration guaranteed a quid-pro-quo: if SNCC switched to voter registration, the government would protect them. Justice Department officials deny making any such pledges, but movement insiders, like SRC's Leslie Dunbar, maintain that they did. When the administration consistently failed to provide protection, SRC-director Harold Fleming described SNCC's disillusionment: "It was bruising and deeply emotional…people wept and cursed Robert Kennedy and Burke Marshall more than the FBI, whom they never had any confidence to begin with." This, historian Victor Navasky argued, "helps explain the bitter turn that the civil rights movement…ultimately took."[14]

To obtain the most benefit from VEP-money, Moses felt that organizational unity would be required. SNCC should therefore concentrate on the rural areas and create a vehicle that united all organizations in a common program. His prime motivation came from locals: "[P]eople felt threatened to the point where they really felt the need for [unity] to confront the opposition. [T]his is what I was responding to." Reducing internal competition was secondary; the projection of SNCC was never something he prioritized. After all, he explained in 1989, it "didn't make sense…to spend a lot of energy projecting SNCC in the local communities [since] you couldn't do the work if you were. [Because] the NAACP [would say], 'Well, I'm NAACP and I'm not going.'"[15]

On January 27, 1962, Moses summarized his plans in a report he wrote with Tom Gaither of CORE. It proposed a "concerted drive for voter registration" through a "state-wide coordinating council" composed of "individuals [who] represent functioning organizations" interested in this. Its targets would be the black majority Second, Third, and Fourth Congressional districts, the Gulf-Coast area, and cities like Laurel, Meridian, and Hattiesburg. Greenville, Clarksdale, Jackson, Vicksburg, and Natchez, where blacks often could vote, should receive "special consideration" since "apathy, ignorance, and long deprivation have dulled the appetite for the ballot." The plan echoed Moses' McComb approach: efforts should be "carefully spelled out in conjunction with the leaders of the city" and activists should "work toward the point where local leadership…will be able to sponsor and

[12] SNCC however received far less than other organizations (over $500,000 was distributed) because it mainly worked in rural areas with little chance of success. This is particularly remarkable considering that the Deep South's 137 rural counties represented more voting strength than urban areas. As James Forman explained: "The rural areas…had a degree of power in the state capitals that was disproportionate to their populations. Under the so-called 'rotten boroughs' system of reapportionment, the rural vote in both the electoral college and the state legislature sometimes approached three times the value of the urban vote. It was thus possible, in principle, to take advantage of this by registering large numbers of rural blacks and thereby win an increase in black political influence." (Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest*, 115).

[13] Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 29, 44-50.

[14] Victor S. Navasky, *Kennedy Justice* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 127-128; O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 66-67; Dittmer, *Local People*, 119-120; Carson, *In Struggle*, 70.

[15] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, March 13, 1988, Taylor Branch Papers; Moses interview Carson, 1982; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 55; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Charles Payne, August 1993, in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, Lawson and Payne, 175; Robert Parris Moses, interview by William Chafe, October 7, 1989, Allard Lowenstein Papers. Moses claimed that McComb's Webb Owens "really drove this [idea of unity] home to me," by stating "a thousand times": "I belong to the NAACP. I belong to CORE. I belong…to *anything* which is going to help this Black man in Mississippi." (Moses interview Dittmer, 1983)

develop the program." This entailed living with locals so "a real relationship between all concerned may be realized." It pleaded to recruit and train 35 Mississippi students before starting work in the summer.[16]

After conversations with Medgar Evers and Aaron Henry in Jackson, Moses and representatives of national and local civil rights organizations established the state-wide council named COFO[17] (Council of Federated Organizations) in early February. The COFO elected local NAACP-members Aaron Henry, Carsie Hall, and R.L.T. Smith as president, secretary, and treasurer. The presidency was to rotate, but no-one else volunteered, so Henry stayed on throughout its existence. Moses was elected program director and Louisiana student Dave Dennis, who had replaced Gaither as CORE's representative, assistant program director. Lawrence Guyot and Tim Jenkins claimed some controversy erupted over Moses and Dennis being outsiders, but this remains unverified[18]. Rather than a coalition COFO was to function merely as a framework for cooperation. Programmatic decisions were made at state-wide conventions attended by all members, whose voices mattered equally. Staff, who implemented convention decisions, spread across Mississippi's five congressional districts, which each had district branches. The separate organizations paid their own staff members, who worked under the COFO umbrella. Funds came from the VEP and the national organizations on a volunteer basis; COFO did "not solicit funds for itself" to minimize competition between supporting groups.[19]

Fear of competition was deep-seated among the national civil rights organizations. While SNCC needed VEP and COFO-money because a national audience preferred donating to more conservative and familiar organizations like the NAACP, the latter in turn feared that if money went to SNCC, it meant less for itself. According to James Forman, Roy Wilkins had opposed funding SNCC at all during the VEP-meetings, because he believed that working in the rural South was futile. Eventually only its state body endorsed COFO. Even Wyatt Walker, who described his dislike for SNCC as "adamant," condemned the attitude of the national NAACP. "[T]he NAACP historically kept its branches from moving," he stated in a 1967 interview, "The people were ready to act and the NAACP wouldn't let them." SCLC, however, kept out of Mississippi apart from establishing citizenship schools as part of the Citizenship Education Program, which it had inherited from the Highlander Folk School. According to Ella Baker, SCLC never "developed an organizing technique…they went in for mobilization." COFO thus "provided [SCLC] with a vehicle…they otherwise wouldn't have had."[20]

---

[16] "Voter Registration—A Projected Program," report by Tom Gaither and Bob Moses, January 27, 1962, Box 6, Ella Baker Papers; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 129-130.

[17] Theoretically COFO already existed: it was founded in May 1961 as an ad hoc group of local blacks to negotiate the Freedom Riders' release from Parchman with Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. Barnett had refused to meet NAACP-officials, so Henry and Evers tricked him by going as 'COFO.' Despite this continuity, however, Moses confessed in 1966 he had neither known "about COFO or the meeting." (Robert Parris Moses, interview by Anne Romaine, September 1966/November 14, 1987, Anne Romaine Papers)

[18] In 2010, however, Dave Dennis claimed that titles were given based on organizational, not personal qualifications: "[It] wasn't because people knew me or what I could do…I was just a skinny kid who represented CORE, so 'put him in there.'" (Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010)

[19] Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 108-109, 115; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 61; Dittmer, *Local People*, 118-119; Lawrence Guyot, interview by John Rachal, September 7, 1996, transcript, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; Tim Jenkins, interview by Howard Zinn, December 18, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; "Mississippi: Structure of the Movement, Present Operations, and Prospectus for this Summer," report, no date, File #0048, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; King, *Freedom Song*, 309.

[20] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 266-269; Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*, 186-187; Wyatt T. Walker and Ella Baker, interviews by John Britton, October 11, 1967, and June 19, 1968, transcript, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University; Moses interview, 1983; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 180. For a detailed discussion of SNCC's fundraising problems in relation to the other civil rights groups, see "Minutes of SNCC Regional Meeting," March 24, 1962, Files #0801-0804, Reel 3, Series III, Staff Meetings, SNCC Papers.

This also applied to CORE, which, fearing anonymity, initially opposed joining COFO. CORE, formed in 1941, operated nationwide, and was committed to nonviolent direct action and interracialism. It had a national headquarters, a clear administrative structure, and a prominent leader in James Farmer. While it looked top-down, however, in reality its local branches were largely autonomous. This was deliberate; as founding member George Houser stated in 1945, CORE aimed to create "a federation of strong local groups" rather than a centralized organization. Its southern branches, mostly newly formed and black-dominated, resembled SNCC in form, function, and outlook. Its members generally shared SNCC's age profile and sympathy for local people. CORE's field workers enjoyed considerable freedom. Dave Dennis recalled in 2010 that although CORE had hired him to coordinate Freedom Rides, he had "had no intention of doing this…I went to Mississippi [and] immediately went into a meeting with Bob." To ease national CORE, however, Dennis said, "Bob and I met to see how we could…keep them happy." They compromised that SNCC concentrated on the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Congressional District, and CORE on the Fourth, where it already worked.[21]

The national organizations realized that COFO offered many benefits. Aaron Henry cherished "the advantage of working with the head personnel of four main groups to develop new ideas" and Moses noted that unity "spurred contributions [and] interest in Mississippi." Moreover, he said in 1983, the established groups "[conferred] a kind of formal legitimacy on us." Dennis agreed: "[Henry] made us respectable. We couldn't have done it by ourselves; we had to be introduced to these communities." Above all Moses liked that it was a *people's* organization. Simultaneously problems about "who got credit for what were always with us," he admitted. SNCC covered 80% of Mississippi's districts and COFO's budget, which effectively meant that COFO equaled SNCC. Yet between 1962-1963 conflicts were minimal due to its small scope.[22]

Scholar Mary Aickin Rothschild judged COFO "one of the [movement's] most successful coalitions." That it was founded "when the nationwide civil rights movement was splintering disastrously" was indicative of Mississippi's oppressive climate. Similar alliances were not replicated elsewhere, which testifies to Mississippi's exceptional position within the South and local blacks' need for massive strength and new approaches to break it. Moreover, it reflected the personalities of its founders, whom Rothschild called "movement oriented" people who prioritized their Mississippi goals over organizational commitment. Henry, a World War II veteran and pharmacy owner, who although an NAACP officer was not a paid staff member, felt he could "work for who I want as I want to." Dave Dennis felt likewise. "[I] never believed in CORE chapters," he reflected in 2010, "[because then] you took away the ownership [from] the local people." Even Medgar Evers, whose organizational commitments, the editors of his autobiography argued, forced him to carefully balance "covert cooperation and public distance" from other organizations, was someone Moses felt "you could work with." Dennis and Evers even became close friends who regularly hung out together. SCLC's citizenship teacher Annelle Ponder, who shared Baker's views of the movement, exercised a similar outlook in COFO.[23]

---

[21] August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1948-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8, 10, 18; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 69-70; Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010.

[22] Moses interview Dittmer, 1983; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 115; Cobb, *On the Road to Freedom*, 267; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Charles Payne, August 1993, in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, Lawson and Payne, 174; Dittmer, *Local People*, 119; Greenberg ed., *Circle of Trust*, 63; Aaron Henry, interview by Robert Wright, September 25, 1968, transcript, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University; Moses interview Carson, 1982.

[23] Rothschild, *Northern Volunteers and the Southern 'Freedom Summers,'* 17; Dave Dennis, interview by Blackside, Inc., November 10, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010; Evers-Williams and Manning, ed., *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 88-89. Moses later stated that if "Charles had been there," Evers' more conservative, top-down approach brother, he believed, "it would have been hopeless." (Moses interview Carson, 1982)

Yet COFO reflected Moses' personality and approach to organizing most. In 1965 local white attorney Bill Higgs claimed that Moses "was instrumental" in its founding. Without him SNCC likely would not have sought cooperation; James Bevel, Diane Nash, and their roommate in Jackson, SNCC-worker Bernard Lafayette, focused on the short term. Unlike Moses they did not feel personally intertwined with the state's fate. His experiences in white schools, AFSC-camps, McComb, and with Ella Baker and Amzie Moore primed him to search for like-minded people. COFO was a quintessential expression of his personal world view and past work, Charles Jones noted: "He had drawn together all of his efforts in Mississippi into that organization." Moses' first meeting with Dave Dennis in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in the fall of 1961 underscores this, the latter related in 2010: "The first time I met him I thought he was crazy…he was very quiet, [sitting] in a corner when other people talked…so I'm like 'what's this guy all about?' [because] I was looking at short gains, not the long term." Intrigued, he approached him. After that "we turned [our Baton Rouge] project around to voter registration." In January he and Moses reconnected; by February Dennis had joined COFO.[24]

On February 18 COFO-representatives met in Jackson to formulate a program for VEP Director Wiley Branton. Moses, anticipating the overrepresentation of the urban middle class, wrote Amzie Moore "to bring a strong group…The more of the rural people come, the better chance we have of adopting the type of program you folks need." This highlights Moses' still unwavering commitment to Moore and the poor rural black populace. At the meeting, reports show, urban middle class leaders were indeed prominent. The NAACP's Dr. A. B. Britton for instance asked "money to complete our efforts" in Jackson so it could be "used as a model" for the rest of Mississippi. However, SNCC recommended that COFO "include representatives from all walks of life" and "make its appeals to all people." It reiterated its commitment to working in the rural counties, but also accepted the need to involve the middle class "for we have no leaders to spare!" COFO agreed to develop a staff of mostly native youngsters "with local NAACP leaders and SCLC citizenship teachers [to give] Mississippi Negroes the broadest possible support."[25]

Recruitment occurred quietly over the next months, although sometimes direct appeals were applied. Willie Peacock, a black Rust College graduate, was leaving for Detroit when Moses and Amzie Moore, who knew his father from the RCNL, came to his house and stated "we're here to come and get him." Others joined after a meeting Moore held in Jackson. But most recruitment occurred as a side-effect of other projects. Some Jackson students automatically joined COFO, whose headquarters were located in the city. This, combined with Moses' plea to leave Jackson, frustrated some in its Nonviolent Movement, which needed the manpower for direct action. Especially local SNCC-worker Lawrence Guyot, Moses recalled, "originally thought of voter registration as a cop-out" and with his strong personality "was something to watch!" But Moses recounted "no dramatics" between himself and James Bevel because "our paths didn't cross much." Because of their scant progress with direct action in Jackson, Bevel had become more open to Moses' viewpoints too. The two men agreed on a political experiment: they would encourage blacks to run for office in the June Congressional elections. Bevel moved to the Delta city of Greenwood to work on Rev.

