

THE TALE OF “TWO VOICES:”
AN ORAL HISTORY OF WOMEN COMMUNICATORS
FROM
MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER 1964
AND
A NEW BLACK FEMINIST CONCEPT

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by
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THE TALE OF "TWO VOICES:"
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ABSTRACT

This study developed a new concept of Black Feminist thought and employs it to examine the intersection of press and communication practices among women involved in Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964. The study draws on oral histories of women participants in this project as a way to contribute these omitted “voices” to the canon of journalism, civil rights, and women’s history.

In analyzing these stories, this study discovered generational differences among the women in terms of Freedom Summer’s influence on their worldviews and subsequent vocations. Although all of the study’s participants performed journalistic tasks, the older women of this group continued their lives as social activists and the younger women became professional communicators. The rationale for this phenomena helps explain, in part, the omission of women from the historical “image” of African American civil rights leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The old adage "a woman's work is never done" could be changed to "a woman's work is often overlooked." This sentiment certainly remains the case in terms of the canonical treatment of African American¹ female leadership and their contributions to journalism, civil, and women's rights history.²

Every meaningful activity requires an effective and powerful tool to help accomplish the task. Just as thinking requires not only brainpower, but also skills of critical analysis; so the successful activities of the Modern Civil Rights Movement³ depended on an essential and mighty tool - The Media, specifically the Black Press.⁴ A comprehensive discussion of the role of the media⁵ in general, and the Black Press in particular, as an instrument of success during the Modern Civil Rights Movement remains sorely lacking from the historical canon of this era. For decades, black women

¹ In this publication, the terms "Negro," "black," and "African American" are used interchangeably and refer to people of African or African American descent.

² Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 297.

³ For the purpose of this publication, the term "Modern Civil Rights Movement" acknowledges the existence of *many* American social movements that sought the establishment and enforcement of basic civil rights for its citizenry beginning with the American Revolution, the abolition of Slavery, women's suffrage and club era, the early days of Jim Crow resistance, labor unions, the 1950s and 1960s, the Women's Liberation Movement, Black Radicalism, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, farm workers, Gay and Lesbian rights, disabled rights, Acquired Immune Disorder Syndrome (AIDS) rights, and Healthcare reform. Although the fight for civil rights for blacks in America pre- and post-dates the following time period, for the purpose of this study, the term "Modern Civil Rights Movement" refers to the collective social, political, and economic struggle of the masses on behalf of African Americans between 1954-1965.

⁴ The term "Black Press" refers to media in all forms that target and cover issues pertaining to or about individuals of African or African American descent.

⁵ Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reece. *Mediating the Message* (White Plains: Longman Publishers, 1996), 6-7, 60. Mass communication scholars Shoemaker and Reese argue that while journalists may espouse the merits of objectivity in reporting, in reality, they communicate their stories within the frame of their personally constructed realities and often fall prey to "ideological hegemony with allegiance to the status quo and the socialization and attitudes of mainstream dominance" (60). Those who covered the Modern Civil Rights Movement proved no different in their presentation of the events, crisis, and triumphs of this social movement.

activists have espoused and cosigned the functional practice of “uplifting” the image of the black male as a means of “uplifting” the entire race.⁶ Additionally, the customary approach to documenting the Modern Civil Rights Movement has been from an Anglo-Saxon male perspective, which would have had a level of expectation that any form of leadership would be represented in the activities of black men. The social and cultural dynamic of African American men and women in activism is peculiar in that historically it has not run congruent to the practice of “separation in activism” within the American mainstream culture. More specifically, understanding that African American women harnessed the power of the press in order to organize and motivate the masses into such a formidable social movement contributes an important element to the record of one of the era’s most pivotal moments – Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964.⁷

Why Mississippi – A Hotbed of the South?

A logical query of any civil rights researcher asks why did Mississippi prove so critical to the success of the Modern Civil Rights Movement? What conditions made the southern state ripe for the Voter Registration Project of Freedom Summer 1964? And, why did it carry such fundamental meaning to the broader struggles of the entire

⁶ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday-Page, 1901); Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 203.

⁷ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Esther Cooper Jackson, ed. *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Vanessa D. Murphree, “One Man One Vote: Public Relations and the Mississippi Freedom Summer” (submitted to the *American Journalism Historians Association*, University of Southern Mississippi, 2004; Vanessa D. Murphree, “The Selling of Civil Rights: The Communication Section of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,” *Journalism History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 21-32.

Movement? Well, first one must understand the dynamics of how the state restructured itself after the American Civil War and the end of slavery.

When the War of the States ended in 1865, Mississippi was considered perhaps the most ravaged region of the defeated South. More than one-third of the state's 78,000 soldiers died in battle or from disease, which depleted over one-fourth of the entire male population over the age of 15. With their labor force dismantled, their economic system destroyed, and the state government bankrupt, planters and farmers (the economic giants of the pre-war South) scraped by to simply survive much less rebuild. From that day to this, Mississippi has routinely ranked "at the bottom of health, welfare, education, and general economic measures."⁸

Although slavery had been abolished, the mindset of white supremacy and black inferiority prevailed and initially became a customary social practice and later actual law under Jim Crow statutes. When newly freed African Americans left their plantations of oppression, white sentiment viewed their departure as typical of the "lazy, idle nigras." In actuality, blacks often left to find displaced loved ones, seek work and boarding, and simply experience the right of free travel. Of course, similar to the plight of many southerners, newly freed blacks were extremely impoverished and resorted to every means necessary to feed their hungry souls. The notional phenomena of "black crime" as a social problem found its roots immediately following the end of slavery.⁹

⁸ Kim Lacy Rogers, *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006, 5.

⁹ David M. Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996, 32-37). Prior to the Civil War and the end of slavery, "Southern whites had long viewed criminal behavior a natural to the Negro. They took his stealing for granted, as a biological flaw. With freedom, 'black crime' moved well beyond the plantation" and became a social issue for the first time in American history. 'In slavery times,' a freedman recalled, 'jails was all built for the white folks. There warn't never nobody of my color put in none of them. No time...to stay in jail; they had

In the fall of 1865, Governor Benjamin G. Humphreys addressed the “Negro problem” before a session of the Mississippi legislature. A planter by profession and a general during the war, he was initially prohibited from participating in the South’s postwar politics. President Andrew Johnson pardoned him on October 5, 1865, however, only three days after winning the office of governor by a landslide. Nearly one hundred years earlier, Humphreys’ victory speech set the stage for the need of Freedom Summer 1964.

In it, he encouraged Mississippians to follow the federal mandate to cease and desist from its practice of institutional slavery. But, he quickly pointed out the folly of many northerners’ plan to cripple the traditions of the South. Humphreys said, “Freedom had its limits...it protected the Negro’s person and property, but did not guarantee him *political or social equality [sic]* with whites.”¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, the Mississippi state legislature passed a series of acts called the Black Codes.¹¹ Although the primary goal of the Black Codes was to ensure a sufficient African American labor supply, it also cemented the lofty social position of whites and protected the political stature of white men.

to work; when done wrong, they was whipped and let go.’ After emancipation, this pattern was reversed. By 1866, the Natchez [MS] city jail held sixty-seven black prisoners and just eleven whites. In Grenada, [MS] to the North, there were seventeen blacks and one white. In Columbus, [MS] to the east, there were fifty-three blacks and no whites. Almost overnight, the jailhouse had become a ‘Negro preserve’” and foreshadowed Mississippi’s tradition of convict leasing and ostensibly high African American prison rates (37).

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ “The Mississippi Black Codes were copied, sometimes word for word, by legislators in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. The Black Codes listed specific crimes for the “free Negro” alone: ‘mischief,’ ‘insulting gestures,’ ‘cruel treatment to animals,’ and the ‘vending of spirituous or intoxicating liquors.’ Free blacks were also prohibited from keeping firearms and from cohabitating with whites. The penalty for intermarriage, the ultimate taboo, was ‘confinement in the State penitentiary for life.’” Ibid., 21.

In an attempt to repeal the Black Codes, the U.S. Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which required each state to rewrite its constitution and include issues of suffrage for African American men, ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, and exist under several military districts throughout the South. Each southern state had to meet these prerequisites in order to apply for readmission to the Union.

In Mississippi, this act created a new political majority almost overnight. More than 80,000 black voters were registered by federal officials, as opposed to fewer than 60,000 whites. By 1870, black Republicans (the party of Abraham Lincoln) in Mississippi were serving as sheriffs, mayors, and state legislators. Their ranks included John R. Lynch, the first black Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, and Hiram B. Revels, the first Negro to serve in the U.S. Senate.¹²

In response to the era of Reconstruction, white Mississippians reacted with the weapon they had become best known for wielding in times of conflict – violence. Owing to its well-earned reputation as the most violent state in the Union, researchers have said that international sea merchants named it the “worst spot” among the coastal gulf; that the houses of state government debate often became local sparring rings; and public floggings commonly took place in the town square – and this was just among white Mississippians.

Violence was central to the South’s code of personal behavior with its compulsion to settle private matters outside the law. It had always been so in Mississippi – from the gentleman’s *code duello* to the common man’s head-splitting brawls, from the festive public hangings to the dutiful whipping of slaves...Mississippians have been shooting and cutting each other...to a greater extent than in all the other states of the Union put together.”¹³

Several Post-Civil War leaders including Nathan Bedford Forrest (1821-1877,) one of several founding members and first Grand Wizard of the white terrorist Klu Klux Klan

¹² Ibid., 22.

¹³ Ibid., 23-24.

and later segregationist James Kimball Vardaman (political career from 1890-1919) unified their efforts to wage an all-out assault not only against African Americans, but also against anything that in the least bit represented the emancipatory goals of the Republican party of Lincoln.¹⁴ Additionally, Mississippi politics became an internal war between northern Delta planters, who benefited from the corporate prowess of its large sharecropping and prison land leasing systems and poor white individual farms of the southern hills and pine country.

Over the next few decades, white segregationist powers implemented their system of Jim Crow horror against blacks throughout the South via institutionalized peonage, removal from the American political process, and the violent practice of lynching. By the turn of the twentieth century, such vile conditions experienced by the average African American elsewhere in the South occurred in exponentially greater proportions for black Mississippians. As evidenced when Holy Springs, Mississippian Ida B. Wells-Barnett sought relief from her plight of poverty and moved to nearby Memphis, Tennessee.¹⁵ There she unabashedly wrote about the immorality of lynching and became the pre-eminent advocate of a bold anti-lynching campaign. On an international level, she exposed the hypocritical domestic policy of the United States as purveyors of a democracy that claimed to aspire to equality and freedom for all.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kim Lacy Rogers, *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006), 4.

¹⁵ As discussed later in Chapter 2, Wells-Barnett would also flee from her home in Memphis after her newspaper office was torched and her life publicly threatened.

¹⁶ Paula Giddings, "Missing in Action: Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and the Historical Record," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2001); Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida. B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12; J.J. Royster, *Southern Horrors and other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997)

Throughout the Progressive era, the U.S. Government attempted to increase the economic and industrial viability of American citizens with employment/farming, educational, and housing programs. In Mississippi, state-level implementation of these programs, tempered with the objective to preserve the status quo, excluded the poorest whites and blacks. As issues of unfair labor practices at home and international conflicts abroad mounted, such localized tyranny set the stage for a dual-backlash - from oppressors and from those oppressed. Post-wartime (World War I and II) prosperity increased employment ranks and afforded whites an opportunity to move into relative upper classes of society. For African Americans, their participation in international military efforts did not garner them such equal opportunities, however, it did embolden their determination to bring about a change in the system of domination.

As a matter of fact, by 1944, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) capitalized not only on the black community's escalating sense of social boldness from the signing of the Atlantic Charter in 1941¹⁷ and the World War II Double-Victory campaign of "Victory Abroad and Victory at Home," but the organization also tapped into global sensitivities of the European Holocaust in pursuit of "Aryan white supremacy" and the burgeoning notion of international responsibility to insure "human rights" for all. For the first time in American history, the NAACP

¹⁷ "For African Americans, however, the Atlantic Charter was revolutionary. It was something, as NAACP Board Member Channing Tobias declared, that black people would be willing to 'live, work, fight, and need be, die for.' ("Address [by Channing Tobias] at Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Reichstag Trial: Carnegie Hall," December 22, 1943, Reel 18, *Roosevelt*) It appeared that the world's largest capitalist nation had joined with the greatest colonial power and admitted that the world they created in 1919 with the Treaty of Versailles had only led to the rise of a racism so virulent that it even offended Anglo-Saxons...The embrace of self-determination, for example, implied that the federal government, or at least Roosevelt, would not fight to end the poll tax, white primary, and other voter restrictions that disenfranchised millions of African Americans in the South." Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

effectively characterized the plight of African Americans as a problem of the world and not simply a dirty little secret of the newest Super Power nation.¹⁸

Only the human rights lexicon, shaped by the Holocaust and articulated by the United Nations, contained the language and the moral power to address not only political and legal inequality, but also education, healthcare, housing, and employment needs that haunted the black community. The NAACP understood this and wielded its influence and resources to take its human rights agenda before the United Nations.¹⁹

Unfortunately, a narrowing of this agenda from the broader “human rights” structure to a more controllable “civil rights” frame resulted from a combination of the United States’ foreign policy of Cold War toward Communist nations; faulty political alignments with public “human rights” advocates, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and President Harry S. Truman (who in reality had limited and often contrived loyalty to African American attainment of human rights) and the success of politically powerful Southerners who branded the idea of “human rights” for blacks as communist-Soviet-inspired threats to the American “way of life.”²⁰

For example, former Mississippi Governor and “Dixiecrat” Senator, Theodore Bilbo spent much of his political life working to implement a populist agenda of liberal social reform and redistribution of wealth among the poor white masses. “The Man,”²¹ as he called himself, also worked just as diligently to maintain white supremacy and

¹⁸ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

¹⁹ Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4, 130-131, and 269.