[24] Bill Higgs, interview by Howard Zinn, December 19, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 199-200; Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010; Dave Dennis, interview by Blackside, Inc., November 10, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries.

[25] Bob Moses to Amzie Moore, letter, February 7, 1962, Box 1, Folder 2, Amzie Moore Papers; Carsie Hall to COFO, letter, February 5, 1962, and "First Draft of Report to Council of Federated Organizations," report, no date, and "Report to Council of Federated Organizations," February 18, 1962, and "Mississippi: Structure of the Movement, Present Operations, and Prospectus for this summer," report, no date, Files #0016A, #0033-0034A, #0017-18, and #0048, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

Theodore Trammell's campaign[26] with Henry and Moore, and Moses worked with R.L.T. Smith's campaign[27].[28]

Everyone knew that the black candidates had no chance of winning. "When I first announced my candidacy," Smith reflected in 1965, "everybody took it…as a great big joke," whereas in other southern states some blacks at least penetrated the political spectrum. Even blacks resisted, Marion Barry related the same year: "[T]hey didn't understand the value or the stimulation of [Negroes running]" if it had no results. But winning was never the campaigns' intent. Rather they were "an organizing tool," Moses explained, to encourage blacks to believe "that eventually they would be electing [black] people to office." It meant to show whites too, Smith stated, "that there was much room for improvement, particularly in the caliber of men who would represent us." The attempt therefore constituted a significant break from previous activism and aligned with Moses' analysis of Mississippi race relations. Smith noted that Moses "thought like I think—I felt that [ours] was an unusual[ly] difficult problem, and the ordinary means that [were] available to us…would not solve it." Barry agreed: '[T]he concept wasn't new…in terms of Negroes running to get a seat[,] but in Mississippi this was a radical and certainly militant position to take [and] new in the sense that [it might be called] stimulation politics."[29]

Moses worked as a 'submerged' campaign and road manager. He wrote Smith that he wanted to work "as quietly as possible." This suited his personality and desire to promote local leadership, but also conveniently prevented renewed 'outside agitation' charges. The campaign had a small interracial volunteer staff and one paid employee, Caroline Tyler. Smith valued Moses as "a deep thinker" of "considerable ability;" Moses marveled at Smith's "very formal" interface with others, "like he stepped out of a book." Moses drove him to campaign rallies in black churches, general stores, and black colleges in the fourteen counties of the Third Congressional district, which included the substantial towns of Port Gibson, Fayette, Natchez, and McComb. Moses gladly used the opportunity to "check on various people" in Amite and McComb, hoping it softened SNCC's departure. When Smith worked at his Jackson supermarket, Moses helped Tyler with her typing, distributed campaign literature, sought poll workers, arranged speaking engagements, and conducted workshops. White lawyer Bill Higgs said in 1965 that he briefed Moses on all developments and "brought him the speeches and the legal [and] political stuff." He claimed that Moses did "everything he could…to help Smith." Ella Baker reported that he "has been working six and seven days every week, sometimes holding classes out of town." He held two such workshops in Claiborne County, but when fifty whites verbally abused the participants on their departure from the first meeting only three blacks attended the second. In Jackson, Moses and Smith were arrested while trying to desegregate the state legislature's spectators' gallery as part of SNCC's coordinated attack on segregation in state legislatures in Mississippi and Georgia. Smith had his house shot at and his supermarket's windows

[26] When Trammell died of a heart attack, Bevel worked on the campaign of his replacement, Rev. Merrill Lindsay.

[27] According to Bill Higgs, the congressional campaign for Rev. Smith was conceived at night-long meetings in the Jackson Freedom House and at Medgar Evers' house, which included them and Smith's son, Bob. Initially it was suggested that Evers should run, but he declined two days later. Unlike Smith, he was a nationally known NAACP-member and the NAACP took the position it should not be directly involved in anything political. They then asked Bob, who also declined but proposed his father instead. Smith announced his campaign in mid-December. (Bill Higgs, interview by Howard Zinn, December 19, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; "Negro to Run in Primary for Congress," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 17, 1961)

[28] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 152; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, March 13, 1988, Taylor Branch Papers; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 67; Moses interview Carson, 1982; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 560; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 174, 180; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 55; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 57, 66. Moses recalled the recruitment of Willie Peacock as follows: "'We need you,' I told Willie as he, Amzie, and I sat and talked in his Charleston, Mississippi home. On the spot, he agreed to come with us. Willie walked into a bedroom and told his mother he was leaving. Willie's father smiled approvingly."

[29] R.L.T. Smith and Marion Barry, interviews by Howard Zinn, December 30, 1965, and December 18, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 71; R.L.T. Smith, interview by Robert Wright, July 10, 1969, transcript, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University.

broken. Local media outlets cancelled his appearances on radio and TV, although complaints to the Federal Communications Committee (FCC) forced the broadcasters to backtrack.[30]

Moses discovered that politics offered new organizing possibilities: "You could get on TV" and project "a local person [rather than] the organizers for a civil rights organization. [O]ther local people who knew him would feel…they could come out to support him, whereas they [might] be reluctant to support SNCC." From this experience, he recollected in 1966, "I first began to think through what was a political party, how does a political party get formed, what is the structure, what's the base, all those questions which had never really been real questions for me." In a letter to Smith he proposed "training people to run for office next year the first chance we get." This indicates Moses' long-term commitment to Mississippi and the depth of his thinking compared to most SNCC-workers. Apart from Bevel no outside SNCC-workers participated in the campaigns, but it was done "with the full awareness" of headquarters. Moses' freedom to execute his ideas again exhibits the effectiveness of individual flexibility within SNCC, but also the precariousness of SNCC's overall state. Even after McComb, it was "an ongoing discussion" what sort of organization it wanted to be. Therefore, James Forman argued, "[r]ather than set up rigid definitions of goals and tactics, it seemed best then to experiment and learn…and draw conclusions from this process." Despite the candidates' expected defeat, Moses' experiment with the political then gradually began to determine the Mississippi movement's strategic direction.[31]

5.2. Bouncing A Ball

In June 1962 SNCC received a $5,000 VEP-grant to start six COFO-projects on July 1. Moses was eager to start: "[I]t is our goal to have several thousand Negroes apply for registration during the summer." He outlined a new long-term political vision: "Negroes must be trained to evaluate prospective candidates and to participate themselves in the political process," starting with the November 1963 local elections. He envisaged week-long adult education programs at the Mt. Beulah Institute in Edwards, Mississippi: SNCC "will recruit 30 a week to send there, so they can return to their community and train others." The projects looked promising, Moses assured national SNCC at a June meeting: "In each place the work is…carried out in corporation with the local civic and civil rights groups" and "local group friction [is] smoothed out." To promote cooperation, he even invited Wiley Branton to "talk to the various groups" and advised SNCC-workers to "bend over backwards to help the NAACP."[32]

Each project's intent was "strictly voter registration, because of the nature of the [VEP]," Moses cited at the SNCC-meeting, "but [staff] will also be laying the groundwork for an eventual direct action group" of local youth as an outreach to SNCC's direct action wing. He now lived at Amzie Moore's house with Bernard Lafayette and James and Diane Bevel, who intermittently joined the revived protests in Albany. Bevel's and Moses' different personalities and views, Taylor Branch claimed, still "put awkward

[30] Ibid.; Bob Moses to Rev. Smith, letter, no date, File #0328, Reel Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 263; Robert Parris Moses, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 15, 2010; Moses interview John Dittmer, August 15, 1983; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 174; Bill Higgs, interview by Howard Zinn, December 19, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; "Recent Progress of the Jackson Nonviolent Movement," report Ella Baker to SNCC, no date, Box 6, Ella Baker Papers; Sutherland-Martinez, *Letters from Mississippi*, viii; Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom*, 79; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 67-68.

[31] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Anne Romaine, September 1966/November 14, 1987, Anne Romaine Papers; James Forman, interview by Howard Zinn, November 12, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 238; Lynd, "Mississippi: 1961-1962"; Bob Moses to John Fisher, letter, May 12, 1962, File #0870, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

[32] Bob Moses to "Interested Friends and Foundations," memo, no date, Papers James Forman, Library of Congress; SNCC Meeting, minutes, June 1-2, 1962, File #0812-0813, Reel 11, Series V, SNCC Conferences, and Bob Moses to Rev. Smith, letter, no date, File #0328, Reel 9, and Bob Moses to Workers in the Voter Education Project, memo, no date, File #1010, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

silences between them." Yet Moses likely acquiesced since McComb showed that direct action could involve the youth's parents and because the VEP's restrictions otherwise diminished COFO's already tiny work force.[33]

Twenty SNCC-workers worked fulltime on the projects. Only Moses and two others were non-Mississippians; most were students from Rusk, Tougaloo, and Jackson State College[34]. They spread across the Delta counties: Ruleville in Sunflower, Cleveland in Bolivar, Greenville in Washington, Clarksdale in Coahoma, and Greenwood in Leflore. Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes worked in Hattiesburg, where they lived with local NAACP-president Vernon Dahmer, a black sawmill owner. In April Moses and McDew convinced SNCC-worker William Miller to "do a pilot study" of it to "serve as a guide post" for the other projects. Black Georgia SNCC-worker Frank Smith started work in Holly Springs, and other SNCC-workers in Vicksburg.[35]

VEP-money made workers' living conditions easier. "Up to then," Moses recalled, they lived "catch as catch can day by day." Yet it was still inadequate for basic expenses. Whereas other organizations spent much of their funds on salaries, SNCC paid its workers a weekly subsistence of $10 ($9.64 after taxes). "SNCC's wage scale," Clayborne Carson observed, "was an essential element in its uniqueness." Wages, moreover, were often used for project expenses—like stamps or pencils—and workers often still had to depend on locals' generosity, even when living in SNCC-rented 'Freedom Houses.' Conditions were sometimes dire. Sam Block, a 25-year-old black Mississippi student who singlehandedly ran the Greenwood project, slept in his car for several days because he had nowhere to stay. Often SNCC-workers worked for their board too. Sandy Leigh, who later stayed at Dahmer's, recalled sawing logs during daylight and organizing meetings at night.[36]

SNCC viewed such chores as quintessential to its job. Working class blacks, historian Wesley Hogan noted, proved "more responsive to activists who tried to become part of the community." As one SNCC-document emphasized, workers should "pick cotton[,] scrub floors, wash cans and windows, baby sit." Like Moses, most SNCC-workers began to wear overalls to symbolize their identification with blue-collar blacks. Occasionally, Dave Dennis recalled in 2010, "we crossed the line with [them]," for instance by wearing overalls to church. This offended locals, he said, because "if they *had* a suit, they *would* wear it."[37]

---

[33] Ibid.; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 55; Dittmer, *Local People*, 124; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 634; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 11.

[34] The twenty activists (with age, place of residence, and occupation) in 1962 were: 1. Moses, 27, 2. Samuel Block, 25, Cleveland, student at Mississippi Vocational College, 3. Willie Peacock, 25, Charleston, Miss., Rust College graduate, 4. Cleveland Barks, Greenwood, 5. Lawrence Guyot, Jackson, 6. Jesse Harris, 20, Jackson, 7. Curtis Hayes, 21, McComb, student at Tougaloo, 8. James Jones, 22, Jackson, 9. Landy McNair, Jackson, 10. Lafayette Surney, 19, Ruleville, 11. James Travis, 20, Jackson, student at Tougaloo, 12. David Vasser, Greenwood, 13. Hollis Watkins, 21, McComb, student at Tougaloo, 14. Diane Nash Bevel, 24, Chicago, 15. Frank Smith, 20, Atlanta, student at Rust College, 16. Charles McLaurin, 22, Jackson, 17. Charles Cobb, 20, Springfield, Mass., student at Howard University, 18. Emma Bell, 19, McComb, student at Campbell Jr. College, 19. John Ball, Greenwood, 20. James Bevel (the three non-natives thus were Moses, Bevel, and Cobb). James Forman composed the list, to which he noted: "The number of native Mississippians on this list is one of the most encouraging aspects of our work thus far in the state, for it shows that indigenous leadership can be developed in even the most difficult areas." ("Field Work in Mississippi," report, no date, File #0057, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers)

[35] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 128-129; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 57; "Supp. Material from SNCC Exec. Meeting, Nov. 1963," report, Box 2, Folder 21, Howard Zinn Papers; William Miller, "Hattiesburg Report," April 3, 1962, File #0941, Reel 7, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers. The Hattiesburg project was started with $50 from SNCC, but SCLC and CORE contributed financially as well.

[36] Hammerback and Jensen, "Calling Washington Collect," in *Civil Rights Rhetoric and the American Presidency*, eds. Aune and Rigsby, 144; Carson, *In Struggle*, 71; Dittmer, *Local People*, 120; Sandy Leigh, interview by Anne Romaine, March 22, 1967, Anne Romaine Papers.