²¹ The fact that Mississippi native and staunch segregationist Theodore Bilbo often referred to himself in public as “The Man” long before African Americans of the Modern Civil Rights era coined the term in black vernacular (in reference to not only white men, but also the American system of oppression against people of color) is not lost on the reputation and memory of the former governor and senator who became the “national symbol of racism” in his warnings of the mongrelizing effect of the black vote to the purity of white society and politics. By the late 1960’s and throughout the 1970’s, ironically African Americans often referred to any success in civil rights as “sticking it to the man.” J.E. Lighter (Ed.), *Random House Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Random House, 1997).

prosperity at the expense of an impoverished and unrepresented black underclass in Mississippi.

While on the campaign trail in 1946, [his third Senate run] in a state where nearly half the population was African American, he fired up his “red-blooded Anglo-Saxon” constituency with a rejoinder that ‘the best way to keep a nigger from voting...[was to] do it the night before election.’ He then instructed his followers that, ‘If any nigger tries to organize to vote, use the tar and feathers and don’t forget the matches.’ His harangue for white racial purity [even in the American political process,] led him to predict that, if African Americans achieved any form of equality, the United States would become a racial cesspool...²²

Not withstanding the constitutional rights of African Americans to participate in the political process and the progress made that year in the Irene Morgan Supreme Court case of integrated interstate transportation, Bilbo made every attempt to eradicate the voting rights of blacks and admonished anyone who did not share the ‘brilliance’ of his political philosophy.

I call on every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the niggers away from the polls, if you don’t understand what that means you are just plain dumb.²³ He called on every ‘red-blooded Anglo-Saxon man in Mississippi to resort to any means to keep hundreds of Negroes from the polls in the July 2 [1946] primary.’ ‘And if you don’t know what that means, you are just not up on your persuasive measures,’ Mr. Bilbo added.²⁴ The principle of segregation of the white and Negro races in the South is so well known that it requires no definition. Briefly and plainly stated, the object of this policy is to prevent the two races from meeting on terms of social equality.²⁵

Bilbo’s goal clearly was to either obliterate all “rights” of African Americans or purge blacks entirely from American society. By the Second World War’s end, he went as far as siding with the Black Nationalist Garvey movement, led by the widow of Marcus Garvey, in attempts to relocate African Americans back to Africa.

²² Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64.

²³ *Time*, July 1, 1946, p. 23.

²⁴ *New York Times*, June 23, 1946, p. 30.

²⁵ Theodore G. Bilbo, *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization* (Poplarville, MS: Dream House Publishing Company, 1947), 49.

When this war is over and more than two million Negro soldiers, whose minds have been filled and poisoned with political and social equality stuff, return and 'hell breaks out' all over the country, I think I'll get more help in settling the Negroes in Africa.²⁶

The 1946 Primary Election also proved pivotal to Mississippi politics in that just two years prior, the Supreme Court ruled (*Smith v. Allwright*)²⁷ that an “all-white Democratic Primary” was unconstitutional. In the South, primary elections functioned as the quintessential election since the one-party system ensured a political majority in the state and federal legislature.

The 1946 Mississippi primary was the NAACP's first opportunity to test the “Magnolia State” in its resolve to ignore the Supreme Court decision. Also that year, the Mississippi legislature unintentionally opened the door to black voter participation when it exempted veterans from the poll tax in 1946.²⁸ Relying on the neglectful educational system of Mississippi blacks, Bilbo and the legislature expected other criteria, like complex literacy tests and machinations of intimidation and subterfuge, would deter African American veterans from voting. To the chagrin of most Mississippi politicians, such events emboldened some black veterans, including a young Medgar Evers, who would lay the critical groundwork for the Voter Registration Campaign of the Modern

²⁶ *Washington Post*, March 23, 1944.

²⁷ US Citation: 321 U.S. 649 (1944) - In 1940, Lonnie Smith, a black dentist from Houston, fought his exclusion from that Texas's all white Democratic Primary by Election Judge S. E. Allwright. Smith appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled 8-1 that the Democratic Party and its primary were not “private and voluntary,” and in 1944 overturned the decision as unconstitutional. As perhaps the first significant victory for the NAACP's newly created Legal Defense Fund against Jim Crow segregation, this decision not only provided the legal and theoretical foundation in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education*, but it immediately influenced several southern mid-term primaries (which were *the* most important elections in the Deep South) in 1946 – including Mississippi. Charles L. Zelden, *The Battle for the Black Ballot: Smith v. Allwright and the Defeat of the Texas All-White Primary* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004.)

²⁸ Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 103.

Civil Right Movement.²⁹ Although the senator's overt racism proved unpalatable for pretentiously liberal northerners and elite segregationists of the Old South, poor white constituents of southern Mississippi kept Bilbo in various political offices over a 30-year period.

Undeniably, the suppression of political participation of blacks has a long-standing and violent tradition in Mississippi. The powers-that-be clearly understood the value and significance of the black vote to their continued hegemony. The state's disdain for African American political participation did not begin in the twentieth century, but rather was crafted as a de facto way of life in Mississippi nearly a century before Freedom Summer 1964.

Why Examine Women's Work in Civil Rights?

Feminist history maintains that many women, both Caucasian and African American, of the Civil Rights Movement fought to achieve a level of equality within their own culture as a predecessor to the Second-Wave Feminist Movement of the 1970's.³⁰ Although decades before this time, women helped forge organizations, movements, protests and pivotal declarations of civil disobedience; history has failed to spotlight the efforts of African American women in the same manner as their white female and black male counterparts.

Understanding the synergy between Black Feminist and Womanist theories and the activism of women from the past and the 1960's Civil Rights Movement provides a

²⁹ Robert L. Fleegler, "Theodore G. Bilbo and the Decline of Racism, 1938-1947," *The Journal of Mississippi History*, Spring 2006, 20; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 3-5.

³⁰ Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn: Carlson Press, 1995), 39; Cynthia Washington, "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum," *Southern Exposure* 4, no. 4 (1977).

sound foundation for the following examination of their roles as communicators. This study shares the experiences of women who employed a variety of communication jobs as a function of their social activism in Mississippi Freedom Summer Movement of 1964.

This study found common agreement among its participants that initially *all* of the women labored to unite blacks and whites and men and women with the solitary goal of Freedom Summer – to establish freedom/citizenship schools, ensure voter registration, secure unencumbered and accurate political representation, and insist on equal treatment under the law. In the initial discovery of their stories, this researcher discerned a unique disjuncture of ideological perspectives between the women of this study. This disconnect between the women was based not on the anticipated factor of race or ethnicity, but more solidly on the variables of age or generation, disposition toward gender roles, delegation of duties, use of standard methods of journalism versus creative and alternative means of communication, geographic backgrounds, and subsequent occupations.

From a close examination of these first-hand stories, this researcher introduces and defines the notional concept³¹, Afro-Pragmatic Womanism,³² within the realm of Black Feminist Thought. This developing idea explains the relationship between women’s communication work during Freedom Summer 1964 of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, the proximity of their burgeoning feminist perspectives, and the

³¹ For the purpose of this study, the working definition of the term “theory” refers largely to a philosophy or idea that has been established and generally accepted in scholarship, withstood diverse criticism, and found application beyond its initial use. The term “concept” refers to an idea that is taken from a larger theory or theories and is in the developmental stage of finding its place in accepted scholarship, subject to close scrutiny by scholars of the field, and not yet fully applied beyond its initial use; but offers a measure of logic, organization, and potential.

³² Since this author claims Afro-Pragmatic Womanism as only a *developing concept*, future research plans include applying it to other Southern states to test whether it can stand as a theoretical approach to studying women from Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964 and other Modern Civil Rights Movement events.

effect that this dynamic had on their subsequent choice of professions as social activists or creators of media.

Building further on this concept, Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, this study revealed that middle-aged³³ African American women (during Freedom Summer 1964) often viewed themselves as the backbone to organizing efforts, but also assumed a “humanist” vision and posture in that they did not begrudge the publicity of their male counterparts. While women like Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Annie Devine held leadership roles at some of the highest levels of social and political activism, they displayed a holistic approach to equal rights and aligned their thinking more fully with the tenets of Alice Walker’s Womanist Theory. Similarly, the oldest women of this study; Victoria Gray Adams, Unita Blackwell, and Dr. L.C. Dorsey; unanimously spoke a mantra of “solidarity of humanity” in that they were “committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female.”³⁴

³³ The interchangeable terms “middle-aged” and “older women” in this study goes beyond the traditional understanding of an average American woman (aged approximately 35-40 years old) who was at the mid-point of her lifespan (average 70-75 years old) during the 20th Century (U.S. Census 2000, *U.S. Government*, Center for Disease Control, *National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics of the United States*, 1966 Life Tables, Vol. II, Section 5). Upon further consideration of the mortality rate of women in Mississippi during the 1960s, the average woman only lived to the age of 55-60 (Mississippi Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics, *Public Health Statistics Time Series – Table 21, Deaths and Rates, by Year and Race, Mississippi, 1913-2005*, (Occurrence Data 1913-1943, Residence Data 1944-2005), which would make a woman in her mid-to-late twenties “middle-aged.” For women of color, both nationally and in the state of Mississippi, these numbers are significantly lower. Specific to this study, age was only *one* criterion upon which the women were categorized as “middle-aged” or “older.” Women of this group were typically married, with children (and in some cases grandchildren), indigenous to the region, third and fourth-generation sharecroppers, and had limited education and experience outside of their poverty-stricken circles. Such an arduous existence clearly crafted their world perspective and their approach to activism, which significantly differed from the “younger” women of this study. Characteristically alien to Mississippi (or the South in general), unmarried, without children, from at least a middle-class existence, and either was in the process of receiving higher education and/or by way of higher education had become skilled professionals; the “younger women” of this study were between their late teens to early twenties in the summer of 1964. This dynamic proved true across the board with the exception of one woman, who was 25; but did not meet the criterion for the “middle-aged” women in any other way.

³⁴ Alice Walker, preface to *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi.

For these middle-aged women of the Freedom Summer 1964 Project, the idea of separatism or distinction among gender, *even in the way history erroneously remembered the Freedom Movement*, did not outweigh the more important story of southern, poor, African Americans overcoming systematic oppression. The very idea of putting the interests of class and color above that of gender also aligns with the thinking of Clenora Hudson-Weems' theory of Africana Womanism.³⁵ This is not to say that these older women did not bristle at the misrepresentation of their gender, but rather understood and valued the greater goal of community uplift for the entire race of African Americans. The convergence of certain elements of Walker's Womanist and Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanist theories helped this study develop an important and unique ideological description of its older women and brought to the discussion an often overlooked rationale for the abiding historical image of a male-led Civil Rights Movement.

A particularly central precept within the Afro Pragmatic Womanist concept emerged from the harmonic accounts of these older women who believed that media emphasis on the "total" struggle proved far more important at the time than their individual or gender struggles. Although they took on leadership roles within the Freedom Summer Movement, the oldest women of this study made a pragmatic and conscious choice to identify black men as the vanguard of the Movement; thereby, reshaping America's posture toward the value and accomplishments of African American men in general. Understanding the machinations of patriarchy in the United States, these women considered their Afro Pragmatic approach most productive in that it fostered an

³⁵ Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism: An Overview," in *Out of the Revolution: The Development of African Studies*, ed. Delores P. Aldridge and Carlene Young. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000).

enlightened social representation of black men, which in turn, benefited the entire group of marginalized African Americans.

Another significant identifier of the Afro Pragmatic Womanist concept is that these women demonstrated a life's vocation to social advocacy that often included holding a grass-roots-supported political office. A subset of the overall Modern Civil Rights Movement, the 1964 Freedom Summer Project, moreover, laid the groundwork for a lifetime of singularly enduring service to social activism for these older women. Because most of them continued to devote their life's energies to the common issues of the oppressed, many also became global human rights advocates. As illustrated in later chapters, this is quite different from the younger women of this study who certainly continued their interest in social activism, but subsequently limited their participation in it because they all became communication professionals of some sort.

A further building block of the Afro Pragmatic Womanist concept points to the fact these women were mostly married with children and indigenous to the region targeted for activism. Unanimously, they viewed the opportunity to work as social activists as *the* only hope for their family and their community. Although seemingly menial duties, these Freedom Women were willing to do whatever it took to prepare a better life for their children and subsequent generations. For example, they revealed in this study, that they performed crucial clerical tasks, conducted successful fundraising projects, organized childcare and summer reading/activities for the youngest children (so that other mothers could canvass local communities,) and carried out clothing and voter registration drives throughout the state. Although many women acquired organizational, political, or journalism/communication skills through their participation in social

activism, the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist often sacrificed professional career opportunities, either present or possible, in order to continue or develop their roles as social activists, mother and wife.

Another principle of the Afro Pragmatic Womanist concept, and perhaps the most important to this study, suggests the older women of Freedom Summer relied on alternative or creative means of communication as the primary tool of facilitating their goals. With limited opportunities to participate in traditional journalism duties, since most of the older women performed field activities, these women worked with communication systems that were at their immediate disposal or of their creative making.