[37] Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 79; Untitled SNCC Document, Box 6, Ella Baker Papers; Carson, *In Struggle*, 81; Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*, 187, 267; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 365; Dave Dennis, interview with author, April 17, 2010.

The majority of the workers were local males, and all were black. This pattern emerged philosophically and pragmatically: SNCC wanted to recruit local workers, but in fact had no choice. Most outside workers, Moses said in 1999, simply "didn't stick." John Hardy and Reginald Robinson had left, comparing Deep South organizing to "deep sea diving with a lot of pressure." Robinson started a project in South Carolina and Ruby Doris Smith joined headquarters. In mid-summer James Bevel left for Atlanta to became SCLC's Director of Direct Action. According to Moses, he left because he was convinced that "we could not do voter registration in Mississippi." Diane Nash joined him, and Bernard Lafayette started a project in Selma, Alabama.[38]

The native workers, however, did not fit Moses' definition of 'local leadership.' As he explained in 2011: they "were 'local' but not 'local leaders' because they travelled from project to project." By 'grassroots leadership' he solely meant people who "were publicly identified as [leaders] by the black community in which they lived." In this definition, facilitating local leadership meant doing whatever necessary to bring locals, irrespective of class or gender, into such a position. Dorie Ladner reflected in 2009 that locals "were putting their lives on the line to even involve themselves. So you couldn't say you want a certain type [of person] first." Luvaghn Brown remembered it somewhat differently: "No-one can say what was subconsciously done. [Generally] when one talks of developing leadership there is a natural prejudice toward people who think and act as they do."[39]

COFO-projects were initiated and sustained independently of Moses' presence. Each community project and congressional district had its own director; Moses' role, SNCC-worker Ivanhoe Donaldson explained in 1967, was rather "coordinating and planning strategy." Based in Cleveland or Greenville, Moses travelled from project to project. Sometimes portrayed as someone who avoided the pragmatic aspects of organizing, in reality Moses, in the words of Eric Burner, was "well aware [of] daily operations and management." His behind-the-scenes work from June through September demonstrates the accuracy of this statement. It also illustrates how the process of 'facilitation' often depended upon Moses' characteristics and contacts beyond the state.[40]

As an intellectual and his parents' son, education characterized Moses' organizing approach. In March he and Jim Dombrowski of SCEF planned a literacy project, enlisting the help of Frank Laubach, the nation's leading literacy expert. Their purpose was to prepare "illiterate adult Negroes for citizenship." SCLC voter registration director Jack O'Dell, whom Moses knew from Harlem, offered to send Mississippi workers to SCLC's citizenship school in Dorchester, Georgia. Later in 1962, Moses wrote Guido Goldman, a Harvard student he had befriended at the Belafonte fundraiser, that he had sent feelers "to people interested in providing scholarships to Mississippi Negroes to study law" so blacks might "have weight in the 1968 elections." He also helped organize local citizenship "workshops" as part of the Adult Education Program. At these locals discussed state government structures and legal cases, searched newspapers "for discussion cases," outlined race and income statistics of the participants' home counties, and learned how to run tape recorders.[41]

In May Moses arranged similar workshops at Tougaloo College for the COFO-workers that also included 'cosmopolitan' issues like "civil liberties, nonviolence, and folk songs." He contacted Myles

[38] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, 16 January, 1999, Taylor Branch Papers; Robert Parris Moses, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 15, 2010.

[39] Dorie Ladner, interview by author, Washington DC, November 16, 2010; Luvaghn Brown, email interview by author, January 13, 2011.

[40] Ivanhoe Donaldson, interview by Anne Romaine, March 23, 1967, Anne Romaine Papers; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 518; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 90, 207.

[41] Jim Dombrowski to Frank Laubach, letter, March 12, 1962, Box 1, Folder 2, Amzie Moore Papers; Bob Moses to Guido Goldman, letter, October 22, 1962, File #0662, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Bob Moses to Members of the Governing Board of the Miss Adult Education Program, memo, 1962, Box 14, CORE Records; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 634.

Horton about holding additional workshops at Highlander from June 4-9. He wrote he was "particularly interested in enlarging the number of participants from Mississippi" to increase their personal growth. He considered this a quintessential part of organizing: "Part of what the movement did was just…exposing people to all different kinds of people who were coming in and out of Mississippi [and] by taking them out of Mississippi…Our job was identifying people who were good candidates to go to that training [so they feel] part of some larger movement." He attended the Highlander workshops, where participants like Hollis Watkins, Curtis Hayes, and Sam Block studied registration laws, crafted programs for their working areas, and listened to organizing advise from veteran citizenship teachers like Esau Jenkins. In October Horton informed Moses of leads for financial help for new educational programs. By then the Adult Education Program was "scotched," but, he wrote Horton, SNCC could "carry out educational programs in communities in which we are working."[42]

Ironically Moses' desire for exposure caused the Program's halt. As part of it he helped organize and conduct a workshop series "on important issues of democracy," such as the Bill of Rights and its guarantees for free speech and assembly, across Mississippi. In May he asked Anne Braden in Jackson if she would speak at one workshop, because, she documented, "Bob felt the theory of civil liberties was something very important the people should think about—especially in Mississippi." After all, he wrote one Harvard professor, "we will not stand any chance…if we do not have the privilege of protest." Being preoccupied, Anne later asked him in Atlanta if her husband could replace her. Carl then joined him between July 13-19.[43]

On August 31 a report Braden wrote on his trip was leaked to southern newspapers. *The Clarion-Ledger* alarmingly headlined: "Braden, Accused As Red, Reported Active In State"; *The Jackson Daily News* even spoke of a "secret Communist document." Moses and Bill Higgs then called Braden, he wrote, "in a very disturbed frame of mind" because for two days papers printed names and places mentioned in the report, falsely describing "everybody that we contacted as part of that old Communist conspiracy." This included David Lollis, director of Mt. Beulah, where some of the workshops for the Adult Education Program were held. Lollis was fired and Mt. Beulah withdrew from the Program. The Bradens, Anne wrote, were "torn to shreds by other people in the movement"; Higgs and Wiley Branton asked SCEF to withdraw from Southern activism altogether. Anne retorted in a 13-page letter that argued that "the social price of McCarthyism" had been that too "many people with creative contributions to make" were driven out of the movement.[44]

The incident left COFO without a citizenship school and Moses caught in the middle. His educational efforts had come to a halt, but he sympathized with the Bradens. Nevertheless he was upset that Carl Braden's report and an article by him in *The Southern Patriot* had exaggerated Braden's role in the workshops and thereby obscured local contributions. It is striking that Moses appeared to be more concerned with the media portrayal of locals than with being identified with alleged Communists—a fact that underscores the difference between southern indigenous leaders and northern blacks in regard to the

[42] Payne, *I've Got The Light Of Freedom*, 142-144; Bob Moses to Myles Horton, letter, May 15, 1962, Files #0928, and Horton to Moses, letter, no date, File #0931, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Bob Moses to Myles Horton, letter, August 13, 1962, October 10, 1962, and Horton to Moses, letter, no date, November 15, 1962, and Bob Moses to A.D. Beittel, letter, May 29, 1962, Box 21, Highlander Research and Education Records, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; A.D. Beittel to Bob Moses, letter, June 1, 1962, Papers of James Forman, Library of Congress; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Charles Payne, August 1993, in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, Lawson and Payne, 173-174.

[43] Anne Braden to Wiley Branton, letter, September 23, 1962, Files #0671-0677, Reel 5, and Moses to Prof. Roderick Firth, letter, May 10, 1962, File #0650, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

[44] "Braden, Accused As Red, Reported Active in State," *Clarion-Ledger*, September 1, 1962; "Secret Communist Document Is Bared," *Jackson Daily News,* August 31, 1962; Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 157-159; Carl Braden to Jim Dombrowski and John M. Coe, letter, September 2, 1962, and Carl Braden to Bill Higgs and Bob Moses, letter, September 7, 1962, Box 55, Folder 13, Carl & Anne Braden Papers.

'Communist issue.' He even replied to Anne that her 13-page letter was "a beautiful job," and expressed regret "we all had to be so cruddy about it." He then joined SCEF's Operation Freedom program, which funded local activists who had subsequently lost their homes or jobs. One of the first people he proposed to receive help later became the national symbol of the Mississippi movement: sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer.[45]

After the Braden-trip the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission increased its surveillance of Moses. Like many white Southerners, its investigators believed in what historian Jeff Woods termed "an extreme southern nationalism" that interpreted any "racial reform [as] a plot hatched by foreign radicals"[46]. Hence a consistent misinterpretation of the civil rights movement characterized MSSC reports. Having argued that Moses had probably been "planted" by Communists, investigator Tom Scarbrough saw the Braden-incident as confirmation of Moses' subversive intentions. After all, Scarborough believed, Moses' New York home was "located two doors from the Communist Party newspaper." As such, native SNCC-workers like Sam Block could simply be no more than Moses' "leg man and stooge" so "Moses himself can remain unknown…until the time gets ripe for his presence." The MSSC also misunderstood inter-organizational dynamics: Moses was repeatedly named CORE director, and Martin Luther King "the head of [Moses'] organization."[47]

Because many of these reports were based on biased articles in Southern newspapers, Moses became increasingly concerned to generate favorable press reports[48]. He therefore befriended John Fisher of the liberal, New York-based *Harper's Magazine*. At a SNCC-meeting he confirmed that "arrangements have been made for publicity…to be done by *Harper's*." He also met a Whitney Foundation official in New York about a fellowship for a "Negro student" to "write magazine and newspaper articles about the work in the South." As he wrote to Fisher, "we desperately need someone who is close to the struggle to interpret what is taking place." In October he wrote to *Jet* to suggest that the black-owned magazine put a native Mississippi SNCC-worker on its cover. He added: "We hardly ever see any Southern beauty on the cover, anyway." Braden and Moses further considered "holding a [two-week] seminar on news media" to train participants in the "proper gathering [and presenting] of facts" for the news.[49]

Moses exploited his northern connections for publicity too, thereby functioning as a behind-the-scenes mediator between the local and the national. He used the New York publishing house of Lawrence Benenson, whose son had been a student of his at Horace Mann, for free (fundraising) prints and suggested that he published an article on Bob Zellner. Benenson in turn introduced Moses to Congressmen John

[45] Anne Braden to Bob Moses, letter, September 25, 1963, and Carl Braden to Bob Moses and Aaron Henry, letter, September 12, 1962, land Bob Moses to Carl Braden, letter, October 8, 1962, Box 55, Folder 13, Carl and Anne Braden Papers; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 140-141.

[46] According to Woods, this xenophobia "had deep roots in the region's past," exacerbated by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Denying black agency, its advocates similarly believed Communists to be the driving force behind black activism because of their support for the working class. (Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 2-20)

[47] Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 2-20, 95; Tom Scarborough, "Mt. Beulah or Southern Christian Institute, Edwards, Miss.," July 23, 1962, "Bolivar County—Aaron Henry and James Bevel," May 21, 22, & 23, 1962, "Leflore County—Samuel Block and Robert Moses," August 9-10, 1962, investigative reports, and Harry Scrivner to Commission Members, "Sunflower County," report, September 7, 1962, and Charles Jacobs to Senator Eastland, letter, September 8, 1962, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/ (accessed November 22, 2007).

[48] Despite feeling that the "nature of the work" required a "quieter atmosphere," Moses realized that publicity was essential but should be done on *their* terms to limit the type of depictions of himself and locals like Herbert Lee and Brenda Travis. *The Clarion-Ledger* for instance falsely labeled Travis a "twice pregnant Negro girl who did several 'strip-teasing' acts in the Pike County jail." (Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, August 10, 1983, Taylor Branch Paper; Charles B. Gordon, "McComb Girl Gets Buildup After Release to Professor," *Clarion-Ledger*, May 17, 1962)

[49] Moses to John Fisher, letter, May 12, 1962, File #0870, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, and SNCC Meeting, minutes, June 1-2, 1962, File #0812-0813, Reel 11, Series V, SNCC Conferences, and Moses to Larry Still, letter, October 3, 1962, File #0979, Reel 12, Series VII, Communications Department, Public Relations, SNCC Papers.