This point directly ties into an equally important component of the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist concept, which asserts that the older women viewed their posture as affecting and affording younger women of the Movement unprecedented opportunities in how they viewed the world and their choices of career occupations. This study addresses this notion in an exhaustive discussion of several younger women's work (during Freedom Summer 1964) and their ideological viewpoints and subsequent careers as communication professionals. It also highlights the fact that most of the younger generation of Freedom Summer 1964 women, especially northern white females, consequently took on a Feminist perspective as a result of their civil rights work that summer.

Additionally, the older women often saw their cooperative approach as a way to minimize internal strife and diffuse the image and reputation of black women as always acting "out-of-order," interloping black men's masculinity, and reactionary-in-nature based on unabated emotion and lack of intellectual discernment. While these women

certainly took pride in their leadership as women and supported the more-feminist efforts of younger generation of black women leaders, they also understood and embraced an altruistic perspective that worked for the times and circumstances.

Just as the older women of this study demonstrated a pragmatic approach to their social work, this study also employed a quite practical methodology of gathering its data. Most historical accounts of the press provide information and synthesis through the perspective of a deemed "authority" such as official records, a secondary-source, or eyewitness reports. Rarely do journalism historians take advantage of the rich opportunity to hear the account from those most intimately involved in or influenced by an historical event – eyewitnesses. The goal of this study was not to discount the value of personal artifacts and official records, but rather to use first-hand testimonies from oral history interviews as the primary source of information and give those previously “unheard” voices” a centralized place in history.³⁶ Such primary sources included personal in-depth oral history interviews with eyewitnesses of Freedom Summer 1964 in the state of Mississippi.³⁷ Through the mind's eye and "voice" of its participants, the oral histories used in this study provide "thick" descriptions about the events and culture of these women's experiences.³⁸

This researcher chose primary oral history interviewees based on demographic characteristics that included ethnicity (African American), gender (female), age (50 years plus), verification of their participation in Freedom Summer 1964 (through a thorough literature review of other eyewitness accounts), and recommendations from noted

³⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

³⁷ See Appendix A (Map of Mississippi—1964).

³⁸ Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1973).

scholars of women's history and black studies. This study also conducted informational interviews with non-black female and white and black male participants of Freedom Movement.

Additionally, this study consulted secondary sources such as archived oral histories; photographs; artifacts and documents including news releases, news articles, meeting minutes, and transcripts of speeches related to the organizing and publicizing of events during Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964. Culled from collections at the University of Southern Mississippi, the Mississippi Oral History Project, the Civil Rights Oral History Project, Digital Schomburg, and Washington University – St. Louis Blacksides Film (*Eyes on the Prize I & II*) Archives, primary materials including press releases, pamphlets, newsletters, and flyers provided tangible evidence of communication efforts for this study. This researcher also examined the press (Black Press and mainstream press) and alternative communication strategies (walkie-talkie and short-wave radio practices and word-of-mouth) employed by these women. Secondary sources included literature on the following ideologies and events: Black Feminist/Womanist theories, African American female leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, and Black Press strategies.

Using Afro-Pragmatic Womanism as its frame, this study provides an important contribution to feminist, historical, and communication scholarship in that it answers the following research question:

How and why did African American women demonstrate direct-action leadership and facilitate various forms of communication, including the mainstream and Black Press, within the Mississippi Chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the 1964 Freedom Summer Movement while propelling their male counterparts into the national

spotlight and subsequently omitting themselves from history's account of one the most turbulent eras in the legacy of the United States of America?

Beginning with a brief review of literature on African American women's history, Chapter One also includes a concise account of the relationship between the Black Press and African American civil rights and chronologically intertwines the contributions of notable black women who worked as social activists of the Black Press. This chapter concludes with a discussion of black women's role in this movement and describes several key African American female advocates of civil justice. The critical work accomplished by these nearly famous women laid the foundation for many of the unsung workers of the Movement and this study.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical constructs of Black Feminist and Womanist Theories and provides further analysis and examples of this study's developing feminist concept – Afro-Pragmatic Womanism. Chapter Three underscores the merits of oral interviews as a viable methodology and cornerstone of historical research and provides a concise discussion on employing oral interviews for the historical analysis of African American women and other participants of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

Chapter Four applies feminist perspectives (Black Feminism, Womanism, and Africana Womanism) to the work of these women in the Summer Movement and shows how a new concept – Afro-Pragmatic Womanism – also shaped African American female activism during Freedom Summer.

Chapter Five allows the reader to hear the "voices" of these innovative and resourceful women's oral histories. Along with the discussion of their journalistic and communication endeavors, this chapter also provides fundamental historical context to their stories and lays bare the important role of the media in exposing their struggles.

Chapter Six concludes with a discussion of this study's implications to journalism, women's, and African American history. It specifically analyzes evidence of oral history participants' "self-reflection" and their process of "constructing" themselves in remembering experiences in the Summer Project. Finally, this last chapter provides an outline for continuing this research.

The following discussion brings meaning, understanding, and recognition to the tireless efforts of women from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. This study also describes and defines the concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism in that it examines and discusses women who participated in the Freedom Summer 1964 and their epistemological location which directly correlates, not only to their feminist perspective, but also to their subsequent professions as communicators and social activists.

CHAPTER 1

THE LEGACY OF WOMEN'S LABOR EXPRESSED IN EVERY ERA OF THE BLACK PRESS AND CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Over the last twenty years, many scholars have contributed to the body of work on African American women and their importance to the overall Civil Rights Movement. Going back as far as Colonial America, book-length treatments¹ outline a myriad of contributions from both black and white women in the fight for equality and justice for all people. Black women's efforts also appear in such notable discussions on the Modern Civil Rights Movement like Taylor Branch's detailed serial anthology on the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.; various collections of personal experiences that recount the black freedom struggle to integrate and secure the political process of African Americans in the South; individual accounts that detail the development and decline of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Committee of Freedom Organizations (COFO), and other civil rights organizations; and oral histories that testify to the surviving spirit of those activist that worked in the most racially hostile and hate-entrenched state in the Union – Mississippi.²

¹ Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline A. Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990). Other important encyclopedic works such as *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830-1970*; *How Long, How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*; *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*; and *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* examine the contributions and philosophies of women involved in social justice movements covering every era of United States history.

² *Parting the Waters: America in The King Years 1954-63*; *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*; *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle*; *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960's*; *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*; *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*; *The Children, Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950's through the*

Additionally, numerous significant autobiographical histories of African American women have broadened the account of their connection to the Modern Civil Rights Movement. For example, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Gender and American Culture)* explores the life and accomplishments of perhaps one of the most influential and skilled individuals (male or female) in twentieth century social activism.³ Many other such life stories also appear in the collected works of women from the Black Diaspora like *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* and *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*.

Unfortunately, scholarship that considers the intersectionality between the media (the Black Press in particular) and the Modern Civil Rights era remain quite limited.⁴ Except for Jinx Broussard's groundbreaking *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists*, even less attention has been given to the intersection of African American women's labor both within and outside of the Civil Rights Movement and its direct correlation to their communication efforts as social activists.

1980's; I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle; An Eyewitness History: The Civil Rights Movement; My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South; and The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance.

³ Rosa Parks' *My Story, Ready From Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement; This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer; For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer;* and Paula Giddings' *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* examine the lives of women from the Modern Civil Rights Movement and discusses their struggles from the perspectives of ethnicity and gender.

⁴ *The Black Press in Mississippi; Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power; Writing America Black: Race Rhetoric and the Public Sphere; Reporting Civil Rights, Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights; and Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles Over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969.*

Undeniably, America has a tradition of African American women who have forged social activism through the process of communication. Orators, literary writers of prose and poetry, and journalists functioned as social activists through various forms of the media and soundly exemplified the synergy between African American civil rights and the Black Press — one has never existed without the other. Understanding the relationship between the Black Press and its reader's fight for civil liberties provides an important foundation for examining the role of black women's contributions to civil rights and journalism history in this study.

The historical relationship of the Black Press to the progress of African Americans directly links to the literary legacy of black women and their long-standing and crucial role in African American civil rights. This chapter briefly outlines the influence and importance of their social activism on behalf of the entire black community (and subsequently other disenfranchised people around the world) and demonstrates that these women facilitated their roles as social advocates via literature and journalism throughout every era of American history. The following discussion also effectively establishes the fact that a heritage of social activism among African American women laid the foundation for the considerable work accomplished by *all* women of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement.

The Early Black Press Fights for Freedom and Leads the Way

The horrors of the “Middle Passage”⁵ endowed the British colony of Massachusetts with one of this country's most celebrated poets. A sickly girl captured

⁵ The “Middle Passage” refers to the Atlantic slave trade that took place from the mid-15th century to the end of the 18th century. Africans were taken against their will from primarily the western part of the

and enslaved from Gambia, named for the vessel (*Phyllis*) that brought her to the shores of Boston Harbor in 1761 and the slave master (*Wheatley*) that trained her; Phyllis Wheatley proved one of the earliest recognized black woman writers and challengers on the morality of slavery.⁶ Wheatley's poetry presented a humanist vision of an enslaved black woman and established her mettle as she stepped outside the socially assigned role of an inferior being and showcased the poetic abilities of the most tutored scholar.⁷ Her work laid the foundation for African American abolition and civil rights and Black Feminist thought and its historical connection to the study of the Black Diaspora and the Black Press.⁸

For example, in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral – On Being Brought from AFRICA to AMERICA* she writes:

T WAS mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,

continent to slave markets in North America, South America and the Caribbean (The Americas). The routes of the Middle Passage formed the shape of a triangle between Europe, Western Africa, and the Americas. European goods were sold or traded for people in the African slave markets, then sailed to the Americas and Caribbean (West Indies) where the Africans were sold or traded for goods that were taken back to the European markets. Depending on the weather, the Middle Passage took two to five months of arduous sailing since most of the ships were designed for the transport of goods rather than people. Consequently, the conditions aboard these ships were inhumane and unsanitary. At least 12 million Africans were forcibly removed from the continent over a three-hundred-year period. See appendix Q (Map of Middle Passage Slave Trade Routes).

⁶ Barbara E. Johnson, "Euphemism, Understatement, and the Passive Voice: A Genealogy of Afro-American Poetry," in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1990).

⁷ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981).

⁸ Barbara E. Johnson, "Euphemism, Understatement, and the Passive Voice: A Genealogy of Afro-American Poetry," in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1990); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981); Phyllis Wheatley, "To His Excellency General Washington," quoted in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 176-177.1776, 176; Digital Schomburg - AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY;

http://digital.nvpl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew,
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.⁹

Additionally, she wrote a salutatory poem, *To His Excellency General Washington*,¹⁰ which celebrated the goals of early American civil rights. Such tributary sentiments certainly would have been expected from a white poetess; but never would anyone in antebellum society expect such creative and flattering work about the man who led the systematic oppression of slavery over the very soul who wrote in his favor.

Although freed after the death of her owners, Wheatley's life after publication mirrored that of many black women to come after her. She married, immediately had children, and struggled economically as a severely underpaid domestic worker. At the age of thirty-one-years-old (1784), Wheatley died in childbirth impoverished and uncelebrated. The canonical treatment of her courageous literary works, however, commemorate the long-standing relationship between African American civil rights and the literary press and foreshadow African American women using it as a vehicle of social activism.¹¹

⁹ Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," quoted in *Poems on Various Subjects*, ed. Risa Stephanie Bear (Portland, OR: Renaissance Editions, University of Oregon, 1998), <http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/wheatley.html> (accessed October 9, 2005).

¹⁰ Phillis Wheatley, "To His Excellency General Washington," quoted in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 176.

¹¹ Barbara E. Johnson, "Euphemism, Understatement, and the Passive Voice: A Genealogy of Afro-American Poetry," in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1990); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981); Phillis Wheatley, "To His Excellency General Washington," quoted in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 176-177. Phillis. "To His Excellency General Washington," 1776, 176; Digital Schomburg - AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY; http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

Since the creation of the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827, an interdependent relationship formalized between the Black Press and its constituents in an effort to attain civil rights for African Americans. Founded in New York City to laud the merits and rights of freed blacks and denounce the American institution of slavery, this journal set an important precedent within the American Press system.¹² The primary role of the Black Press has always been to formally address the concerns of African Americans as a marginalized group that either had been vilified or simply ignored by the mainstream American Press.¹³ In keeping with the Black Press Credo,¹⁴ it strategically worked to fill such cultural needs as well as provide an unassailable testament to the aptitude and inclination of black participation and consumption of American journalism.

By 1831, more than forty-five years after Wheatley's writings and three years after the official beginning of the Black Press,¹⁵ another African American woman facilitated her social activism through the pages of literary expression. Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879) spent her early life as an orphaned indentured servant and then a domestic

¹² I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Willey and Company, 1891; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969); Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press: New York, 1827-1847* (Northport, Alabama: Vision Press, 1992).

¹³ Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3; Martin E. Dann, ed., *The Black Press 1827-1890: The Quest for National Identity*. (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 33.

¹⁴ Armistead Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997). The Black Credo, which is similar to a corporation's mission statement and written from the perspective of the editor, is a "statement or platform" peculiar to the Black Press which outlines the goals and political and social purposes and of the journal. "The presence of such credos and platforms serves as a commitment of the paper to publish news and other information that will sustain the premises or aims of the platform...and serve as the rhetorical counterbalance [to mainstream press]." Ronald E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 205.

¹⁵ Since the creation of the first African American newspaper *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 New York City, an interdependent relationship has existed between the Black Press and its constituents. In an effort to attain civil rights for African Americans, this journal set an important precedent within the American Press system. I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Willey and Company, 1891; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969); Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press: New York, 1827-1847* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1992).

servant until her marriage to James W. Stewart. A prominent African American shipping agent in Boston, he secretly distributed *David Walker's Appeal* (1829) to abolitionists and African Americans below the Mason-Dixon line. Like the Afro-Pragmatic Womanists that came after her, Stewart worked in tandem with her husband's abolitionist efforts and continued to "fight the good fight" long after his death. In her widowhood and immediate descent into poverty, she once again became a domestic servant and credits a religious experience with her commitment to "warrior" for African Americans. Stewart responded to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's call for black women to submit articles to his newspaper *The Liberator* with the historically acclaimed "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build." In time, Stewart became a regular contributor to the journal and self-published collections of her essays including "Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart (1832)" and "Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart (1835)."¹⁶

Additionally, Stewart made history as the first African American woman to give a political speech to a racially and sexually integrated audience on April 28, 1832 at *The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America*. Not only did she go on to become an experienced and well-sought public speaker, but also demonstrated the merits of her social and political activism as an educator and writer in New York City, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.¹⁷

Mistress of poetry and prose – "the Bronze Muse," Frances W. Harper created a prolific collection of literary expression during and after slavery – all for the cause of

¹⁶ Maria W. Stewart, *America's First Black Woman Political Writer*. Edited and Introduced by Marilyn Richardson, 1987; Digital Schomburg - AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY; http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

¹⁷ Ibid.

racial uplift. Born free in Baltimore, Maryland in 1825, she worked as a domestic servant and nanny for a family that owned a bookstore and allowed her unencumbered access to its holdings as a way to develop her love of writing. About ten years before the end of slavery, she became an anti-slavery lecturer and published her first collection of poetry, *Forest Leaves*, in 1846. Harper's contributions¹⁸ to the legacy of African American women who expressed their social and political activism through various forms of communication proved pivotal because she helped usher in the era of such women who accomplished this through women's club work.¹⁹ This study goes on to identify several of

¹⁸ Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's body of work includes several collections of poetry published between 1872 and 1900: *Sketches of Southern Life*; *Moses: A Story of the Nile*; *Light Beyond Darkness*; *The Sparrow's Fall*; *Martyr of Alabama*, *Atlanta Offerings*; and *Poems*. "The Slave Mother," "The Slave Auction," "The Fugitive's Wife," and "Bury Me in a Free Land" are among her best known poems. One of her best-known essays is "Christianity" (1853) and her most famous short story is "The Two Offers." Harper's first three serialized novels appeared in the *African Methodist Episcopal Church's Christian Recorder*: *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869); *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story* (1876-1877), and *Trial and Triumph* (1888-1889). In 1892, Harper's best-known novel *Iola Leroy: Or Shadows Uplifted* was published. In this novel, Harper tells the story of a young woman striving to overcome racism during Civil War/Reconstruction America. Tonya Bolden, "Biographies," in *Digital Schomburg: African American Writers of the 19th Century* (New York: The New York Public Library, 2000), http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

¹⁹ Harper's women's club membership included the American Equal Rights Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the YMCA, the National Congress of Colored Women, and the National Association of Colored Women, of which she was a founding member; Tonya Bolden, "Biographies," in *Digital Schomburg: African American Writers of the 19th Century* (New York: The New York Public Library, 2000), http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html. Over the next century, women's club work functioned as one of the most critical instruments of change for both black and white women in America. These women's groups initially operated as auxiliaries to men's religious and social organizations. A primary task of these women's groups facilitated communication efforts through the writing, printing and copying of newsletters, general correspondence, and speeches. Additionally, women from both races found themselves duty-bound to work in their respective communities as social activists on behalf of less fortunate women and children. Christian accountability and social mores of the time mandated that women's social or political work exist only within the socially assigned role of "women's club" work. Unknown to many, however, this paradigm also created a powerful mechanism that secured the contribution of women in every social movement in this country's history. Bettina Aptheker, *Women's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex and Class in America in History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds., *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Press, 1995); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19; Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness:

these “club women” as those who assumed the role of Afro-Pragmatic Womanist in that they worked within the barriers of their contemporary social mores as a way to forge new opportunities for the disenfranchised and the next generation of women activists.

By the end of the Civil War in 1865, and thus slavery, more than forty African American newspapers had been established and became a staple of the black community.²⁰ Particularly throughout the South in the early half of the 20th century, African Americans relied on the Black Press to inform them of political, social, and economic issues of importance to their community and provide positive images of black achievement.²¹ This independent Black Press created the foundation for a Black Public and Counter Public.²²

During the Reconstruction era, several African American journals took up the mantle of race directives in the press; they advised blacks on what they should do with their new-found freedom and how they should build their individual and community wealth. During this time, the Black Press filled its pages with the “uplift” ideology of

Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Digital Schomburg - AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY;
http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

²⁰ Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press: New York, 1827-1847* (Northport, Alabama: Vision Press, 1992), 9.

²¹ Ibid.

²² For the purpose of this study, the “Black Counter Public” refers to the protagonist public sphere that developed within the Black Public Sphere of accommodationism and uplift ideology of the early twentieth century. Fostered during this era by W.E.B. DuBois, some of the Black Press broke with the traditions of the Black Public Sphere and endorsed the Double-V campaign that pressured the U.S. Government to address issues of inequality among African Americans. Subsequent examples of the power of the Black Counter Public include the Black Power Movement within the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Feminist Movement within Second-Wave Feminist Movement, and the Black Gay/Lesbian Pride Movement. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2002), 121-22; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience—Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

noted black intellectual and educator Booker T. Washington.²³ Through his “Tuskegee Machine,”²⁴ which anonymously owned several southern black newspapers, Washington espoused a philosophy that heralded education, land ownership, and an accommodationist approach to relations with the white mainstream.²⁵ By 1887, T. Thomas Fortune took over the *New York Age* (NY) and became a major public proponent of Washington’s ideology. The white mainstream praised Fortune’s paper, particularly Theodore Roosevelt,²⁶ because it prided itself on working to “help black people do better for themselves without damage to the race relations we’ve all worked hard for with whites.”²⁷

One of the most celebrated contributors to the *New York Age* and other such journals, Gertrude Bustill Mossell (1855-1948), came from a family of social activists including Cyrus Bustill (a Philadelphia baker for General George Washington’s troops during the American Revolution and founder of the first black mutual aid society, the *Free African Society*), abolitionists and educators Grace Bustill Douglass and Sarah Mapp Douglass, and the famed international vocalist, orator, and social activist Paul Bustill Robeson. She distinguished herself as an advocacy journalist during this era by writing articles on political and social issues of “uplift” in publications such as the *AME Church Review*, the *Philadelphia Times*, the *Philadelphia Echo*, and the *Independent*. For

²³ Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

²⁴ Clint C. Wilson, *Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 55; Louis Harlan, preface to *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), viii.

²⁵ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday-Page, 1901); Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 203.

²⁶ Clint C. Wilson, *Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

a time, she edited the Woman's Department of the *New York Freeman, the Indianapolis World*, and the *New York Age*. Her articles primarily focused on black women's rights and responsibilities as they transitioned from slavery to freedom.²⁸

Although she married Philadelphia physician Nathan Frances Mossell in 1893 and eventually had two daughters, in 1894 she published *The Work of Afro-American Women* (a collection that highlighted the achievement of black women from various disciplines) under her husband's initials N.F. Mossell. Like the quintessential Afro-Pragmatic Womanist, Mossell demonstrated conformity to public mores and modesty by presenting her "public self" in conjunction with her husband while using the opportunity to advocate African American progress and exonerate her black womanhood. Clearly she demonstrated an influential "public voice" "without disrupting the delicate balance of black male-female relations or challenging masculine authority."²⁹

Of Those Who Came Before Us

Shortly after the turn of the twenty-first century and the onset of the "New Negro" era,³⁰ scholar and social activist W.E.B. DuBois encouraged African Americans to become self-reliant for their success in life. Although he agreed with Washington's concepts of cooperative effort and uplift (reaching back to help other blacks); DuBois felt that only one-tenth of the Negro population intellectually, socially, and economically qualified to take on these challenges - thus the notion of a "Talented Tenth."³¹ Perhaps

²⁸ Gertrude Bustill Mossell [Mrs. Nathan F. Mossell], *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (1908; reprint, New York, NY: Oxford, 1988).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1967), 19-23; Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in World War II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 23.

³¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903), ch 6; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York, NY: Holt, 1993).

most notable among DuBois' tenets on black progress in America was his dogmatic insistence that African Americans refrain from total assimilation into the mainstream culture.

The very antithesis of Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise," which advocated social, and most ironically, political submission of black folk; DuBois challenged Washington's perspective because it asked African Americans to surrender the goals of political power, insistence of civil rights, and higher education of the Negro youths.³² In view of the contextual developments of the era, DuBois felt compelled to publicly speak out against Washington's advice toward blacks relinquishing their right to political participation.

Legislative machinations such as the "grandfather clauses of 1895 to 1910," which denied voting rights to black Americans who may have previously voted prior to 1867 without educational, property, or tax requirements; the "understanding clause," which allowed the election board to require prospective voters read and interpret a state and/or U.S. Constitution to the "conditional" satisfaction of the board member; the poll tax, and the increasingly severe social repercussions for voting (that ranged from loss of employment, to beatings and/or banishment, to public lynching) created an immediate chilling effect among African American voters. The rise of Jim Crow and the fall of black political power at the turn of the 20th Century set the stage for the perpetual disfranchisement of black voters in the South that lasted right up to the Freedom Summer Voter's Registration Project of 1964.

DuBois said for Washington to make such requests presented a "triple paradox,"

³² W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903, 41.

“(1) He is striving to nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage. (2) He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run. (3) He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates.”³³

and stressed, instead, that African Americans accept "not one jot or tittle less than their full manhood rights".³⁴ Many considered DuBois' statements so very radical because he openly questioned the validity of the accommodationist model which reasoned that African American industriousness would prove and guarantee their right to full citizenship and all of the privileges therein associated. Washington's reasoning, according to DuBois, demonstrated that the criteria for American citizenship differed between whites and blacks and that the right to vote was a "conditional" and not "constitutional" right of Americans.

DuBois' ideas, however, found a place among the Black Press as early as the 1880's and represented the ideology of such famous black publishers/editors like Ida B. Wells – 1892 (*Memphis Free Speech*), John Murphy – 1892 (*Baltimore Afro American*),³⁵ Robert Abbott - 1905 (*Chicago Defender*),³⁶ James H Anderson – 1909 (*New York Amsterdam News*),³⁷ Edwin Nathaniel Harleston - 1910 (*Pittsburgh Courier*),³⁸ and his

³³ Ibid., 42.

³⁴ W. E. B. DuBois, *Address to the Nation*, Delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the Niagara Movement, Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, 16 August 1900, 2.

³⁵ "What the Afro's Closed Fist Means," *Baltimore Afro-American* (July 18, 1942), quoted in Earnest L. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

³⁶ "Freedom of the Negro Press," *The Chicago Defender* (December 20, 1941), quoted in Earnest L. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

³⁷ Earnest L. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

own journal in 1910 (*The Crisis*) of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).³⁹

This intellectual debate over the most effective plan-of-action for blacks to become full participants and contributors of American society began over a century ago. For most of their adult lives, Washington and DuBois publicly argued the merits of accommodationism (which advocated that African Americans exercise patience as they assimilate into the mainstream populace) versus militancy (which called for an immediate demand of civil rights.) This same socio-political discussion continues among contemporary African American intellectuals.⁴⁰

Another important element of this debate, argued in the pages of the Black Press of the ‘New Negro’ era, centered on how African Americans should address the acceptable Southern-borne practice of lynching blacks without due process. Accommodationists generally thought Negroes should continue their efforts to “uplift” themselves with education and economic prosperity. DuBois and his followers, journalist and publisher Ida B. Wells in particular, took a more definitive stand against the practice by using the “power of the press” to expose the illegalities and inhumanity of this practice to northern whites and Europeans. With the help of the Black Press, DuBois and

³⁸Patrick S. Washburn, “*The Pittsburgh Courier’s Double V Campaign in 1942*,” *American Journalism* 3, no. 2 (1986): 77

³⁹“Now is the Time Not to be Silent,” *The Crisis* (January 7, 1942), quoted in Earnest L. Perry, “A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association’s Fight for Equality during World War II,” *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

⁴⁰See works by Cornell West, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Michael Eric Dyson, and Haki Madhubuti.

company successfully forged a very public “sociological wedge” between southern whites and their claim to Anglo-European civility.⁴¹

Because of her autobiographical railings against men in the Early Civil Rights Movement who took credit for work they had not done, some might argue that Wells displayed more characteristics of a Black Feminist. Using her talents as a journalist in the context of a social movement for the betterment of black men, women, and children and spending the latter half of her life as a social activist rather than a journalist demonstrates the duality of her location⁴² in Feminist history.⁴³

In keeping with the expectation of educated black women of her era, Wells primarily exemplified the Afro-Pragmatic Woman in the *later* part of her life in that when she married Ferdinand L. Barnett (an attorney and also an activist and owner of Chicago’s first black newspaper), she became co-owner and editor of the *Chicago Conservator* for the next two years until the birth of her second child in 1897, but soon surrendered her duties as professional journalist for the sake of her family. “All this public work was given up and I retired to the privacy of my home to give my attention to

⁴¹ Paula Giddings, “Missing in Action: Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and the Historical Record,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2001); Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12; J.J. Royster, *Southern Horrors and other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁴²Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth discussion on Wells and her proximity to Black Feminist theories.