Lindsay (R) and Emmanuel Cellar (D) and went "to Washington with us to see them." Lindsay then offered help "with lawyers' fees and further contacts." Moses regularly corresponded with former colleagues as well; in October he for instance advised one on organizing a "Belafonte/King night" at Harvard. In July he asked his old roommate Bob Cohen and his New World Singers to do fundraising concerts for the Jackson Movement. The significance of Moses' Ivy League background was underscored in June when the Rabinowitz Foundation offered him a $15,000 grant to write a book on the student movement "because he has the academic qualifications." Moses, committed to his field work, declined but "strongly" suggested another well-educated black Northerner: James Forman.[50]

Moses also used television to bring the movement North. On August 10 he and Sam Block accompanied 25 registrants to the Greenwood courthouse before members of the national news media, including reporters from CBS, the AP, and UPI. He worked closely with CBS to produce the documentary *Mississippi and the 15th Amendment*, which aired on prime time on September 26 to an audience of "millions." It showed SNCC-workers, including himself, accompanying blacks to the Hattiesburg courthouse. Moses' collaboration with CBS, SNCC-scholar Vanessa Murphree argued, ensured "that the message of overt discrimination [was] clearly stated," and "SNCC's organizing efforts…shown in the best possible light." Moses cherished another benefit: it projected the courage and determination of *local* blacks. The documentary evoked a sympathetic response from many Northern viewers. As one New Yorker wrote Moses: "[A]s I watched that TV program and observed the planning and patience that characterized your organization, I could not help but feel that what was being done, striven for, already existed [realized in you]."[51]

Moses was engaged in behind-the-scenes fundraising as well, like writing appeals to interested groups and visiting potential donors. Most SNCC-workers did such fundraising "reluctantly" because it meant leaving their projects. But Moses was more alert to the advantages of trips North, especially when he could cultivate New York so he could visit his northern contacts and family. He also ventured North more readily if it helped Mississippi blacks. In December he for instance attended a New York Direct Action Training conference to plead for "experienced people" in nonviolence to come to Mississippi so "workers can see how these people operate." In hindsight he felt the reluctance among field staff around fundraising was an understandable mistake: "[None] of us [had] a background where people were thinking in terms of…how you put an economic base to an institution." Consequently "we were not imaginative about fundraising" and "left the worries about fundraising to [James Forman]." Apart from selling SNCC-literature, he reflected in 1982, SNCC could have published monthly stories "around a given SNCC field secretary [and] the community that person worked with," because "it doesn't focus you on any one particular person."[52]

At this stage, SNCC's office and field workers rarely interfered with each other. Workshops and quarterly 'all staff meetings' functioned primarily as interstaff communication. In fact, Forman documented, press releases were "the best type of staff communication we have," although "Bob has suggested that we get an interstaff memo" that highlighted workers' field reports. Headquarters sometimes proposed rules

[50] Bob Moses to Lawrence Benenson, letters, May 15, 1962, no date, File #0378 and #0491, Reel 5, and James Forman to Russell Lasley, letter, May 9, 1962, File #0592, Reel 10, and Bob Moses to Harry Belafonte, letter, no date, File #0561, Reel 5, and Bob Moses to Guido Goldman, letter, October 22, 1962, File #0660, and Goldman to Moses, File #0662, Reel 6, Unknown sender to Forman, June 11, 1962, File #0232, Reel 8, William Miller to James Forman, letter, July 20, 1962, File #0945, Reel 7, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

[51] Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 75; "Registration Efforts in Mississippi Continue Despite Violence and Terror," *The Student Voice* 3, no.3 (October 1962): 2, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 58; Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights*, 42; New Yorker to Moses, letter, October 31, 1962, File #1081-1082, Reel 11, Series VI, Bookkeeping Department, Financial Records, SNCC Papers.

[52] Moses interview Carson, 1982; Bob Moses to Hermann Rottenberg, letter, no date, File #1219, Reel 8, Forman to Moses, letter, June 11, 1962, File #0572, Reel 9, and "Report of Proceedings Conference on Direct Action Training, Dec. 15-19, 1962," File #0536, Reel 8, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers.

that made sense from a public relations viewpoint, but not from the field-workers'. For example, later that year it created the position of state directors (Charles Sherrod became director of Georgia, Moses of Mississippi, etc.) but did so without consulting those involved. Moses recalled in 1984 that he "was made field director…by fiat. [It] just came out of the blue from Atlanta." This contradicted his view of letting the field staff determine who represented them: "It wasn't anything that the staff people in Mississippi got together [about] and said, 'We want to have this kind of organization.'" Yet he was too preoccupied to concern himself much with headquarters. Factually, he said, Mississippi staff had few contacts with the outside world, apart from the Justice Department and Friends of SNCC-chapters: "[W]e were pretty much isolated. I don't remember having much interface with SDS [or] other groups." The latter is remarkable considering that New Left groups avidly read Tom Hayden's writings on McComb[53] and that a growing overlap in SNCC and SDS-membership developed.[54]

Rather than unwillingness to participate in headquarters' affairs, Moses recalled in 1982 that he just "didn't think it through enough then." Like with organizing, "nobody sat down and theorized all this…you went down there and [tried] to do something…[Then] you learned what couldn't be done. That helped define what could be done." Afterward there was time for reflection, at staff meetings or retreats. Yet Moses' activities during 1960-1962 show that SNCC operated with relative precision. His trick was learning "everything you can about a town[,] slip in quietly, do your thing, and get out." Before going into southwest Georgia and Selma both Charles Sherrod and Bernard Lafayette did research. Arkansas SNCC-worker Worth Long insisted at one meeting that workers must "study in and about our area[s]" and "know current techniques" used elsewhere. SNCC's Research Department, founded in 1962 by Jack Minnis, helped them by providing contacts, statistics, legal briefs, and 'how to' guidelines[55]. SNCC regularly organized workshops, leadership training, and seminars to educate its members too. It invited anyone, as one document noted, "who would talk to us."[56]

---

[53] Tom Hayden's experiences in McComb transformed his views on the production of social change. Central in this was the beating he and Potter underwent, but he was also impressed with SNCC's need to operate largely in secret: "We went down to Mississippi…because there were phone calls coming from the SNCC office [that] police and rabid segregationists were trying to get into Mr. Ernest Noble's Cleaners…Moses and these other people were hiding in among the clothes and trying to call out…So we stayed at the Camillia Motel in McComb, then alternately would go to see George Guy and Oliver Emmerich…and they would rave and rant to us about these SNCC workers McDew and Zellner, who they wanted out of town, or worse, and then we would go meet with McDew at night. You'd have to hide in the back of a car and be driven to a gas station and then switch to another car and go to a house with curtains pulled and blankets nailed over windows so that nobody could see that there was a meeting about voter registration going on. Because the house would be blown up." (Greenberg ed., *Circle of Trust*, 71).

[54] Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 65; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Anne Romaine, Septembera 1966/November 14, 1987, Anne Romaine Papers; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Joe Sinsheimer, December 5, 1984, Box 108, Folder 1, Taylor Branch Papers; Jim Forman to Lester McKinnie, letter, February 26, 1962, File #0844, Reel 7, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Agger, *The Sixties At 40*, 171, 184-185; Carson, *In Struggle*, 53-54. Some workers that belonged to both SDS and SNCC included Casey Hayden, Tim Jenkins, Bob Zellner, and Jim Monsonis. For more on SNCC's relations with SDS, see Hogan's *Many Minds, One Heart*.

[55] SNCC distributed "How To" guidelines among staff composed by field workers or outsiders, like the YWCA or even the American Baptist Education Society in 1890. These detailed the practice of organizing registration drives, direct action, or producing social change in general. All stressed pre-research, like analyzing the "organizations already operating in the community" and "critical changes" like "shifts in population, facts about people moving[,] new industries, new sources of power, loss or gain of markets, employment." Locals should be interviewed "to feel the pulse of the community" and workers should know the "social values on which the way of life in the [community] is based" because "we must forever be under the judgment of the community." Yet "[t]his does not mean that if it is contrary to our philosophy…to move in a particular direction, we nevertheless must," but rather "that whatever we do…must be executed after careful consideration of the people." ("How-to-do-it Guide for Organizing and Conducting a Voter Registration Drive," report, no date, File #0335-0338, Reel 23, Series VIII, Research Department, and "Memorandum by Mr. Frederick Gates, May 26, 1890," File #0517-0518, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Untitled SNCC Document, Box 6, Ella Baker Papers.)

[56] Moses interview Carson, 1982; Hammerback and Jensen, "'Working in 'Quiet Places,'" 10; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not*

SNCC's project in Ruleville exemplified this blend of sophisticated planning and trial-and-error. In August Moses entered Sunflower County to assist the project that Amzie Moore and the Bevels had instigated. By now the COFO-workers' and the media's presence in Greenwood had alarmed whites in the Delta. Ruleville, a black majority city with 161 registered voters out of 13,524 eligible blacks, was particularly vigilant because Senator James Eastland's plantation was nearby. This gave Ruleville symbolic significance. As SNCC-worker Charles McLaurin recalled: "[I]f I could get something going in his territory… it would make me stand out." In early summer Moses and Moore canvassed Ruleville for two weeks, persuading six locals to register at the county courthouse in Indianola. Convinced that the project had potential, Moses drove students McLaurin, Dorie Ladner, Charles Cobb, James Jones, Landy McNair, and Jesse Harris to Cleveland in early August. On the way he "lectured [them] about the region's history," as Amzie Moore had done for him. Despite being briefly arrested by a gun-toting Mayor Charles Dorrough, they soon opened a citizenship school, started canvassing with local youth, and accompanied potential registrants to the courthouse in Indianola.[57]

Canvassing was hard and often unpleasant. Going around in the hot sun talking endlessly to locals "wasn't very romantic," Cobb recounted in 1996, "It was slow[,] dangerous [and] boring" and nobody was "interested in what you were doing. It wasn't like we were doing this under the glare of the television lights." Then there was the "moral burden" of telling locals the negative consequences of registering. The key, Moses said, was to "convince them that nothing would happen[,] that their houses wouldn't be bombed, that they would not be shot at [or] lose their jobs, [but in Sunflower and Greenwood we] couldn't convince people [because] it wasn't true." Most feared violence at the courthouse rather than attacks on their homes, which they could protect with arms. Mississippi courthouses, Moses wrote in 2001, were "bastions of white power [with the capacity for] ugly Klan violence understood but kept well hidden until needed." Another canvasser summarized locals' inhibitions best: "If you couldn't read, couldn't bring yourself to confront a white person[,] couldn't find transportation[,] couldn't leave your obligations[,] couldn't quiet your wife who screamed in panic[,] couldn't think about anything except the hunger in your belly[,] you couldn't, wouldn't, didn't have the ballot."[58]

To overcome these hurdles, Moses reflected in 1986, organizers learned to "slow down and get into the motion of the people [and] move with them in ways which seem meaningful to them. [Much] of what turned out to be organizing, turned out to be patience." Yet "just the presence of the organizer," he noticed, "seems eventually to help as a catalyst." After all, "it's very important that the Negroes in the community feel that you're…going to ride through whenever trouble arrives…And in general, the deeper the fear[,] the longer you have to stay." Effective organizing, he stated, might even have to start with something as trivial as "bouncing a ball": "You stand on a street and bounce a ball. Soon all the children come around. You keep bouncing the ball. Before long, it runs under someone's porch and then you meet the adults." This slow building of relationships meant that during canvassing registration might not even be mentioned. Instead, McLaurin's notes read, workers should just "talk with the people, laugh with them…it's very important to learn what bugs them" irrespective of a connection with voting: "[F]irst meet

Afraid, 321; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, xii; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 196; Georgia meeting, minutes, December 14, 1962, File #0110, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 69; Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights*, 23.

[57] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 635-636; Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000), 31; Todd Moye, *Let The People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 92-97; "Registration Efforts in Mississippi Continue Despite Violence and Terror," *The Student Voice* 3, no.3 (October 1962): 2, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 58.

[58] Charles Cobb, interview by John Rachal, October 21, 1996, transcript, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; King, *Freedom Song*, 130; Lynd, "Mississippi: 1961-1962."; Patricia Mosely, *A Reminiscence*, in *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle*, ed. Erenrich, 10-11; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 25; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 14.

the people on their own terms, or you lose." He spent days in front of a grocery store, drinking sodas while its owner taught him local history. Slowing down also aided the workers' psychological survival. As Moses put it: "[Y]ou can't live as though you're in very real danger every day…The communities we worked in didn't live like that [so they showed us] how to take advantage of those times…you relaxed and deepened ties [that were] not directly connected to any specific political act," like talking on a porch or helping locals with "whatever."[59]

To overcome locals' feelings that voting seemed too abstract, workers related it to their daily problems. McLaurin's notes revealed that they "went from door to door telling people…how with the vote they would get better schools, jobs, paved streets." Hollis Watkins agreed that canvassing was "much more educational than it was political." Still many were hesitant. "I understand what you are saying," they often responded, "except it'll get me killed." The "most important thing," Moses maintained, was "to convince the local townspeople that we meant business." Yet deciding which approach to use was always tricky, as one canvasser's internal musings revealed: "Maybe I should have bullied him slightly, or maybe I should have talked less…Did I rush him? Should I never have mentioned registering [but] just tried to make friends?" Considering SNCC's emphasis on 'letting the people decide,' the issue of manipulation made canvassing even more difficult. "[W]hen you organize, you *bother* people," SNCC's Bernice Johnson said, "There is an element in the organizer that's slightly harassment."[60]

Locals also feared embarrassment over their lack of education. Registration questions ranged from interpreting any of the state constitution's 285 sections to "your understanding of the duties and obligations of citizenship under a constitutional form of government." Most rural blacks were already lost after the phrase 'to interpret.' Some registrars tricked applicants with ridiculous questions—like writing a poem about the constitution—and disqualified them based on their answers. The workers' most effective canvassing technique became presenting the form and asking if the person wanted to "sit down now and try to fill it out?" In doing so, Moses argued, blacks bridged a psychological gap by "[imagining] themselves at the registrar's office." At the citizenship school, Watkins recounted, they then took lines from the constitution like "there shall be no imprisonment for debt" to explain that 'interpreting' meant saying "you can't go to jail for owing some money." They also used Bible passages or newspapers, which were additionally used to acquaint locals with movement activities elsewhere. Other activities included describing registrars' habits and building group morale, aided by speakers like Amzie Moore or Moses. Often they just focused on teaching literacy or calculus, for which they used SCLC's literacy materials. "[T]he old people," Sam Block wrote SCLC, "think the world of them…They tell the others, 'this is my school book.'" Just taking the classes therefore was empowering for most southern blacks, having always been taught that education and the vote "wasn't for them"—just as Moses' classmates in elementary school had felt that taking citywide exams was 'out of their range.'[61]

---

[59] Robert Parris Moses, interview by Blackside, Inc., May 19, 1986, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Lynd, "Mississippi: 1961-1962"; Elizabeth Sutherland-Martinez, ed., *Letters from Mississippi: Personal Reports from Civil Rights Volunteers of the 1964 Freedom Summer* (Brooklyn: Zephyr Press: 2002), 80-81; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 243; Moye, *Let The People Decide*, 103; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 68; Charles McLaurin, "Notes on Organizing," report, no date, Files #0053-0055, Reel 40, Series XV, State Project Files, SNCC Papers.

[60] Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest*, 117-118; "Ruleville," report by Charles McLaurin, August 18-31, 1962, Files #0954-0956, Reel Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Hollis Watkins and Charles Cobb, interviews by John Rachal, October 23, 29, 30, 1996, and October 21, 1996, transcript, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 122; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 46.

[61] "Mississippi voter registration test," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 50th Anniversary*, ed. Rubin, 58-59; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 46; Hollis Watkins and Charles Cobb, interviews by John Rachal, October 23, 29, 30, 1996, and October 21, 1996, transcript, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 149; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 634.

Essentially SNCC's political education programs were replicas of SCLC's citizenship schools in Georgia and South Carolina, which it had taken over from Highlander and which black women like Septima Clark and Dorothy Cotton pioneered. But despite this continuity SNCC-workers laid their own accents. Knowing the fear of embarrassment from competing academically with whites, Moses identified with Mississippi blacks in this respect. Witnessing their struggles strengthened his belief that to "overcome our slave conditions, we black people have to first overcome ourselves." This accelerated his gravitation towards working-class blacks. Perhaps more than most SNCC-workers, he became preoccupied with ideas of 'credentializing' people, meaning redefining who is qualified to do things on people's behalf, and what gives someone such a position. As his father and Ella Baker had taught him, educational titles or wealth were no such qualifiers. This realization evolved naturally from workers' interactions with locals, he asserted in 1964: "[F]or the first time certainly in my life I met people who seemed extremely simple in their conception of life but very direct in terms of what they wanted [with] elemental ideas about justice." SNCC-workers thus learned, in Stokely Carmichael's words, that "wisdom can come from the most unlikely of sources." For example, an uneducated elderly lady "might be highly influential simply because she was noted as a kind of personal problem-solver" within the community. Such people, Sherrod explained, "don't see themselves as being leaders, although they're just natural[s]…We find those people out." What started from practical and philosophical reasons over time thus grew into a solid operating principle to "exploit whatever sources of strength a particular locality offered, whether found in a pulpit or a whorehouse."[62]

The SNCC-workers discovered other innovative means of involving locals. After two weeks the Ruleville SNCC-workers organized a mass meeting at Williams Chapel. Forman, Bevel, and Moses spoke about blacks' constitutional rights, with Bevel almost shaming locals into action through a sermon on Luke 12:54-56 and Matthew 16:3, which called to act on the "signs of time" as one would to clouds indicating rain. At the end of the meeting eighteen locals agreed to register on August 31. One volunteer was 44-year-old Fannie Lou Hamer, a stout sharecropper with a limp from polio. Before then, she later claimed, "I'd never heard of no mass meeting" and "didn't know that a Negro could register," although she knew Amzie Moore, saw the Freedom Riders on the news, and had been an informal community leader at W.D. Marlow's plantation[63]. She, like Moore, was not someone SNCC 'discovered' or 'developed'; she was innately predisposed to activism. Hamer, Moses later said, "really represented what everyone was trying to…struggle for," namely "the promise of [those at the bottom of society] being able to find their inner spirit [and] put that to the service of a great social movement."[64]

Now heralded as *the* symbol of how 'ordinary people could do extraordinary things,' Hamer authenticates revisionist historians' stress on grassroots movements. Even in the 1960s SNCC's Communications Department deliberately built her up as such for the media. As Julian Bond admitted in 2008, "Our work…was to say everybody has the right to vote. They don't have to be literate…And she typified that. So to that extent, yes, we did try to elevate her." Occasionally, one of her biographers noted, Hamer purposely crafted "a public/historic image of herself" as well. She emphasized her "triumph over destitution" while avoiding the stereotypical stigma of needing outside help, which clearly "masked

[62] Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2, 5-7; Bob Moses, "Speech," (West Coast Civil Rights Conference, April 23, 1964), transcript, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, University of Southern Mississippi; Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready For Revolution*, 109; Watters and Reese, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 106; Charles Sherrod, interview by Blackside, Inc., December 20, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Payne, *I've Got The Light Of Freedom*, 247-249.

[63] Having had six years of education—more than most sharecroppers—Fannie Lou Hamer worked as a timekeeper, who charted laborers' hours and cotton picked, and used that position to upgrade workers' pay when Marlowe cheated them.

[64] Moye, *Let The People Decide*, 97-100; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 25; *Freedom On My Mind*, directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford, Clarity Educational Productions, 1994; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 79-80.

the truth." Hidden in such projection, especially by white observers, might be a certain class-bias, as the extraordinary contributions of black middle class leaders, like Victoria Gray or C.C. Bryant were often neglected. Northern whites swooned over stories like hers, and SNCC knew it.[65]

Yet in citing Hamer as validity for the 'local people approach' lies the danger of blurring the role that fulltime workers played in helping to bring the potential of locals like her to the surface. As Hamer told Charles McLaurin, she "had always wanted to get involved with something to help her people" but "didn't know exactly how or what to do." She added: "Everything you heard us [say] nobody tell us to say that. This is what's been there all the time [but] nobody else had ever give us that chance" to express it. The mass meeting, which she at first declined to attend, and the presence of the SNCC-workers, provided a "turning point." This does not mean that she, or those like her, otherwise had not become movement participants, but rather that the SNCC-workers accelerated the decision. The way in which SNCC-workers organized mass meetings, for instance, explains why, as her biographer Chana Kai Lee said, it "lit a fire in Hamer…to the point of helping her to ignore or forget her initial response."[66]

Like canvassing, mass meetings were nothing new. Blacks were used to meetings where they listened to fiery speeches by acknowledged or self-proclaimed leaders. SNCC-workers, however, expanded the meetings' democratic character and provided a space, Moses explained in 2001, that "demanded that Black people challenge themselves." This dimension, he argued, "has been almost completely lost in the imagery of hand-clapping, song-filled rallies [which] define portrayals of 1960s civil rights meetings." They were "training grounds, allowing participants to develop and emerge as political leaders." In Mississippi this altered function directly reflected Moses' influence. He related in 2010 that he "came to look upon the meeting as a fundamental [organizing] tool" when he "noticed that who spoke at a meeting depended on who [else] was speaking." At a Jackson meeting he spoke but Lawrence Guyot challenged him. Then a local teenager, Lafayette Surney, "got up to challenge Guyot" but "never got up to speak when I spoke." So "the issue really struck me [as to how] meetings become places where grassroots participants…feel free to [speak, so] we changed the style of the meeting." Rather than formalized meetings with panels at which a few individuals asked questions or imposed knowledge, they turned it into a format in which *all* participants "were empowered. They weren't just sitting there."[67]

Following McLaurin's notes that "apathy will disappear when you give…people some responsibility," one strategy was to divide participants at mass meetings into small groups. Each submitted or chose one from a list of problems they considered relevant to their daily lives and discussed steps to alleviate it. Then they assigned people to execute the steps and report back at the next meeting. SNCC operated this way too: if workers were unable to solve an issue, it frequently composed a volunteer committee to research it and report their findings through an interstaff memo. Another meeting strategy became making 'rights'-talk less abstract. When talking about voting SNCC-workers actually distributed applications and taught participants how to fill these in, like at the meeting Hamer attended, or reviewed the form collectively. They also gave public recognition to locals by letting *them* tell their stories. This equated their strength with that of acknowledged leaders on the platform, thereby 'credentializing' them. This way participants, historian Charles Payne observed, also "created a public face to themselves, which they then had to…live up to" and "helped [them] turn private…grievances into a collective consciousness of systematic oppression." COFO-meetings became organizing tools in themselves as well, as locals from different areas mingled. This was necessary, Moses said, because "it was still difficult for people in Ruleville to see themselves connected to people in Liberty."[68]

---

[65] Julian Bond, interview by author, Washington DC, October 27, 2008; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 42; McLaurin, "Notes on Organizing," report, no date, Files #0053-0055, Reel 40, Series XV, State Project Files, SNCC Papers.

[66] Moye, *Let The People Decide*, 97-100; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 25; Payne, *I've Got The Light of Freedom*, 154; Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle of Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1997), 149.

[67] Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 71, 81, 87; Robert Parris Moses, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 15, 2010.

[68] Ibid.; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 25; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 259-261; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 71.

The key to an effective meeting was going to where participants themselves were. This required cultural knowledge, like the telling of stories from the animal world, and using religion and music. Particularly Hamer's encounter with 'freedom songs'—songs adapted from the church or the labor movement—at the Chapel "eliminated any doubt in her mind." Such songs were more than motivational tools, Bernard Lafayette stated: when "people develop songs about their local conditions…they have internalized the movement. [Then] the movement continues to move." However, as folk singer Theodore Bikel argued in 1964, the meetings and songs now inspired action whereas "they [had] failed to do so fifteen, twenty-five or forty years ago." The contrast flowed from "a shift of interpretation" in the relationship between religion and current events. Before, 'freedom' had referred to "the after-life," whereas after the sit-ins it was "read with an appended 'NOW.'' Bernice Johnson explained that for instance the biblical story of Paul and Silas in the song *Keep Your Eyes On the Prize* now had a different meaning. Ministers "preached about it like Paul and Silas were…so unique, incredible. They were in jail and they sang until they walked out. Now, once…you're in these cells, rocking [them with freedom] songs, and the jailers let you go because they can't stand it no more, Paul and Silas ain't got nothing on you." Even Moses' singing "Climbing Jacob's Ladder" in his mind on the way to the Liberty courthouse in 1961 was a reflection of this development, he recalled: "On the one hand, it was spiritual and on the other hand it had a wider political meaning, and it was all connected in this act of driving down to the courthouse." Freedom songs, historian Todd Moye concluded, therefore were "instrumental" in creating "a movement culture."[69]

This additionally helps to explain why the religion-tinged 'Moses-legend' proved so effective in Mississippi. "[O]ne reason the Mississippi Project was one of SNCC's most successful," Stokely Carmichael stated, "was in no small part due to the fortuitous accident of Bob's last name." When Hamer addressed locals, she consciously compared him to the Biblical Moses to "guarantee that the time had arrived": "[God] sent a man to Mississippi with the same name…to tell [Governor] Ross Barnett to let my people go." Bikel likewise observed that Moses "has come to lead his people to freedom as did his namesake in Egypt. History's pun, perhaps, but was not the original Moses an 'outside agitator' too?" White liberal reporters now habitually used the imagery of a "saint" to describe him; Jack Newfield called him a "prophet." This made Moses increasingly uncomfortable. Feeling that it unduly revered his persona, he began warning locals more frequently and explicitly that "if you let it, the news media will tell you who your leaders are instead of your telling the news media." He stopped using the kind of religious imagery that appeared in his Magnolia letter, although he continued to treat workers' and locals' religious beliefs with "deep respect." This left even those closest to him wonder about his religious views, sometimes questioning their existence more than was accurate. In 2010 Dave Dennis recalled he "wouldn't know [whether Moses] went to church because he really believed in it as a way of life or [as] a tactic…I don't recall ever going to church with Bob, or seen Bob at church outside of the movement." Other SNCC-workers have admitted that they used religion deliberately as an organizing tool. For native workers like Hamer this came naturally,[70] but

[69] Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready For Revolution*, 292; Greenberg ed., *Circle of Trust*, 110-125, 190; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 26-27; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 259-263; Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movement: Fannie Lou Hamer," in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, ed. Erenrich, 401-402; Theodore Bikel, "We Shall Overcome…from Egypt to Mississippi," *Hootenanny*, January-February 1964, File #0565-0568, Reel 5, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Lassiter and Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 127; Moye, *Let The People Decide*, 100.