⁴³ Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Robnett, Belinda, *How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 34; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” in *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women’s History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn: Carlson Press, 1995), 39; Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 72-114.

the training of my children.”⁴⁴ Although Wells went on to have two more children in 1901 and 1904, she continued her social activism in 1909 as one of 40 co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and in 1910 with the formation of the Negro Fellowship League to assist new black migrants from the South. Until her death in 1931, Wells continued her social activism through club work, free-lance writing, and an unsuccessful run for the Illinois State Senate while never formally returning full-time to the profession of journalism.⁴⁵

An equally important contemporary of Wells and fellow native Tennessean, Mary Church Terrell also believed that the advancement of African Americans depended on "uplifting" black families and spent 70 years pursuing that goal. An Afro-Pragmatic woman who although born (1863) to a wealthy businessman and salon operator and afforded an unusually elite old guard black lifestyle, Church Terrell spent much of her energy and resources fighting for the rights of those less fortunate. Often distinguished in biographies as the “first black woman to graduate Oberlin (OH) College, she found herself historically located among the first generation of educated African American southern women.⁴⁶ A prolific contributor to many journals of the Black Press and a prominent clubwoman, Church Terrell was an active member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, a co-founder and first president of the celebrated National Association of Colored Women, along with her constant companion Ida B. Wells, a co-

⁴⁴ Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 250; Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 98-114.

⁴⁵ Ibid; Miriam DeCosta-Willis, ed., *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117-174; Gloria Wade-Gayles, “Black Women Journalists in the South, 1880-1905: An Approach to the Study of Black Women's History,” *Callaloo*, no. 11/13 (February-October 1981).

founder of the NAACP, a member of the War Camp Community Service during World War I, and numerous other organizations of advocacy.

Although married to Robert Terrell, a District of Columbia municipal judge, for over thirty years and a mother of four (daughter Phyllis and three other adopted children of close relatives), Church Terrell continued a life of social activism expressed through journalism, education, and direct social activism. She spent a great deal of her time on the lecture circuit denouncing segregation and fostered the same type of lifestyle for her children. Her last and perhaps one of her most important protests took place in 1953 Washington, D.C. when she marched (with the assistance of a cane) and carried a sign demanding the integration of downtown *Kresge's* department store and its adjoining *Thompson's* restaurant. The next year and only a few months after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, she died at the age of ninety. One of her most famous quotes summarizes her reasons for conducting a life-long battle to uplift women and African Americans,

The elective franchise is withheld from one half of its citizens, many of whom are intelligent, cultured, and virtuous, while it is unstintingly bestowed upon the other, some of whom are illiterate, debauched and vicious, because the word "people," by an unparalleled exhibition of lexicographical acrobatics, has been turned and twisted to mean all who were shrewd and wise enough to have themselves born boys instead of girls, or who took the trouble to be born white instead of black.⁴⁷

An often overlooked media contemporary of Wells and Terrell, Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1872-1935), although much younger, also, expressed her commitment to social activism through literary journalism. Originally a bookkeeper and Dillard University-trained teacher, Dunbar-Nelson had a particular passion and gift for writing. Her first

⁴⁷ Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 115-175.

publication in 1895, *Violet and Other Tales*, garnered her the attention of fellow poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, which led to their marriage three years later. Her marriage to the celebrated author brought her wide acclaim for their dual publishing, *Poems of Cabin and Field* and *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, in 1899 (his and hers respectively.)

After her separation from Dunbar in 1901 and his death in 1906, Dunbar-Nelson married again in 1910 to Henry Arthur Callis and began her social activism over the next few years as a field organizer for the Mid-Atlantic States Women's Suffrage Movement. She married for the last time in 1916 to Wilmington Advocate (DE) Publisher Robert J. Nelson and within the year published a two-part article, "People of Color in Louisiana," in the scholarly *Journal of Negro History*. A devotee to the uplift of the 'New Negro' and an active clubwoman, she wrote poetry and prose for such journals as *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Lift*, A. Phillip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) newspaper *The Messenger*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the NAACP's *Crisis*.⁴⁸

While yet a major contributor to the Harlem Renaissance, between 1918 and 1922, Dunbar-Nelson escalated her social activism as a field representative of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense, a member of the State Republican Committee of Delaware Negro Women, a member of the State Federation of Colored Women and co-founder of the Industrial School for Colored Girls (Marshalltown, DE) and joined Wells' national anti-lynching campaign and headed the

⁴⁸ Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 176-220; Tonya Bolden, "Biographies," *Digital Schomburg: African American Writers of the 19th Century* (New York: The New York Public Library, 2000), http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html. DIGITAL SCHOMBURG AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY; http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

Anti-Lynching Crusaders in Delaware. Over the next decade, she routinely contributed to many journals of the Black Press including James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* until her death in 1935.⁴⁹

Unlike Wells and Terrell, Dunbar-Nelson never had any children and throughout her comparatively short life spent as much time as a journalist and as she did a social activist. However, she still fits with the paradigm of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism in that she used avenues of communication to facilitate her activism for the rights of women, African Americans, and children.⁵⁰

The Black Press Moves Folk Up North and Through the War Years

After the failure of Reconstruction and the systematic institution of Jim Crow, most of the Black Press functioned as watchdogs for legal and political injustices permitted primarily in the South. The *Chicago Defender* (with an influential edition in the Tri-State area of Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas) particularly angered southern whites with its editorials urging blacks to leave the insidious Jim Crow laws and cotton fields of the South for the North's booming factories and less-sinister rules of segregation.⁵¹ Newspapers like the *Afro-American* (Baltimore), *Amsterdam News* (New York), *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* essentially became a major impetus for the First and Second migration of blacks from the South to the North.⁵² By the onset of

⁴⁹ Gloria T. Hull, "Modern American Poetry: An Alice Dunbar-Nelson Chronology," *Modern American Poetry: An Online Journal and Multimedia Companion to Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (2000), http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/dunbar-nelson/chronology.htm.

⁵⁰ Jinx Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 199.

⁵¹ Carole Marks, *Farewell, We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 17; Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1915-1945* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 20-29.

⁵² "The *Chicago Defender* has always advised Southern blacks to stay at home and fight for their rights, but in response to the economic opportunities created by the war, Abbott reversed his position. With

World War I in 1914, these newspapers, often distributed underground by Pullman porters on trains⁵³ and sold by newsboys who risked lynching, provided a forum for a continuous and sometimes exhaustive partnership between African American Civil Rights and the Black Press.⁵⁴ The political stance of the Black Press shifted somewhat during these years in that most black papers, on both sides of the Negro intellectual debate, came together and supported America's interest in World War I for the sake of "preserving democracy."⁵⁵

By 1919, the Association of the Negro Press had come into being and provided a standardized and fact-checking news service to all outlets of the Black Press.⁵⁶ This new facet of the Black Press proved important in that it helped distribute reliable information to every African American journal, which in turn provided accurate and uniform news stories to local black communities. On one hand, this approach helped quell the resurgence of life threatening rumors in some communities. On the other, it created a network of information that helped its readers make informed political, social, and

characteristic enthusiasm, Abbott used the full resources of the paper—articles, editorials, cartoons, poems, and even songs—in a campaign to urge the *Defender's* readers to come to the North. The paper even printed train schedules, one-way to Chicago." Stanley Nelson, producer, *The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords*, DVD (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1998).

⁵³ Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Willey and Company, 1891; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969); Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press: New York, 1827-1847* (Northport, Alabama: Vision Press, 1992), 10; Julius Thompson, *The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

⁵⁵ Earnest L. Perry, "It's Time to Force a Change: The African American Press' Campaign for a True Democracy during World War II," *Journalism History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 85.

⁵⁶ Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1915-1945* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 15.

economic decisions. Perhaps most importantly, it fostered a lasting relationship of trust between the African American community and Black Press editors.⁵⁷

Toward the end of World War I, many Black Press editors and readers questioned the wisdom of African Americans,⁵⁸ subject to the laws and moirés of Jim Crow, giving their lives in battle on behalf of an America that sustained their oppression. Most editors of the Black Press, however, agreed to “close ranks” (at the urging of DuBois) for the sake of “saving Democracy.”⁵⁹ During the years between the world wars, the Black Press and its leadership collectively developed strategies to hold America accountable for its treatment of African Americans in the First World War.⁶⁰ By the Second World War, the Black Press publicly promoted the campaign of “Double ‘V’” – victory against the Axis powers abroad and victory against Jim Crow at home (started by the *Pittsburgh Courier*) as a “strategy” to promote better treatment of African Americans in the war and when they returned home. With the onset of the second major migration of blacks from the South to the North, the depletion of white troops abroad and factory workers at home, and the political debate to integrate the military raging in Congress, the Black Press demonstrated its domestic “power” to affect the war effort.⁶¹

As a result of America’s war years and the aforementioned Jim Crow treatment of African Americans, the notion of Black Liberation or Nationalism began to blossom

⁵⁷ Armistead Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 75.

⁵⁸ Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in World War II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 12; Earnest L. Perry, “It’s Time to Force a Change: The African American Press’ Campaign for a True Democracy during World War II,” *Journalism History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 87.

⁵⁹ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York, NY: Holt, 1993), 578; Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in World War II*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 10.

⁶⁰ Earnest L. Perry, “A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association’s Fight for Equality during World War II,” *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 34.

⁶¹ Patrick S. Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” *American Journalism* 3, no. 2 (1986): 77.

among black intellectuals. The previous discussion of the legacy of early black women who facilitated their social activism through journalism now continues with several remarkable women beginning in the 1920's.

Amy Jacques Garvey (1895–1973), born to middle-class parents in Kingston, Jamaica was a former secretary and second wife to Pan-Africanist and UNIA-ACL President General Marcus Garvey (1922). She remembered her introduction to racism at the age of 23 as a new immigrant to the United States and said her commitment to social activism stemmed from that experience and not from her childhood in a somewhat elitist environment of the Jamaican caste system.⁶²

Jacques Garvey spent much of her life as a journalist for her husband's paper, *The Negro World*, (even taking on the role of editor and publisher upon his imprisonment), which afforded her the historical role as one of only a few "pioneer Black women journalists and publishers of the twentieth century." One of her most important contributions to Black Press history included the addition of "Our Women and What They Think" – a women's page to *The Negro World*. Not only did it provide an outlet for women's intellectual and social discussions, but it also added to the contemporary trend in American newspapers to feature segregated columns for the showcase of women's literary and journalistic talents.⁶³

Jacques Garvey proved herself a true Afro-Pragmatic woman in that she took up the social cause of her husband with the publication of *Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey – Volumes I, II & III*, routinely contributed to the Harlem Journal, *African*, and

⁶² Broussard, Jinx. *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004, 40.)

⁶³ Dustin Harp, "Newspapers' Transition from Women's to Style Pages: What were they Thinking?" *Journalism* 7, no. 2 (2006).

other countless journals of the Black Press. By 1963, she published her first book, *Garvey and Garveyism* and later in 1968 a booklet, “Black Power in America: The Power of the Human Spirit.” She continued to champion the tenets of her husband’s philosophy of Black Nationalism and Liberation even until death in 1973 in her birthplace of Kingston, Jamaica.⁶⁴

Contrary in philosophy to Garveyism, another competing black liberation Movement of this era promoted trade unionism and economic cooperatives. An integrationist and socialist, A. Phillip Randolph encouraged black laborers to discharge the directives of Black Nationalism’s capitalism and “use the same instrumentalities to save themselves as white workers.”⁶⁵ Understanding the general biases of this generation against trade unions, Randolph sought to create an African American labor union equally structured, and therefore equally viable, with that of white labor organizations. In keeping with the mores and the social acceptance of the period’s “cult of true womanhood,”⁶⁶ Randolph developed a division of labor based on gender. He recognized, however, the significance of women’s work to social movements⁶⁷ and saw it as an effective way to

⁶⁴ Broussard, Jinx. *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Ula Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁶⁵ Jervis B. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (1973; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 127-129.

⁶⁶ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151. “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, *submissiveness* [italics mine], and domesticity.... Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them, she was promised happiness and power.”

⁶⁷ “The council addressed members not as ‘woman,’ but as consumers. Consequently, it proposed a variety of techniques that consumers could use to attack economic problems in the African American community. The program’s feminism emanated from its recognition of women’s political agency, its insistence that women were essential to the Movement for racial democracy and economic justice. Council members argued that women’s issues were consumer issues, and thus both economic and racial justice issues....while the program of the Women’s Economic Council contained elements of communal feminism and Womanism, its class-conscious, integrationist intent distinguished the council from other women’s

increase membership numbers and garner power among the local chapters. “All of the standard railroad unions have powerful Ladies Auxiliaries that are great factors in the labor movement, and the Porters’ Brotherhood will build a similar structure.”⁶⁸

In the fall of 1925, Randolph and Naomi DesVerney, organized the Women’s Economic Council (WEC), also known as The Ladies’ Auxiliary, of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and proclaimed its mission to “bolster a husband’s morale, making him feel like a man, restoring him to the fight. The wife would win vicariously, his victory would be hers.”⁶⁹ Most members of this early twentieth-century African American women’s organization did not hold memberships in the elite black “club women” groups;⁷⁰ in fact, the “Brotherhood women and men sought partnerships with [rank-and-file] trade unionists, white and black, in [a] common cause against capitalism.”⁷¹ The group utilized many working class women whose efforts proved paramount to the BSCP’s success as the first African American labor organization.

groups.” Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Sleeping Car Porters* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 65.

⁶⁸Ibid., 61.

⁶⁹ Chateauvert highlights an important line of reasoning about these early twentieth-century women that will be echoed nearly 40 years later by the older women of this study: “To African American men and women, the demand for [black] manhood carried a variety of meanings. In traditional politics, it meant emancipation from slavery, suffrage, equal political rights, and equal pay for equal work. Manhood also signified the right of black men to protect black women and children from white men, and to preserve the family by restoring mothers to the home. In this sense, manhood rights were not for men only.” Ibid., 4, 46, 61.

⁷⁰ It should be understood that civil rights luminaries like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Irene McCoy Gaines, A’lelia Walker, Mary McDowell, Mary Church Terrell, and Mary McLeod Bethune supported the efforts of the Brotherhood through their membership on the Citizens’ Committee, but very few such “club women” regularly joined the local city chapter of the WEC. In fact, “even among the wives of the BSCP national organizers, only Walter (Mrs. C.L.) Dellums actively participated in the Oakland local’s activities. Lucille Randolph [Mrs. A. Phillip], Elizabeth Webster, and Hazel Smith had their own circles of social service and club friends and did not [initially] belong to their local Women’s Economic Councils. Historian Deborah Gray White argues such divisions were ‘the cost of club work, the price of black feminism’.” Ibid., 43-46. Some twenty years later (1946), Lucille Randolph joined the local New York Ladies’ Auxiliary “when her husband paid for her dues” Ibid., 14.

⁷¹Ibid., 46.

BSCP International President Halena Wilson⁷² and International Secretary-Treasurer Rosina Corrothers Tucker⁷³ particularly endure as noteworthy examples of black female advocates of this era who utilized the Black Press to further the civil rights of all African Americans. Although they had differing opinions on the role of BSCP in the Labor Movement,⁷⁴ Wilson and Tucker often worked in tandem to secure the support of and properly train African American women for the organization's vital work.

Exhibiting the classic characteristics of an Afro Pragmatic Woman, auxiliary president Wilson set the tone for subsequent BSCP women in that she advocated wifely support for the public image (and consequently uplift) of the black male (husband.) Tucker's notion of black female empowerment, overshadowed by African Americans' acceptance of mainstream early twentieth-century ideas of womanhood and a bit before its time, fell to the background and became a secondary cause among BSCP women.⁷⁵

⁷² "(1895-1975)...became president of the Chicago Ladies' Auxiliary in 1931...Wilson's husband, Benjamin, joined the Brotherhood before 1927 and once served on the local executive board; he died in 1955. For most of their married life, the Wilsons lived in a four-room apartment of Chicago's south side. They had no children.... Despite attacks of arthritis and perhaps depression for which she was often hospitalized in later years, she presided over both the International and Chicago Auxiliaries until 1956. The international president earned a salary for her labors, but Wilson identified herself as a housewife and a trade unionist, not as a worker." Ibid., 12-13.

⁷³ "(1881-1987)...described herself as a worker in her autobiography, *My Life as I Have Lived It*...A native of Washington, D.C., at seventeen she became the third wife of Harlem Renaissance poet, novelist, and minister, James David Corrothers...They had one child, Henry, and also raised Corrothers' son by his first marriage. In 1918, she married her second husband, Berthea, a Pullman porter on the Broadway Limited. They were members of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church. Rosina Tucker challenged its class-conscious minister, the Reverend Francis Grimke, to support the BSCP; she was the first woman to be elected a trustee of this prestigious church.... Widowed in 1963, Tucker remained in her three-bedroom Northeast Washington home near Gallaudet University until her death at the age of 106." Ibid., 13. Like Wilson, Tucker also earned a salary for her work as an international officer.

⁷⁴ "Wilson believed in the in the union wife, a woman who enjoyed the domestic security of her husband's wages and wielded her economic power to advance the labor movement. Tucker believed in the union woman, and would have spoken on behalf of female Brotherhood members. She thought the Auxiliary should be 'the big sister' to black women workers everywhere; she wanted to organize trade unions for their own economic advancement." Ibid., 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

Whatever their differences, Wilson and Tucker vigilantly organized the wives, daughters, mothers, and female associates of the BSCP.

Among the officers, Wilson, in particular, mostly contributed to the women's pages of *The Black Worker*⁷⁶ - the BSCP's journal. The women cooperated on behalf of their husbands' efforts with the union and worked towards the betterment of all African American railroad workers through their work with the newspaper. Wilson utilized contemporary scholarship on labor history, economics, and race studies to demonstrate to *Black Worker* readers the importance of their participation in the Movement. Chateauvert details Wilson's contributions not only to labor history, but also African American feminist history, parenting, and economic development strategies. For example, her series "Organized Labor Movement and the Ladies' Auxiliaries," chronicled the gendered practice of workers' protest dating from Biblical times through World War II.

The various histories of the Organized Labor Movement indicate that there was no intention in the earlier days, on the part of the labor organizer, to include women in a movement that was intended to be purely masculine in its composition.⁷⁷

Her articles on parenting acknowledged the important role of women in the trade union movement, but also encouraged parenting practices that cultivated socially aware children.

The 'Modern Negro Mother' should indoctrinate her children with the three principles of trade unionism, 'Unity, organization, and cooperation.' Children who learned this creed would advance the race as adults...Wilson told

⁷⁶*The Black Worker* became the second official paper of the BSCP in 1929. "While the eight-page newspaper regularly covered news items beyond the narrow confines of the BSCP, it never assumed the cultural significance of the *Messenger*. Unlike the earlier journal, *The Black Worker* reported women's activities on a separate page devoted to the Woman's Economic Councils.... With their own page of news, women now had a forum in which to discuss their concerns as union wives." *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

Brotherhood women that the labor movement needed strength as consumers, as housewives, and as mothers.”⁷⁸

Perhaps most effectively, the WEC’s cooperative employed economic strategies that demonstrated the power of consumerism to its workers and outside merchants. Auxiliary members monitored prices for local ration boards and passed the information on to the U.S. Government and their local black communities.

‘Do your part to help prevent a catastrophe,’ Wilson asked *Black Worker* readers. ‘Refuse to pay more than the ceiling price. Help OPA [Office of Price Administration] help your community - Enlist as a volunteer to work on your Price Control Board.’⁷⁹

Black Worker articles on tactics of consumer cooperation often addressed issues of commodity price and rent control, preparation for post-war reconversion, financial and savings planning practices, home and business budgeting, war bond and stamp purchasing, credit union participation and credit building strategies, union buying practices that adhered to AFL’s “We Don’t Patronize” list of unfair business and instructing readers on the importance of honoring picket lines.⁸⁰

The Brotherhood also found union buying an effective tool against the Pullman Company. Porters and maids were required to purchase their uniforms from company-designated suppliers. In response, the BSCP [and it’s Ladies’ Auxiliaries] told its members to ask for union label uniforms.⁸¹

Clearly the *Black Worker* functioned as a critical element of the labor, and thus the civil rights, movement of the early twentieth century. In the tradition of Afro-Pragmatic activists before and after them, the rank-and-file women of the Ladies’ Auxiliary contributed to this key journal for the purpose of uplifting their men who could

⁷⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁸¹ Ibid., 153.

not afford to advocate for justice for fear of Pullman reprisals. They lifted up their children who learned first-hand the significance of social activism and became well situated to carry on the struggle of civil rights in the modern era. And, they lifted up their community by enlarging the legacy of black women who employed the power of the Black Press to gain civil rights for all African Americans - often at the expense of omission from the canon of journalism and civil rights history.

The Mainstream Press Finally Takes Notice of the Black Press

Even after numerous African Americans made significant contributions to World Wars I and II, the mainstream media continued to ignore their role as productive citizens and often reinforced governmental and social policies to suppress their human and civil rights.⁸² For example, prior to the end of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, the Black Press served as the *only* place to air public grievances since the mainstream press routinely segregated or purposely overlooked letters to the editor.⁸³ For this reason, the Black Press of the 1950's and early 1960's took on an unprecedented role of leadership in American journalism in its national coverage of breaking civil rights news events.

Beginning with the 1954 landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*,⁸⁴ the Black Press heralded the first major blow to Jim Crow with massive media coverage and the mainstream press followed suit. Until this time, such national media attention had not been shone on the African American community and the Black Press

⁸² Earnest L. Perry, "It's Time to Force a Change: The African American Press' Campaign for a True Democracy during World War II," *Journalism History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 85.

⁸³ Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1915-1945* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983).

⁸⁴ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977); Mark Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

since the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865.⁸⁵ The very next year, August 1955, the Black Press' vivid news coverage of the Mississippi killing of 14-year-old Emmett Till⁸⁶ demonstrated the vigilance and synergy of the African American community and its press. Together they showed their ability to soundly secure the attention of the nation and the mainstream press to their mounting civil rights issues.

By the end of that year (December 1955) and into 1956, the Montgomery Bus Boycott put both mainstream press and Black Press members for the first time on the same frontlines of covering the Civil Rights Movement.⁸⁷ The beginning of a shift towards tandem coverage took place between the years of 1957 (the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas)⁸⁸ and 1962 (the integration of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi.) Due to what famed civil rights photojournalist Charles Moore termed as “white-privilege of safety,” eventually the mainstream press had more access to these pivotal and violent civil rights events than their African American counterparts.⁸⁹

By the March on Washington in August of 1963, the mainstream press had taken more seriously the national coverage of African American civil rights events (unlike the previously proposed mass March on Washington in 1941, spearheaded by A. Phillip

⁸⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁶ *Jet*, September 1, 1955, Volume 8, Cover Story; Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement*, 3rd ed. (Troy, MI: Bedford Publishers Inc., 1994); Christopher Metress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Gerald Baldasty and others, “News, Race and the Status Quo: The Case of Emmett Louis Till” (paper presented at the American Journalism Historians Annual Convention, Oregon School of Communication University of Washington, Portland, OR, October 7-9, 1999).

⁸⁷ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989).

⁸⁸ Deborah Kades, “Writing for Equal Rights: African-American Newspapers and the Little Rock Crisis of 1957” (paper presented at the Midwest Journalism History Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, April 10-11, 1992).

⁸⁹ Michael Durham, *Powerful Days the Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991).

Randolph).⁹⁰ Because the Black Press had gained so much momentum in the earliest years of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, its proposed coverage of the event signaled to the national mainstream press that it could no longer ignore such a massive demonstration as unworthy of attention. Both the Black Press and the mainstream press found themselves shoulder to shoulder in covering subsequent civil rights events including ones of particular import to this study - 1964's Mississippi's "Freedom Summer Voter Registration" campaign, the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.⁹¹

The Black Press of Mississippi Tells the Stories No One Else Will

One such interaction among black and white press members helped craft the ever-scathing *Mississippi Free Press*. Owned and published by a northern white man (Charles Butts), edited primarily by a southern white woman (Lucy Komisar), and staffed by blacks and whites, this journal courageously criticized not only local citizens' reticence to the onset of the Modern Civil Rights Movement within the state, but took particular aim at law enforcement and mainstream press efforts to thwart the success of it.⁹² In an effort

⁹⁰ Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2002), 200; Paula Pfeiffer, A. Philip Randolph: *Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 1; Earnest L. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 88; Michael Durham, *Powerful Days the Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991); Clint C. Wilson, *Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991).

⁹¹ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); Vanessa D. Murphree, "The Selling of Civil Rights: The Communication Section of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," *Journalism History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 21-32; Tom Hayden, "SNCC: July-October 1961 from 'Revolution in Mississippi'," in *Reporting Civil Rights: Part One-American Journalism 1941-1963*, comp. Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, and Bill Kovach (New York: Library of America, 2003), 619-626; Michael Durham, *Powerful Days the Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991); Sanford Wexler, *An Eyewitness History: The Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Facts on File, 1993).

⁹² *Mississippi Free Press*, M395, Folder 5, Komisar (Lucy) Civil Rights Collection, 1961-1991, Southern Mississippi University Archives, Hattiesburg, MS, 1964.

to demonstrate the significance of the Freedom Summer projects, “All of the stories of the June 27th issue were about the missing civil rights workers (Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner.) The lead article of that issue boldly criticized the slowness of the federal authorities to authorize a search for the three civil rights workers who disappeared in Neshoba County.”⁹³

In the tradition of the rest of the Black Press, the *Free Press* also provided detailed description and photos of violent events in Mississippi as a way to bring attention to the plight of individuals who supported the Movement. “The Free Press reprinted portions of an article about the mutilation and lynching of a black man and his wife. According to the article, the victims’ fingers were cut off while large corkscrews bore into their bodies and were pulled out with ‘spirals of flesh.’”⁹⁴ Consistently in contrast with the few other competing black papers of the era, the *Free Press* centered its news coverage on the injustices aimed at and the advances of the mounting Civil Rights Movement.