[70] Native workers like Hamer easily gave 'testimony' of her experiences, or told congregants, including reluctant preachers, to take being a Christian seriously, meaning that "[y]ou can pray until you faint but if you're not gonna get up and do something, God is not gonna put it in your lap." Unita Blackwell used phrases like "God helps those who help themselves" and Victoria Gray Isaiah 6:8 (the Lord said "'Whom can we send and who will go for us?' and I said, 'Here am I, send me, I'll go'") to motivate others. (Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 25, 32, 163; Unita Blackwell, interview by Blackside, Inc. on May 7, 1986, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 77)

atheists and agnostics in SNCC learned to recognize and cite passages from the Bible as well.[71]

Hamer and Moses developed a warm relationship; she later even stated that she loved him like a son. Moses first noticed Hamer on August 31, when she went with him, Charles McLaurin, Charlie Cobb, Amzie Moore, and the seventeen other locals on the voter registration trip to Indianola[72]. While Moses and McLaurin mingled with local blacks, Cobb waited outside the courthouse with the group. None of the applicants succeeded in registering. When riding home in a bus that Amzie Moore had rented for them, a highway patrolman followed them. Then "this wonderful woman," Moses recalled in 1994, sang "every church song that you can imagine," lighting "up the bus with her spirit." The patrolman stopped the bus and fined the driver $100 for having a bus "with too much yellow" on it so it might be mistaken for a school bus. Unable to pay the driver's fine, the group offered to get arrested with him. The patrolman refused, arresting only the driver. Moses, Moore, and another SNCC-worker followed them to the Indianola courthouse, while the group waited as armed whites drove up and down. Eventually Moses returned, saying the fine had been reduced to $32. All chipped in and the group returned home. The group's solidarity was transformative for Hamer, who now "realize[d] the strength in numbers for community action."[73]

That elation was soon tested when the newspapers printed the names of the 'Indianola 18.' W.D. Marlow evicted Hamer from the plantation, forcing her to move in with friends Mary and Robert Tucker and later to move to Tallahatchie County. She returned to Ruleville two months later when Moore found her a new home. Friends and SCEF paid her utility bills, which again underscored the need for outside intervention to sustain local activists. Moses then asked her to work fulltime for COFO and invited her to a leadership conference at Fisk University. Meanwhile other locals faced similar harassments. Two black cleaners were falsely closed for 'building violations'; the Mayor cut off water and tax exemption for the Williams Chapel; and the U.S. Fidelity and Guaranty Company, located in Baltimore, cancelled the church's insurance. This indicated the extent of northern complicity in southern illegality, Moses noted coolly in a complaint letter to the Company: "The thought occurred to me that [your company] would not want to be used to help coerce minority people who seek to exercise constitutional rights." Moses was not safe either. When he and Moore walked across town, a white man in a pick-up invited them to his farm. Astonished, they agreed, only to be told: "I've got a shotgun waiting for you, double barrel."[74]

---

[71] Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready For Revolution*, 31, 93-94, 289-291; Theodore Bikel, "We Shall Overcome…from Egypt to Mississippi," *Hootenanny*, January-February 1964, File #0565-0568, Reel 5, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; King, *Freedom Song*, 146; Newfield, *A Prophetic Minority*, 73; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 179; Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movement: Fannie Lou Hamer," in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, ed. Erenrich, 401-402; John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, "Robert Parris Moses (1935 -), civil rights activist, social activist, professor," in *African-American Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), ed. Richard W. Leeman, 264; Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010; Heather Tobis Booth, email interview by author, November 2009.

[72] Initially Moses reneged on going, since he and 3 other workers were arrested there the day before for distributing leaflets without a permit. To not delay the registration drive, Bevel and Forman bailed them out while the police chief rebuked them: "We don't need no outside agitators coming in here, stirring up the people…so that they can't think straight." Feeling morally committed, Moses went anyway. ("Registration Efforts in Mississippi Continue Despite Violence and Terror," *The Student Voice* 3, no.3 (October 1962): 2, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 58)

[73] Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 307; Lynd, "Mississippi: 1961-1962"; Moye, *Let the People Decide*, 98-101; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 27-37; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 636-639; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 78, 80; *Freedom On My Mind*, directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford, Clarity Educational Productions, 1994; In *On The Road To Freedom*, Cobb states that Hamer was already singing on the way to Indianola as well (page 305).

[74] Ibid.; Amzie Moore to SCEF, letter, 1962, Box 55, Folder 13, Carl and Anne Braden Papers; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 17; News Release, September 17, 1962, File #0146, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 139.

The most violent reprisal came on September 10 when nightriders shot into the homes of the Tucker, McDonald, and Sisson families. Hattie Sisson had earlier attempted to register with McLaurin. The Sisson home, Cobb documented, showed twenty bullet holes with "pools of blood…all over the living room floor." Granddaughter Vivian Hillet and friend Marylene Burks were shot: Burks in the head and neck, Hillet in the arms and legs. They barely survived. Distressed, Cobb unsuccessfully called Moore, and then Moses, who was in Jackson. Moses suggested he informed the Justice Department and went to the hospital. There Mayor Dorrough, who also served as justice of the peace, arrested Cobb for "asking a lot of silly questions." Together they returned to the Sissons, where, one local testified, Dorrough told the sheriff on the phone: "Moses is the cause of all this." He ordered the Sisson family not to clean up the bloodstains until the FBI could determine "whether it's human." S.D. Milam, brother of one of Emmett Till's murderers, transported Cobb to jail.[75]

The situation worsened when Moses and other workers departed Jackson at 2 A.M. for Ruleville in a broken car that kept stalling at slow speed. This "added to the general fatigue and nervousness," Moses recorded afterwards. When driver James Jones fell asleep behind the wheel they hit a road sign and came to a stop in a cotton field. Shaken but unharmed, they packed into a second car of workers behind them. The sheriff issued an arrest warrant for Moses, in whose name the car was registered, for reckless driving and leaving the scene of an accident. Represented by Carsie Hall, Moses and Jones later plead guilty and paid a $120 fee. When Moses finally arrived in Ruleville to interview witnesses, the sheriff threatened to arrest him for interfering with a police investigation. MSSC-investigator Tom Scarbrough (who believed that Carl Braden had driven Moses) reported dismayed that Moses "acted like he was some special government investigator." Undeterred, the SNCC-workers continued interviewing witnesses, and Moses sent detailed reports to the FBI, the media, and the Justice Department. On September 13 President Kennedy called the shootings and recent church burnings in Albany "cowardly as well as outrageous" and now openly vowed protection for registration workers: "[I]f it requires extra legislation, and extra force, we shall do that." He touted the FBI's presence and assured the assailants' prosecution. In reality, McLaurin reported, the FBI "didn't seem to be looking" for the perpetrators and "did more to frighten people than to help them." Despite the SNCC-workers' newfound means of involving locals, they had to spend much of September regaining the community's trust. Barely mentioning voting, they went "house to house asking people about everyday problems[,] carry them to the store downtown, help pick cotton and chop wood."[76]

5.3. Never Seen a Nigga Like That

SNCC projects in other states developed the same slow organizing approach that Moses pioneered in Mississippi. In Georgia, for example, SNCC ran registration projects in Terrell, Lee, Sumter, and Dougherty counties; within two years they had covered 22 rural counties. In 1962-1963 Georgia had twelve fulltime SNCC-workers[77]. Like SNCC-workers in Mississippi, most of them used nonviolence as a

[75] "Shooting Incident in Ruleville," memorandum Bob Moses and Charles Cobb, October 8, 1962, File #00365-00371 and "Report," Charles Cobb, 1962, File #00372-00373, Reel 5, Part 4, Series I, Records of Andrew J. Young, Records SCLC; Lynd, "Mississippi: 1961-1962."

[76] Tom Scarborough, "Humphreys County (Robert Moses, Negro Male)," September 13, 1962, and Untitled Report, no date, reports, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/ (accessed November 22, 2007); Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 82-84; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 638-639; Russell, *Black Genius*, 332; Joseph A. Loftus, "Kennedy Decries Church Burnings in Racial Dispute," and "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters," *New York Times*, September 14, 1962; Moye, *Let The People Decide*, 102-103.

[77] By spring 1963, the twelve workers were: 1. Prathia Hall, 22, black, from Philadelphia, divinity student Temple University; 2. Jack Chatfield, 20, white, from Bradford, Vt., student Trinity College; 3. Carver Neblett, 19, black, student Southern Illinois University; 4. John Churchville, 21, black, from New York, student Temple University; 5. Joyce Barrett, 24, white, from Philadelphia, graduate Temple University; 6. Don Harris, 21, black, from New York, graduate Rutgers

tactic. In each county, a 1963 report stated, workers held mass meetings, citizenship classes, did "tedious canvassing," and organized courthouse trips. "Special efforts" were directed at teachers and ministers, but their core constituency was the working class, whose daunting conditions they shared. Workers sometimes went hungry, Bill Hansen reported, because most of the Negro community was too frightened to associate with them. They painted houses, picked squash, and fished for survival. Like their co-workers in Mississippi, they encountered church burnings and shootings. Jack Chatfield was wounded twice; two others were grazed by bullets. Hansen was beaten in jail with police permission. "My nerves are about completely shot," he wrote in August. Yet generally, the 1963 report stated, "the terror…is at a much higher pitch" in Mississippi in terms of "outright violence," "more difficulty in obtaining a place to meet," and in "convincing local leaders…to take an active stand." Consequently, by late 1963 the Georgia project had registered a few hundred voters; in Mississippi the number was much lower.[78]

The Georgia and Mississippi projects differed in other respects. Georgia lacked a COFO-like vehicle. In addition, the staff of the Southwest Georgia Project included only two native blacks. The others were from outside the state, and half were white. This reflected Charles Sherrod's insistence on integration: "[T]he means should at all times reflect the end." The inclusion of whites also had a practical benefit, he admitted: "[W]hen the white folks get in trouble, we get out of trouble," meaning that arrests and violent incidents generated press coverage. While equally committed to interracialism, Bob Zellner's beating in McComb had shown Moses that using whites in Mississippi was counterproductive. The 1963 report agreed it was "too dangerous for whites to participate in the project in Mississippi." Moses added that "SNCC itself had never really resolved what it meant by integration [so] we more or less left the idea alone…We talked local leadership instead."[79]

Sherrod's stress on interracialism derived from his religious convictions, which were consistent with SNCC's Statement of Purpose. His state directorship accordingly appealed to other religiously inclined workers, allowing for religion to become an integral part of the projects' daily life. Sherrod introduced 'Prayer Breakfasts' each morning and insisted on using religion with locals. "This is a part of accepting the people…where they are," he explained. He regularly used phrases like "it's people like you, with faith in God, who are going to change this country." Like fellow-minister James Bevel, one worker observed, Sherrod "really gave sermons when he spoke to people[,] just quoting from the Bible." "[T]his is a perfect way to talk to these people," Julian Bond noted in 2008, because "it relates to them [and it's] who he is."[80]

University; 7. Ralph Allen, 22, white, from Melrose, Mass., student Trinity College; 8. Eddie Brown, 20, black, from Albany, student Monroe High School; 9. Faith Holseart, 20, white, from Brooklyn, N.Y., student Bernard College; 10. Alphonzo Hubbard, 17, black, Albany, student Monroe High School; 11. Joni Rabinowitz, 20, white, from New Rochelle, N.Y., student Antioch; 12. Sherrod.

[78] Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 28, 71; "SNCC Field Work in Mississippi," report, spring 1963, File #0057-0058, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Charles Sherrod, interview by Blackside, Inc., December 20, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; "SNCC Field Work in Southwest Georgia," report, spring 1963, in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 50th Anniversary*, ed. Rubin, 38; Carson, *In Struggle*, 77; Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights*, 31; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 67-68; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 56; "Churches Burned, Nightriders Attack SNCC Staff In Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Drive," *The Student Voice* 3, no.3 (October 1962) 1-2, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 57-58; Bill Hansen to SNCC, Field Reports, June 26, July 6, July 23, August 1, 1962, Adam Fairclough private collection.

[79] Carson, *In Struggle*, 75-77; Zellner, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek*, 174-175; Mississippi's 'Freedom Summer' Reviewed, conference October 30 - November 2, 1979, transcript, Session 2, Folder 3, Mississippi's 'Freedom Summer' Reviewed Collection; King, *Freedom Song*, 71, 497, 505; ; "SNCC Field Work in Mississippi," report, spring 1963, File #0057-0058, Reel 10, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Charles Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 151.

[80] Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 56; Untitled paper on Terrell County, no date, Box 1, Folder 13 and Report Guy Carawan, Box 2, Folder 9, Howard Zinn Papers; Julian Bond, interview by author, Washington DC, October 27, 2008; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 74-75.