At the other end of the spectrum among the few black newspapers in Mississippi, the *Jackson Advocate* and its editor Percy Greene took a rather divergent approach to coverage of the Movement. Formerly a true “advocate” for the plight of African Americans and marginalized whites in Mississippi’s 1940’s, Greene did an about face by the mid-1950’s and became one the most controversial figures of the 1960’s Black Press. Once a well-respected accommodationist, Greene obviously wanted to see an end to

⁹³ *Mississippi Free Press* (vol. 5, 1964), M4126, University of Southern Mississippi Archives, Hattiesburg, MS; Jinx C. Broussard, “Saviors or Scalawags: The Mississippi Black Press’s Contrasting Coverage of Civil Rights Workers and Freedom Summer, June-August 1964,” *American Journalism* 19, no. 3 (2002), 63-85.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

segregation, however, he thought the civil rights leaders of the day went about it in a way that simultaneously damaged relations with whites and disenfranchised blacks.⁹⁵

At nearly every turn, Greene used the pages of his *Advocate* to lambaste the achievements of the civil rights workers. In the case of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, he adopted the philosophy of his subsequent benefactors - the White Citizens' Council,⁹⁶ "...no matter what kind of decision the United Supreme Court makes, government in the United States starts at the local level, and that no decision by any court is stronger than the public opinion, for or against it, at the local level." Regarding the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he editorialized, "[the boycott] succeeded in making matters worse for the masses of Montgomery Negroes"; and he renamed Freedom Summer as the "Twentieth Century Version of the Tragic Reconstruction Era."⁹⁷

The negative portrayal of freedom workers, rhetoric that minimized violence against blacks and provided a false-sense of progress, and the use of pejorative language in headlines represented the recurrent press routine of Greene's *Jackson Advocate*. For example, in its June 6, 1964 edition, the *Advocate* ran a front-page article with the following phrase in the lead paragraph, "...violence from civil rights demonstrators." The rest of the article falsely reported that in retaliation for their violence, the cottage Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. occupied had been "riddled with bullets in a violent outburst" and

⁹⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

⁹⁶ Formed October 1954 in Greenwood, Mississippi in response to the May 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that segregation was illegal, the White Citizens' Council sought to find "'respectable' methods of defending white supremacy.... The Councils thought the best long-term goal solution to the race problems was to drive half-a-million black people out of the state [Mississippi]," Charles Payne. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 35.

⁹⁷ Jinx C. Broussard, "Saviors or Scalawags: The Mississippi Black Press's Contrasting Coverage of Civil Rights Workers and Freedom Summer, June-August 1964," *American Journalism* 19, no. 3 (2002), 68.

that one of his aides had been shot at while sitting in a car. In a move that “broke the proverbial camel’s back,” Greene accepted funds for his paper from the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission; an organization created to counter the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement.⁹⁸

Ironically, as integration took hold, the mainstream press increased coverage of traditionally black issues and began recruiting talented African American journalists. The Black Press became a victim to its own success of integration. For example, the once beloved *Arkansas State Press*, started in 1941 by civil-rights crusader Daisy Bates⁹⁹ and her husband, shut down (after the city's Central High crisis in 1959) primarily due to the withdrawal of white advertising revenue and the depletion of the number of veteran African American journalists who went to work for larger mainstream newspapers. This scenario created a deficit of experienced journalists to train and mentor the next generation of reporters.¹⁰⁰

The Black Press has and continues to speak to and for black politics, present an alternate and positive portrayal of African American life, and provide a public forum for discussion about and among blacks nationwide. It also offered a forum for activists and scholars to discuss social ideologies, teach economic and political empowerment, and showcase artistic works without censure from the dominant press. The Black Press has

⁹⁸ Ibid., 66; Williams, Julian “Percy Green and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission,” *Journalism History*, 28:2, Summer 2002.

⁹⁹ The Afro-Pragmatic Womanist approach is applicable to Bates because she used her journalistic skills in a social movement (the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas) for the benefit of the entire black race and valued the practical routine of working behind the image of men or youth.

¹⁰⁰ Revived only briefly in 1984, Bates finally stopped publishing the paper in 1987. Michael Durham, *Powerful Days the Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991, 3; Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock, A Memoir* (New York: David McKay Company, 1962).

represented the spectrum of African American opinion and social issues for nearly 150 years and has helped blacks publicly define their own identity, find a sense of unity through establishing a communication network, highlight world events from a black perspective, celebrate black achievement, and cooperatively work for black equality.¹⁰¹

In addition to the Black Press' primary function of informing and uplifting African Americans, it also took on the roles of social registry, literary forum, and historical archive.¹⁰² The Black Press sustained its role in the Black Public Sphere and kept African Americans informed of political, social, and economic issues. It collectively gave them a "voice" when the mainstream press did not speak on their behalf. In return, throughout every era of this country's history, African American women gifted their talents to the expression and empowerment of the Black Press.

Women's Place in the Modern Civil Rights Movement

Unfortunately, American history and Black Press history, perhaps unwittingly, have silenced the "voice" or role of African American *women* from the accepted canon of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement with its narrative of the "Great Man" paradigm. This model generally assigns more value to the traditionally masculine role of national leadership over the feminine role of local grass-root-level organizer.¹⁰³ Most historical photographs and writings posit the man many call the "Father of the Civil Rights

¹⁰¹ Robert Fay, "The Story of the African American Press," *Crisis*, July/August 1999, 46.

¹⁰² According to veteran Black Press Columnist Vernon Jarrett, "We didn't exist in the other papers. We were neither born, we didn't get married, we didn't die, we didn't fight in any wars; we never participated in anything of a scientific achievement. We were truly invisible unless we committed a crime. But in the BLACK PRESS, the Negro press, we did get married. They showed us our babies being born. They showed us graduating. They showed our PhDs." Stanley Nelson, producer, *The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords*, DVD (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1998).

¹⁰³ Owen J. Dryer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory and Conflict," *Professional Geographer*, November 2000, 663.

Movement," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other notable men like Andrew Young, Ralph Abernathy, and Jesse Jackson as the "face" of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

In most every American social movement, however, women often utilized their kitchens, homes, schools, neighborhood and civic organizations as backdrops and foundations for the work that later gained national attention with a masculine figure at the helm. Contrary to the established record, recent scholarship has brought to light that such women became important conduits to and for both the mainstream and Black Press coverage of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Such women as Daisy Bates, Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, Jo Anne Robinson, Gloria Richardson, and the essential Ella Baker, proved foundational to its success and should be included in the pixel count of the "image" of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. No doubt, countless other nameless matriarchs of this social reform remain yet discovered.¹⁰⁴ The goal of this study is to focus on a few such women and examine their roles as activists and communicators.

The "Face" of Female Leadership

In harmony with this study's examination of women activists of Mississippi's Freedom Summer 1964 and in an effort to synthesize and put a "face" on black female leadership, the following discussion centers on only *one* woman whom this study acknowledges as a prototype of several women leaders of this era. Perhaps most instrumental to the success of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, Ella Baker's galvanizing work with young people provided an effective template for the subsequent national movement of politically active American youth. Baker instructed young men and

¹⁰⁴ Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 3.

women of many races who later became the foot soldiers for much of the civil progress in the South. She exemplified courage, brilliance, and fortitude that only recently has been documented and put into the canon of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁵

Baker worked for more than 50 years as an anti-racist and social activist. A native of Raleigh, North Carolina and a participant observer of the Harlem Renaissance, her work and training as a field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP) took her throughout the South. Baker diligently worked in this capacity at a time when in the South simple membership in this organization could result in punishment and/or death. While honing her leadership skills at the Highlander Folk School in the mid-to-late 1950's and working in the Montgomery (Alabama) NAACP, Baker labored in the early years of the Movement with the likes of Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, and JoAnne Robinson.¹⁰⁶

Understanding the importance of complementing leadership skills with developing effective networks, Baker often called upon these women and some of her male associates from the North to assist in her efforts in the South. For example, as the Montgomery boycott progressed and expenses mounted, Baker worked closely with these women, but also called on several of her New York contacts such as A. Phillip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Stanley Levinson to raise funds for the effort.¹⁰⁷

Never one to acquiesce to anyone because of public image or notoriety, Baker often found herself at odds with prominent men of the Movement and continuously tried

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Aprele Elliott, "Ella Baker: Free Agent in the CRM," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 5 (1996): 596.

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 173.

to strike a balance between respect for leadership and her sound experience. For example, when the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of desegregation on public transportation, King, Jr. expected and encouraged a lull in protest activities in the area. Baker, however, felt the time proved best to continue striking while the irons remained hot.¹⁰⁸ This struggle between male leadership and her vast experience became characteristic of her participation in traditionally conservative African American civil rights organizations. Although Baker issued the call for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which included over 60 ministers representing several core civil rights groups to come together as one powerful organization, she understood early on the only acceptable role for her remained in the background.

I knew from the very beginning, as a woman, as an older woman, in a group of ministers who were largely supporters; there was no place for me to come into a leadership role. The competition wasn't worth it.¹⁰⁹

I had known...that there would never be any role in a leadership capacity with SCLC. Why? First, I am a woman. Also, I am not a minister...The basic attitude of men and especially ministers, as to...the role of women in their church setups is that of taking orders, not providing leadership.¹¹⁰

Baker too, fits within the model of an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist in that she spent all of her life as a social activist, who certainly made strides as a woman leader, but also saw the usefulness of adhering to gender customs for the sake of a social movement. When she had the opportunity to head up a civil rights organization she did so, but not for

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 175; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 91.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 597.

¹¹⁰ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 92.

the benefit of women's image or rights, but for all young whites and blacks, males and females.¹¹¹

After severing her ties with the older traditional civil rights groups, Baker fostered activism among primarily high school and college students, which became her greatest contribution to the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. She, along with several other activists, created the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and used the Socratic method to help students develop their own social consciousness and a sense of responsibility towards effecting change in their communities through nonviolent measures. She encouraged her students to resist the lures of SCLC and the NAACP, where they would be subject to a more hierarchical system, in favor of a group-centered leadership or participatory democracy established within smaller branch offices of the SNCC. Baker's organization found its greatest success in the state of Mississippi, particularly during the 1964 Summer Voter Registration Project, where many small towns formed SNCC branches from among its local residents.¹¹²

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which combated systematic endeavors to keep African Americans out of Mississippi's one-party system, resulted from the many social and political initiatives of SNCC. The MFDP joined Fannie Lou Hamer in lambasting the 1964 Democratic National Convention's acceptance of

¹¹¹ Baker organized her first youth organization in 1930—The Young Negro Cooperative League (YNCL) in New York. During the 1930s, she chaired the Youth Committee of One Hundred, worked with the Young People's Community Forum and, served as an adviser to the New York NAACP Youth Council. After denied the national NAACP position of youth director in 1938, Baker became a field secretary and an original co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Committee (SCLC) and founder of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

¹¹² Barbara Ransby, "Behind-the-Scenes View of a Behind-the-Scenes Organizer: The Roots of Ella Baker's Political Passions," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 42; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Mississippi's all-white representation as “recklessly inaccurate.”¹¹³ Future presidential candidates Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale helped formulate an unacceptable compromise (a.k.a. as the “Mississippi Challenge”) that allowed two MFDP delegates to sit that year as at-large members.¹¹⁴ Undeniably, Baker’s work proved foundational to the success of not only African American civil rights in Mississippi, but also civil rights on a national scale.

Scholars say that history has partially portrayed or neglected to fully reveal the aforementioned women, and many others like them, due to a shallow understanding of their place in the memorial backdrop of the entire Movement. Owen Dyer explains the effect such historical omissions have had on the American psyche.

On the memorialized landscape, the presence of what might be described as, "the feminized mass," by virtue of its numbers and enthusiasm and position as congregation vis-à-vis the pulpit or marchers vis-à-vis the head of the march, plays the allegorical role of confirming the righteous leadership of individual men.¹¹⁵

This study confirms that many of these women certainly showed industriousness in that they transmitted information to the African American masses on both local and national levels. And that expectedly, their primary tool for accomplishing this task required coordination with the Black Press. Through an examination of their interaction with the mainstream and Black Press and their use of alternative forms of communication in the Movement, this study also shows that some of these women held a notion of practicality, Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, which indirectly influenced history’s omission

¹¹³ Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Dutton/Penguin Books, 1993), 145-56.

¹¹⁴ Aprele Elliott, “Ella Baker: Free Agent in the CRM,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 26, no. 5 (1996), 601.

¹¹⁵ Owen J. Dyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory and Conflict,” *Professional Geographer*, November 2000, 664.

of the story of African American women and the press of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.¹¹⁶ In addition to hearing their personal stories, the examination of archived and personal artifacts such as diaries, professional and private journals, and first-hand recounting (oral histories) of the resourcefulness of these women yielded undiscovered scholarship in media history.

The preceding review on the influence and importance of African American women's contribution to the 1960's Civil Rights Movement highlights the unmentioned and often omitted ways these women contributed to Black Press history. The value of hearing the "voices" of these women through an oral history brings unparalleled understanding and meaning to an overlooked element of this Movement.¹¹⁷ The effectiveness of informing and organizing of a young generation of activists during one of the most unforgettable times in American history helps bring deeper awareness and more significance to those who sacrificed all they possessed for the sake of the overall Civil Rights Movement. The manner in which these women cooperated among themselves, with other grass-root organizations [like SNCC, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)] and both the mainstream and Black Press underscore the progress made among women whose civic-minded ancestors could not forge such collaboration.