Sherrod's and Bevel's flamboyant southern preacher styles contrasted starkly with Moses' soft, monotone speech. Sherrod could be feisty, engaging in demonstrations as eagerly as in voter registration. He sat-in at Robert Kennedy's office once and literally jumped him when Kennedy tried to persuade SNCC away from direct action, shouting: "It is not your responsibility, before God or under the law, to tell us how to honor our constitutional rights. It's your job to protect us when we do." Simultaneously he could be patient. An Albany black once repeated to him: "People treat me like a dog…Do I look like a dog? Do I look like a dog?" Sherrod listened for "several hours…eyes focused intently on the man. Afterward, word spread through the community that [SNCC] really cared." Bevel was a different character altogether. John Lewis described him as "Wild. Crazy. Nuttier than nut. Brilliant. Passionate. Eccentric…[H]e had an irresistible confidence about him that gave those around him…no choice but to pay attention." But he also listened and was open to new concepts, like Smith's campaign. Later Bevel suffered borderline psychotic spells, but in the sixties, Taylor Branch wrote, he used "gossip about his wobbly mind" to propel the movement, saying that blacks "needed to be crazy in order to dream of freedom." His "high-fevered ecstasy" was highly effective in motivating locals, as his role in McComb and Hamer's first meeting exhibited, although Bevel's style ultimately proved more suitable for SCLC's goal of mobilization than for SNCC's community organizing.[81]

Moses in turn was shy and his speech studied. In 1965 Robert Penn Warren described his language as "slow but with enunciation almost pedagogically careful." Movement participants praised his ability to get to the point without slipping into emotional language or hollow slogans. Journalists noted that he spoke calmly "with the rhythms of a man crossing a stream, hopping from rock to rock." Communication scholars observed that his speeches mainly featured facts, names, and dates, like history lessons. Some contemporaries accordingly dismissed him as a "moody, murky intellectual"; one reporter actually termed him "an outstandingly poor speaker." Even Tom Scarbrough criticized Moses' "slurred way" of speaking, although, in a way, it was reminiscent of a southern drawl.[82]

Historians, however, have argued that Moses was "an outstanding, effective speaker" because his rhetoric met "his purposes and fit his persona." While Worth Long's claim that "Moses deliberately rejected the role of orator because it was the traditional role of Black leadership" overstates his intent, those who knew him recognized that his style in itself carried a message. Moses' goal was to project local leadership, not his own. Accordingly, Stokely Carmichael observed, he was not "interested in impressing you [but in concentrating] on the problem [and] get[ting] you to move beyond the superficial and focus on *ideas* too." He often underscored this message, especially with uneducated audiences, by speaking from the back, engaging an audience in conversation, or raising questions rather than answering them. This was a way of moral leadership by example, Casey Hayden argued: "Bob set an example through practice, gaining loyalty by listening, [which] helped individuals empower themselves."[83]

For those working *with* Moses, his style added to his charisma, which, scholar Ann Ruth Willner asserted, is in the eye of the beholder. "[C]harisma is defined in terms of people's perceptions of and responses to a leader. It is not what the leader is but what people see the leader as." This also applied to Moses. "Moses was 'perhaps the most trusted, the most loved, the most gifted organizationally of any southern Negro leader' *precisely because* he seemed humble, ordinary, accessible," wrote SDS-veteran

[81] "NAG Plans May 17 Demonstrations in DC," *The Student Voice* 3, no.1 (April 1962): 3, in *The Student Voice*, ed. Carson, 51; King, *Freedom Song*, 158; Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*, 60-61, 177; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 54; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 480.

[82] Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* 48-49; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 188; Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 310-313; Hammerback and Jensen, "Your Tools Are Really The People," 126-140; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 148; Halberstam, *The Children*, 402; Tom Scarborough, "Leflore County—Samuel Block and Robert Moses," investigative report, August 14, 1962, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/ (accessed November 22, 2007).

[83] Ibid.; Payne, *I´ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 333; Hammerback and Jensen, "Robert Parris Moses," in *African-American Orators*, ed. Leeman, 263; Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready For Revolution*, 310-313.

Todd Gitlin, "The early New Left…wanted elemental talk, not grand rhetoric." Instances of praise from supporters are abundant. Mary King recalled feeling her chest muscles quicken when Moses spoke and others savored his ability to "communicate a soothing, spiritual depth." At one SNCC-conference Moses is said to have held a 600-man audience "at seat's edge…for over an hour." After speaking at Stanford University he received a five-minute standing ovation. Moses' understatement could also be humorous. Warren documented a Mississippi meeting which whites wanted to invade. Moses "orders two men to the door to keep out any unauthorized persons. Then, even more calmly…he says: 'Be gentle with them.' The audience thinks it is very funny."[84]

Moses' speech was effective because it reflected *who he was*—even though, as Mary King admitted, he "well understood that we were engaged in certain forms of political theater." Cobb rendered a discussion of charisma obsolete by reducing it to personality: "I don't think [Martin Luther] King could be what Bob was anymore than Bob could be what King [was]." Reserve had always defined his character, and his upbringing and education had reinforced that characteristic. In 1993 Moses said that Amzie Moore had strengthened this tendency by advising him never to "telegraph what you're doing." For example, "Amzie rarely told me where we were going until we were well on our way" to protect himself. Above all his silence reflected his concern for morality and his fear of leading people, like Louis Allen, into something beyond his control. He intuitively felt that his speech should reflect the practical. As he told *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1964: "[O]ne of the things wrong with this country is that everyone is saying too much…It's wrong to promise more than you can give. To accomplish something very real, you have to do something very limited." In Mississippi, he added in 1993, he had learned that "you always had to understate everything because the problem itself was too big…What you had to show people was that you were actually biting off a small piece of the problem and you were actually doing that…I didn't sit down and think this through[,] but my reaction…was, you don't mislead people by promising what you can't deliver [but] only to talk really in very specific terms. Like what we're going to do next…I didn't know any other way to talk there."[85]

Moses' approach benefitted from SNCC's culture of participatory democracy. Within all southern state projects, Howard Zinn explained in 1965, decisions were made on an "intermediate" level "by the people on the spot [like Henry, Moses, and Sherrod] in conjunction with the people in the organization…in the field. [Then] local people…were brought in [and then] national headquarters." There were thus two 'aboves': SNCC's national headquarters and a "local above" composed of the main players, like the state directors. The latter "above" outranked the first. For Moses this was a matter of principle: "How could you set up [a structure] where there's some people who have good jobs and are working somewhere safe in society, and they…decide policy which some other people [have to execute] for nothing at the risk of their lives?...I couldn't find [a justification for] it…I would never agree to that kind of procedure for the work that we were doing." Casey Hayden agreed: "We couldn't go on if we didn't give everybody the space to…get to where we were all comfortable…We couldn't ask each other to risk our lives." This also applied to SNCC headquarters, Stokely Carmichael argued: "We always laughed at these theoretical formulations [of our structure]" because "we never proclaimed that [SNCC] *had* to proceed by consensus." Yet "[a]ll you *could*

[84] Ann Ruth Willner, *The Spellbinders*: *Charismatic Political Leadership* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 14; King, *Freedom Song*, 146; Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* 48-49; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 188; Hammerback and Jensen, "Your Tools Are Really The People," 126-140; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 148.

[85] Mary King, email interview by author, December 8, 2009; Charlie Cobb, interview by John Rachal, October 21, 1996, and Amzie Moore, interview by Michael Garvey, March 29 and April 13, 1977, transcripts, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 40; James Atwater, "If We Can Crack Mississippi," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 2, 1964; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Charles Payne, August 1993, in *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, Lawson and Payne, 175-176, 183. Occasionally his sparseness also reflected self-protection, Sherrod claimed in 2010: "If you asked him a question [he'd be] too busy. He had too many [problems] bothering him." (Charles Sherrod, interview by author, April 16, 2010)

do is talk…because the issues are deadly serious." What emerged was then not so much a philosophy but "really a 'culture,' a way of dealing among ourselves" and locals that was "simply necessary."[86]

Howard Zinn believed that Bob Moses decisively influenced the development of participatory democracy within SNCC. Moses, he wrote in 1965, had thought it through more than most. Without him, Dave Dennis agreed, "there would not have been a Mississippi project…of the nature that it was." At staff meetings Moses consistently dealt with conflict through consensus, but "was not particularly outspoken" on the subject of participatory democracy. Mary King believed that he simply "assumed it was our method of functioning." Considering his shyness and experience with the Quakers, however, it was a natural approach for him. In 2009 John Lewis recalled that Moses dealt with conflict by doing what "in the religious tradition [is called] tarry, [that is] almost waiting on a spirit…you talk and you talk with individuals and don't give up on them." When someone "made a mistake" he reacted "nonviolently" by not rebuking people. If disagreements emerged, King agreed, he tried not to personalize them, even when directed at him. After all, one reporter noted, his "insistence on including everybody in meetings—and requiring meetings for just about everything—can exhaust even the most faithful." Yet mostly, Lewis said, workers kept their disagreements "to themselves…because there was so much respect[,] affection and love for the man." At this stage, moreover, disputes were usually minor and the group small. Even if workers and locals were not "personally attached to him," one SNCC-veteran stated, they appreciated Moses as "the quiet kind of fellow that would get things done."[87]

In practice participatory democracy was more complicated than seemed. Charles Sherrod, for example, personified a tendency within SNCC to impose views on locals and staff. He openly advised colleagues not to "let the project go to the dogs because you feel you must be democratic to the letter or carry out *every* parliamentary procedure." He understood his influence well, he admitted in 2010: "[W]e had a preacher named Samuel Wells; he was pushing *me* [but occasionally] I would come against a point [or strategy] he had to make…If I wanted to, I had the last word." His "ability to sway the thinking of a group" often frustrated workers too, they complained in a 1963 report: "Sherrod, when he is there, is sole administrator…He handles the money[,] makes assignments, and all decisions concerning the project policy—in reality the group meets…but even they realize that the policy is already made"[88]. With a flamboyant personality as his, Stokely Carmichael likewise admitted that inevitably he "wasn't able to keep" his rule of leading without bombast or fiat. In meetings he occasionally took a local aside, explained the issue, and sent the person on stage to talk "as if [s]he's always known it." SNCC-workers in Albany reported writing "prepared speeches for local leaders," and in a June meeting Charles Jones dismissed Albany Movement president Dr. Anderson, a black osteopath, as "not really a leader," arguing that "he must be led by the Strategy Committee." Moses himself occasionally pushed decisions too. In 2011 Luvaghn Brown recounted that he had a "quiet insistence when he felt…things should be approached a certain way." Dorie Ladner agreed that "ultimately what he had to say, he would say it." Historians August Meier and Elliot Rudwick recorded that Moses "in actual fact often made basic COFO decisions." Dave

[86] Howard Zinn, interview, November 11, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Moses interview Carson, 1982; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 134, 185-186.

[87] Howard Zinn, interview, November 11, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Dave Dennis, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 17, 2010; John Lewis, interview by author, Washington, DC, November 16, 2009; Mary King, email interviews by author, December 8, 2009; Julia Cass, "The Moses Factor," *Mother Jones*, May/June 2002, http://motherjones.com/politics/2002/05/moses-factor (accessed May 12, 2008); Robert E. Wright, interview by John Britton, July 22, 1968, transcript, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University.

[88] The Georgia workers also criticized Sherrod's power "to say when an [individual worker] should come out of his present project and go to another." Jean Wheeler Smith and Martha Norman for instance wanted to leave for Greenwood, but Sherrod refused, "so we waited for Sherrod to go to jail, and as soon as he went…we left at midnight." This contrasted starkly with Moses, who asked Smith in 1964 to attend the Democratic convention. She declined: "He said, 'Fine,' he got back on the bus and I stayed." ("Southwest Georgia," report, 1963, File #1016, Reel 9, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 151; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 137-138)

Dennis admitted as much when he stated that "Bob or myself…did sort of shove things down sometimes to get things moving in [a] certain direction that maybe was not understood at the time." But overall, Charlie Cobb argued, "we were organizers in Mississippi, not leaders, even if at moments we led. The distinction was important to us, and a practical necessity."[89]

Moses accordingly gained a reputation for trying to live up to the principles of participatory democracy, grassroots leadership, and personal freedom. Many viewed him, in Taylor Branch's words, as "the anti-King within SNCC." Yet Mary King rejected the notion that his approach was one of 'anti-leadership.' "Bob was not against leadership," she explained in 2009, "He cared deeply about leadership and had thought profoundly about it." Moreover, his age explained part of his unusual commitment to these principles compared to other SNCC-workers: "A lack of maturity was both strength and weakness for SNCC…Some may not have understood Bob's depths of commitment to raising up leaders who could speak for the oppressed, which concomitantly requires decentralization."[90]

Moses implemented these principles, historian Charles Payne argued, by turning "everything into a lesson." He let locals do his public speaking or answer his mail after teaching them these skills. One was 15-year-old Greenwood prostitute Endesha Mae Holland, who became a movement regular after Moses taught her how to type. She felt special whenever he chose her, she related in 1994: "I was so glad to be used for something. While the whole town was looking down on me, the movement said, 'You are somebody.'" She eventually became a professor, but her transformation never received as widespread attention as Fannie Lou Hamer's, most likely because of her 'disreputable' background. Moses' own actions were teaching moments in themselves too. Unita Blackwell remembered feeling empowered when witnessing Moses confront state authorities, she said in 1968: "Moses was a little bitty fella. And he stood up to this sheriff…I had never saw that happen before. From that day on, I said, 'Well, I can stand myself.'"[91]

How Moses involved another Greenwood fifteen-year-old, June Johnson, illustrates his slow organizing approach. Having watched him for days, she finally asked him if he was a Freedom Rider. He responded by asking about her family and offered to carry her books. June then asked Moses to meet her mother. The latter disliked June's and her brother Waite's involvement, but quickly became fond of Moses, who, Waite said, "had a special charisma with the old folks. They just seemed to trust him." Within several months June was allowed to attend meetings "so long as Bob or Annelle [Ponder] was around." A "special plea" by Moses even allowed her to go to Septima Clark's citizenship school in South Carolina in June 1963. June later termed him 'The Person Who Influenced Me Most' in an essay, because he had taught her "that the most important thing…is education and becoming a first-class citizen" and about "people who I

[89] Charles Sherrod, interview by Blackside, Inc., December 20, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 60, 75, 79; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 318; Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust*, 90; Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest*, 175; Sherrod, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 16, 2010; "Southwest Georgia," report, 1963, File #1016, Reel 9, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers. Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 385-386; Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights*, 31; SNCC Staff Meeting, minutes, June 3, 1962, Adam Fairclough private collection; Luvaghn Brown, email interviews by author with Luvaghn Brown, January 13 and 31, 2011; Dorie Ladner, interview by author, Washington DC, November 16, 2009; Charles Cobb, interview by John Rachal, October 21, 1996, transcript, Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Collection, University of Southern Mississippi; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 394; Dave Dennis, interview by Blackside, Inc., November 10, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries; Charlie Cobb, "Organizing Freedom Schools," in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, ed. Erenrich, 134; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 335.

[90] Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 30; Mary King, email interview by author, December 8, 2009.

[91] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 334; *Freedom On My Mind*, directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford, Clarity Educational Productions, 1994; Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 313, 320-321; Hampton and Fayer, *Voices of Freedom*, 180.

didn't know." Everyone respected him, she noted, because he was "beaten for us." She emphasized how the fulltime workers' presence bolstered local agency: "[I]f we could get more men like Bob Moses into Greenwood our problems would soon be over…If he and the other workers hadn't come…we would be the same Uncle Toms—afraid to walk and talk for our rights."[92]

Like all COFO-workers Moses, Dorie Ladner reflected in 2009, "was learning in the process as well," although "you would never know [how] because he was very quiet." As an erudite Northerner he had much to learn about southern black life, but overcame this hiatus through his genuine care for locals. As in McComb he developed personal relations with Greenwood blacks. "Bob would actually *merge* in," Dave Dennis claimed in 2010, "He dealt with them as family…It wasn't just like a strategy around them." He accordingly promoted what "the extended family is all about" and transported this to his coworkers: "The closeness we all had, had a lot to do with the Moses personality." This included looking after them once confrontations were over, like following the Burgland students to Jackson and returning to Amite during Rev. Smith's campaign. Greenwood was no different. When June Johnson returned from South Carolina, she and other participants were arrested for attending a white restroom in Winona, Mississippi. In jail she, Annelle Ponder, and Fannie Lou Hamer were brutally beaten; June lost consciousness twice. With Moses' aid, SNCC-worker Marian Wright arranged for her to go to a summer camp in Connecticut a month later, although she spoke at meetings days after. Moses encouraged its director to "have her tell you about the beating," that is, "if you can get June to talk." He often arranged such trips North for Mississippi students, and helped them to secure scholarships. "Negro students coming out of the Mississippi school system…need remedial work," he wrote a Minnesota professor. One was Curtis Hayes, whose "life and development," he wrote Wright, "has special meaning for me."[93]

Moses' cosmopolitan background proved a valuable asset. Apart from his ability to utilize Northern connections, he was praised for his intelligence. Even Aaron Henry admitted that Moses' "ideas usually became SNCC policy in short order." Marion Barry agreed in 1965 that the "one person who charted [Mississippi's political] course would be Bob," although "sometimes we all agreed with him, sometimes we didn't." Usually they did: "It just happened that you agree once you hear [his ideas], they sound so exciting." His intelligence impressed locals even more. One said that Moses "sees real far into the future, and a lot of time the people…can't keep up with him." Yet locals, Ladner said in 2009, "wanted to hear what somebody had to say of society…we were looking for the outside world to…help educate us." Sharecropper L.C. Dorsey related that Moses "kept putting the questions out: 'Why do you think that is? What do you think we ought to do about that?' He'd listen to what you said and force you to think about it. That was his genius."[94]

---

[92] Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 68-69; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 226, 240; June Johnson, "The Person Who Influenced Me Most," no date (William Heath Papers).

[93] Dorie Ladner, interview by author, Washington, DC, November 16, 2009; Dave Dennis, interview by author, April 17, 2010; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 227-228; Moses to Jay Stager (Camp Director 'Camp Claire' in Hamburg, Connecticut), letter, July 6, 1963, and Stager to Moses, letter, no date, Files #1192 and #1347, Reel 69, and Moses to Professor Lonero, letter, February 16, 1964, #0462, Reel 64, Appendix A: MFDP Papers, and Moses to Marian Wright and Jim Forman, letters, no date, Files #0032-0033. Moses even loaned $100 from SNCC for Hayes to get started in Chicago. Months after leaving McComb, SNCC-workers also still tried to get Brenda Travis released from Oakley. She was eventually allowed custody with a white professor in Alabama, but when a judge overturned this decision, Baker became her guardian. ("Getting Miss Brenda Travis out of a Mississippi jail," report, April 1962, File #1203, Reel 6, Series IV, Executive Secretary Files James Forman, SNCC Papers; Charles B. Gordon, "McComb Girl Gets Buildup After Release to Professor" and "White Teacher No Longer Has Custody On Negro Girl," *The Clarion-Ledger*, May 17 and July 27, 1962; Grant, *Ella Baker*, 145; Dittmer, *Local People*, 171-173)

[94] Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 115; Marion Barry, interview by Howard Zinn, December 18, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Howard Zinn Papers; Dorie Ladner, interview by author, Washington DC, November 16, 2009; King, *Freedom Song*, 146; George Raymond, interview by Robert Wright, September 28, 1968, transcripts, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University; Julia Cass, "The Moses Factor," *Mother Jones*, May/June 2002, http://motherjones.com/politics/2002/05/moses-factor (accessed May 12, 2008).

Despite Moses' egalitarian, family-style approach, his background and personality distinguished him. When he spoke his cosmopolitan training was unmistakably present. Historians Seth Cagin and Philip Dray describe his general attitude: "He might discuss the demeanor of the Amite County sheriff[,] offer tactical advice on how to win over a reluctant NAACP leader, then skip to the moral complexities of urging others to nonviolence, before managing to tie it all to the humanism of Camus and Bertrand Russell." Yet overall Moses waited for others to speak before he offered his own thoughts. As Dorie Ladner recalled: "After we were finished debating for hours[,] screaming and yelling at each other, we [all would] wait for Bob to say something." Luvaghn Brown stressed that Moses "was sort of 'apart from.'" MacArthur Cotton underscored this in a 1968 interview: "I had never seen a nigga like that before…he was definitely in a different class from anybody I'd ever know." Yet this was a blessing, Brown argued. "Coming from the outside gave Bob a perspective we did not have. His mind was free of the baggage that many of us picked up at childhood." Lacking this "sense of acceptance" made him seem "reckless to some of us that grew up in Mississippi." Brown recalled when he, Moses, and two other thirsty workers once stopped at a soda stand and its operator insisted on serving them on the backside. The native workers agreed, but "Bob insisted [to] get the sodas in front." The operator then uttered racial epithets, but Moses persisted until they got the drinks. "I just thought it was unnecessary and dangerous," Brown later reflected, but "we told the story with great relish and it added to Bob's reputation."[95]

Another such incident occurred on August 16, 1962. At midnight Sam Block called Moses in Cleveland from Greenwood's COFO-office, which was surrounded by a white mob accompanied by policemen with him, Luvaghn Brown, and Lawrence Guyot inside. After softly advising them that "it'd be a good idea to get outa there," Moses called John Doar and Burke Marshall at their Washington homes. Block then called again to say the police had left and that the whites were brandishing chains and guns. Unsure of "what we were supposed to do" but convinced that boldness gave him "some kind of immunity," Moses and Willie Peacock drove to Greenwood, arriving around 4 A.M. The office was empty—the three had escaped through the window and over the roof—and trashed, with all COFO-records missing. Moses turned on a fan and fell asleep on the couch. Convinced that its noise would get them killed, Peacock later wrote, he "just didn't understand what kind of guy this Bob Moses is, that could walk into a place where a lynch mob had just left [and] go to sleep, as if the situation was normal. So I guess I was learning."[96]

Such incidents contributed to what observers have called the "Bob Moses mystique." When asked whether it was enhanced in history, the majority of SNCC-veterans insist that it was real. "It was indescribable but apparent from first meeting him," stated Julian Bond. Moses intrigued many because he was the opposite of their expectations, Brown added: "I anticipated a fireball. Bob certainly was not that!" While his 'Director'-title did not give Moses any powers over others, his position as state coordinator enhanced his authority. Whether he wanted to or not, he was the de facto leader,[97] particularly since the group was small. All field workers were required to call Moses daily. Sam Block wrote him repeatedly during his first months in Greenwood to ask for advice or report events. Such reports were surprisingly

---

[95] Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 179; Robert E. Wright, interview by John Britton, July 22, 1968, and Douglas MacArthur Cotton, interview by Robert Wright, August 5, 1968, transcripts, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University; Dorie Ladner, interview by author, Washington, DC, November 16, 2009; Luvaghn Brown, email interview by author, January 31, 2011; Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, 291-292.

[96] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 151; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 633-634; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 1, 53, 75-76; Willie (Wazir) Peacock, "Comments," Panel Discussion, Session 'From Student Activists to Field Organizers,' SNCC's 50th Anniversary Reunion Conference, Shaw University, Raleigh, NC, April 15, 2010.

[97] Moreover, outsiders *did* respond to titles, as Stokely Carmichael observed: "By virtue of being 'district director' I was seen as having instant authority. People were disposed to like and trust you just because." They expected that titles equated certain powers. One worker whose subsistence pay had stopped complained that SNCC headquarters had no such authority: "If Bob Moses hired me, he should be the one to put me off the staff, because he is the Mississippi Project Director." (Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 385-361; Nick Hampton, Report, March 1963, Box 1, Folder 3, Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) Panola County Office Records, Wisconsin Historical Society)

detailed, including budget overviews for office supplies, meals, rent, and expenses like "[hiring] a fellow to help move furniture in office." This again underscores that Moses was aware of the projects' daily pragmatics and that he influenced them through his responses. When Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes complained about working too much at Vernon Dahmer's sawmill, Moses made arrangements for them to move. He occasionally dealt with finances too. On July 11 Block wrote him that two locals wanted $20 pay instead of $10, so he "told them, that they had to see you" because "you told them to let you know if they needed any other expense money." Moses proposed concrete strategies in letters to workers as well. On August 11 he advised Guyot to expand from Greenwood to neighboring rural areas. Small groups needed to go into different counties for a week to do "a scouting job," then meet to "evaluate where we stand and…plan strategies." Although he asked if Guyot had ideas of his own, he disclosed his long-term vision by suggesting that he travelled "from project to project…This will allow you a chance to meet students all across the state…for action projects in the future." Moses served as the main 'contact man' for everyone who came to Mississippi, including federal officials and other organizations.[98]

John Lewis accordingly argued in 2009 that although "we preached…that we didn't need leaders, [or] build up a personality…we did it in a way. We elected people head of a project, or Secretary, the Chair, the Field Directors." Local workers like Luvaghn Brown likewise denied that "SNCC had an anti-leadership view. We clearly had people who were viewed as leaders and primary decision makers. While local field secretaries made decisions based on their environment, we filed reports to [SNCC headquarters] and worked with goals set by SNCC leaders." Being director in *Mississippi* strengthened Moses' position. Mary King added: "Mississippi represented the depths of depravity and hatred…This gave his words more echo, because the cost of poor decision making would bring the greatest reprisals to Mississippians, and he would necessarily absorb the greatest responsibility." As such, his "quiet determination helped to embolden" other project directors.[99]

Even if Moses sees himself—or revisionist historians treat him—solely as a 'facilitator,' his organizing work accordingly went far beyond using one's skills and power to facilitate local groups. His singular character, contacts, and vision proved decisive for the Mississippi movement's direction. Revisionist historians' emphasis on 'facilitation' of grassroots movements alone—implying that anyone could have done what Moses did—therefore cannot adequately explain how the 1960s civil rights movement generated social change. This became especially evident from the next phase in the Mississippi movement. Although Moses' field experiments had formed the groundwork for a long-term, increasingly political vision of social change that he summarized to the VEP as "Negro control of [the black majority] rural counties in the Deep South," events in the winter of 1962-1963 necessitated a transition in COFO's introverted, slow organizing approach as whites increasingly replicated Ruleville's violent means to stop the movement. As a result, Moses said, a "heavy curtain…dropped down on the state, making us invisible to the nation."[100]

[98] Julian Bond, interview by author, Washington, DC, October 27, 2008; Luvaghn Brown, email interview by author, January 13, 2011; Sam Block to Bob Moses, letters, June 23, July 11, 22, 27, 1962, and Bob Moses to Lawrence Guyot, letter, August 11, 1962, Papers James Forman, Library of Congress; Robert Parris Moses, interview by Taylor Branch, 15 February 1991, Taylor Branch Papers; Will Henry Jr., interview by Robert Wright, June 29, 1969, transcript, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Howard University.

[99] John Lewis, interview by author, Washington DC, November 16; Luvaghn Brown, email interview by author, January 13, 2011; Mary King, email interview by author, December 8, 2009.

[100] Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest*, 115; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 61.