SNCC, Freedom Summer 1964, and Black Women

In order to have a fruitful discourse about the role of black women in the success of SNCC and the 1964 Freedom Summer Project, one must go back to the point in

¹¹⁶ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 45.

¹¹⁷ Duchess Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 283.

history when the topic of African American women's contributions became a critical part of the internal dialogue among civil rights organizations. According to Dorothy Height, founder of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), strategy planning meetings leading up to the 1963 March on Washington brought to the fore African American women's overlooked contributions to the Movement.¹¹⁸

It is characteristic of black women to put the race issue ahead of everything else but we made it clear that we wanted to hear at least one woman in the March dealing with jobs and freedom. We knew, first hand, that most of the Civil Rights Movement audiences were largely comprised of women, children, and youth.¹¹⁹

Height maintains that the perfunctory gesture to seat a couple of African American women on the platform and say that Mahalia Jackson's solo vocal performance expressed a "representation of women's contribution" at the March essentially felt like a slap in the face for all of their efforts. "Nothing that women said or did broke the impasse blocking their participation. I've never seen a more immovable force. We could not get [acknowledgement of] women's participation taken seriously."¹²⁰

After several post-March meetings, Height says some black women began to mobilize themselves as a definitive power within the ranks of African American civil rights groups.

It also put us on guard that if we didn't speak up, nobody would. And, we began to realize that if we did not address issues such as this, if we did not

¹¹⁸ Dorothy I. Height, "We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to be Heard: Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 85; Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 244.

¹¹⁹ Dorothy I. Height, "We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to be Heard: Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 86.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

demand our rights, we were not going to get them. The women became much more aware and much more aggressive in facing up to sexism in our dealings with the male leadership in the Movement.¹²¹

Later in the fall of that same year, noted legal scholar, educator, and civil rights activist, Pauli Murray, summarized the shift in mood of many African American women involved in the Civil Rights Movement:

What emerges most clearly from events of the past several months is the tendency to assign women to a secondary or 'honoree' role instead of the partnership role in the Civil Rights Movement, which they have earned by their courage, intelligence, and dedication. It was bitterly humiliating for Negro Women on August 28 [1963] to see themselves accorded little more than the token recognition in the historic March on Washington. Not a single woman was invited to make one of the major speeches or to be part of the delegation of leaders who went to the White House. The omission was deliberate.¹²²

With such tensions setting the stage, there is no wonder the following year, 1964, became a seminal point in time not only for the Civil Rights Movement, but also for the women who helped forge its success. The fact that much of accepted civil rights history reinforces the erroneous perception that black men led this Movement remains a paradox since women in the South proved more politically active than their male counterparts and their efforts became known in the Mississippi Delta as the 'women's war:'

Women took civil rights workers into their homes, of course, giving them a place to eat and sleep, but women also canvassed more than men, showed up more frequently at mass meetings and demonstrations and more frequently attempted to register to vote. There appears to be no disagreement. It's no secret that young people and women led organizationally.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid., 89.

¹²² Ibid., 90.

¹²³ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 266.

To imply that male grass-roots activists held little or no leadership positions in Mississippi would be a fallacy; in fact, black males (in their late fifties and sixties) initiated the beginning of the Movement in this state. However, the driving force behind the Movement consisted of women between thirty and fifty and male and female youths (from teens to early twenties.)¹²⁴

These women wanted some sort of recognition, not for the sake of historical posterity, but rather (as noted by Height) to have visible representation of the very ones making the Movement a success – women and youths. They thought the image of women at the podium communicated an important message of self-recognition, hope, and steadfastness. In the end, these women not only acquiesced to the public exclusion of themselves, but they also indirectly supported the omission with their steadfast attendance. Now of course, this did not mean they felt satisfied about the decision to prohibit women from speaking, but in their minds, they could not find *practical* reasons for withdrawing their continued support of the March or the Movement – a perfect example of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism.

SNCC – The Vehicle to Drive Black Women’s Activism

From its earliest days women existed as a part of SNCC leadership. Founded by a woman, Ella Baker (co-founder of SCLC and one of the experienced women activists Dorothy Height referenced as a potential speaker at the 1963 March on Washington), the organization developed “non-traditional” sources of leadership.¹²⁵ In fact, the operating style of the group showed a disdain for bureaucracy and hierarchy, which had become

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, 171.

characteristic of older organizations, and embraced a new philosophy of inclusion to which black women more readily responded. “Had SNCC employed a more traditional style of organizing – e.g., working primarily through previously established leadership – it might not have achieved the degree of female participation it did.”¹²⁶ This notion of going “outside” the proverbial box of political and social protocol also became characteristic of the way the organization approached employing the media. Many of these women (and men) had their initial (and for some, life and career altering) contact with the press as members of SNCC. Feeling the freedom to go beyond the traditional role of woman activist, many developed a level of administrative creativity and interaction with the media they had never experienced.

Baker whole heartedly believed that those trained for leadership often brought into social movements the unsound notion that they must distance themselves from the community they represent, “[there existed] a false assumption that being a leader meant that you were separate and apart from the masses, and to a large extent people were to look up to you, and that your responsibility to the people was to represent them.”¹²⁷ Such disjuncture between traditional patriarchal ideologies of leader and community caused the majority of problems between Baker and many of the men she worked alongside.

Maddeningly to Baker, [Martin Luther, Jr.] King was at once the antithesis of the preacher type and its epitome. In private, he was personable, self-effacing, willing to listen, to serve, and to work hard – all qualities that had induced Baker to extend her volunteer SCLC work for a full year...Within SCLC, however King was a preacher’s preacher, which

¹²⁶ Ibid., 268.

¹²⁷ Ula Taylor, “‘Negro Women are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers’: Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927,” *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2000).

brought him a degree of adulation that few institutions outside the Negro church could approach.¹²⁸

By the early 1960's, the first southern student sit-in had taken place and many young people across the country began emulating this effective form of protest.¹²⁹ Baker saw this as an opportunity for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to provide a critical public endorsement not only for the women and youth who had joined the "cause," but also for the overall credibility of the entire Civil Rights Movement.¹³⁰ In a surprising move, King and his associates agreed with her. This cooperative effort on the part of the two organizations allowed Baker to organize a series of meetings that led to the formation of SNCC in Atlanta in 1960.¹³¹

Baker may have found more success in her activities with SNCC primarily because she could empower her student workers with *her* brand of community activism without the direct interference of the male-centered NAACP and SCLC. As the women and students showed more boldness and advocated grass-roots level leadership and community involvement, King and SCLC wanted to annex the group because of its apparent disdain for tradition and hierarchal hegemony within the African American community. When King and his associates told her to put the women and youth "in check," she reportedly replied, "...it was useless to put the brakes on, because it was

¹²⁸ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 247.

¹²⁹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 83.

¹³⁰ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1, 367.

¹³¹ Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 248.

enthusiasm unleashed--an overflow of a dam that had been pent up for years and it had to run its course.”¹³²

This officially marked the end of Baker’s turbulent association with King. She remained steadfast, however, not to abandon the agenda of the women and youth and worked diligently to raise funds, advise on strategies of community activism, speak on their behalf, and mentor emerging leaders - both male and female - of SNCC.¹³³ Thus, her work in SNCC fits the socially prescribed role of Afro Pragmatic Womanists in that she trained and worked with other women and both male and female youths.¹³⁴ Perhaps the most important signifier of her Afro-Pragmatic Womanism centered on her interaction, listening, and building relationships with people who had been overlooked by legislators, the media, and their own popular leaders. Baker allowed herself and admonished her trainees to hear the “voice” of the people most in need of and affected by any social change. In doing so, she not only empowered the people that she met to stand up and demand their rights, but she also infused the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement with women and youth workers from all classes, races, and genders. Perhaps most importantly, she did so without publicly lambasting King and his cohorts, but rather perpetuated a “humanist” approach to the goals of the Movement.¹³⁵ Ella Baker was an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist.¹³⁶

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 328

¹³⁴ Baker was an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist. See Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 209; Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 39.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹³⁶ In Barbara Ransby’s *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, Baker says she does not consider herself a Black Feminist, but rather a black woman who believed in participatory democracy for all colors of people, gender and generations. While she certainly had no problem exhibiting skills associated with male leadership and freely spoke her mind, she did recognize and indirectly supported

Ironically one of the most recognized men of SNCC, Bob Moses, considers himself a protégée of Ella Baker:

He was one of the young people whom she spent a lot of time talking with and listening to, and he continued in her political tradition – teaching, listening to, organizing young people – long after her death...Moses absorbed Baker's message that revolution was an ongoing process intimately bound up with one's vision of the future and with how one interacted with others on a daily basis. Moses also shared Baker's confidence and faith in young people.¹³⁷

A great number of these young people, contemporaries of men in SNCC like Bob Moses, John Lewis, Julian Bond, and Lawrence Guyot, included black women or women of color like Ruby Doris Smith, Diane Nash, Raylawni Branch, Sheila Michaels, Dorrie and Joyce Ladner, and Terri Shaw and white women like Zoya Zemen, Jan Handke, and Margaret Hazelton. An even larger number of women involved in Freedom Summer 1964 of SNCC included the older activists like Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, Victoria Gray Adams, and Unita Blackwell. All of these women functioned as “bridge leaders.”¹³⁸ Bridge leaders do not hold traditional leadership positions, but instead develop and work as the conduit between the community and formalized civil rights groups. Perhaps one of the most important traits of a good “bridge leader” requires her to interact and use the media to get the message to the masses. Fannie Lou Hamer understood the power of television as evidenced by her moving speech as a delegate to

(through her continued participation) the patriarchal traditions of black social movements, 272. Like all Afro-Pragmatic Womanists, however, she used such experiences to provide a foundation for the next generation of men and women to blaze a new trail in terms of their world perspectives and contributions to society. Also, she meets the criteria of an Afro-Pragmatic in that she devoted her life to participation and training of others in social activism. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

¹³⁷ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 209, 251.

¹³⁸ Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

the 1964 Democratic National Convention. A simple and poor sharecropper turned grassroots woman activist from Mississippi, she used the media to publicly challenge her state's Democratic party with the simple phrase "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." This cornerstone statement from her profound speech pointed to the social, political, and physical mistreatment of poor blacks in Mississippi and the Deep South and today still reverberates with poignancy and truth.¹³⁹

Very few women, other than Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ruby Doris Smith, have been canonized in a formal authoritative role beyond "bridge leadership." "Clearly, by everyone's standards, [however] Ruby Doris Smith Robinson stood out-even among the extraordinary women leaders of the Civil Rights Movement."¹⁴⁰ These women proved themselves unique and noteworthy because of their style of leadership and also the way they used it to acquire, develop, and distribute information. Their approach to social activism as Afro-Pragmatic Womanists helped them develop effective communication practices and afford younger women the opportunity to become Black Feminists in theory and action.

¹³⁹ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 3,109; Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Dutton/Penguin Books, 1993), 145-56.

¹⁴⁰ Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "Black Women and Black Power," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 211.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK FEMINISM SHAPES THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Chapter two outlines the development of differing perspectives of Black Feminism¹ and shows its continuous application to the activist work of black women throughout the history of the United States. In order to truly understand and properly document the import of black women during Freedom Summer 1964, one must acknowledge that they functioned from varied sociological and epistemological positions of Black Feminism, Womanism/Africana Womanism, and the concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism; all of which, previous generations of African American women practiced, but had not formally named.

Starting with a section on the contributions of Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, this chapter charts early black women's social activism from its beginning through the era of the official First-Wave Black Feminists (suffragist) to the heyday of black women's clubs. Using theories of Black Feminists Patricia Collins and bell hooks and Womanist/Africana Womanists Alice Walker and Cleonora Hudson-Weems, this discussion links nineteenth and early twentieth century Black Feminism to African American women's activism in the Modern Civil Rights Movement and establishes the theoretical foundation for this study's application of the new concept - Afro-Pragmatic Womanism. The chapter effectively weaves the thread of

¹ For the purpose of this study, the initial use of the term Black Feminism is used to describe the overall body of feminist theories that have an African or African American based foundation. A description of Black Feminism as a differentiated theory is provided later in this chapter.

Black Feminist Theory throughout the historical fabric of American social movements and lays bare the legacy upon which the women of this study develop their perspectives.

19th Century First-Wave Black Feminists

Since the beginning of modern feminism in the mid-nineteenth century, the role of African American women among their white counterparts has remained tenuous if not downright confusing. While early black and white women suffragists understood and advocated the basic tenet of feminist theory - equality for all genders, African American women have often found themselves at odds with their Caucasian counterparts on the critical issue of racial equality. At the first National Women's Convention at Worcester, MA in 1850, racially motivated discord among the white contingents prompted many African American women to ponder their relative position and eventual benefit in remaining part of the Movement. Although an invited speaker and celebrated orator, Sojourner Truth's famous speech, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, did not protect her or any other black woman from the overt racial discrimination of their white sisters who claimed the same fight for equality.² For this very reason, Sojourner Truth's speech the following year at the 1851 Seneca Falls National Women's Convention³ explicitly underscored the importance of black women effectively defining their role in the abolition and suffrage movements.

In her first treatise on the development of Black Feminist thought (*Ain't I a Woman?*), twentieth century Black Feminist bell hooks drew on the title of Truth's speech and opened with a discussion of slavery and its impact on not only black men and

² Ibid., 159; Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 234.

³ Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" (speech, Women's Right Convention, Akron, Ohio, 1851) in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 198.

women, but also the social hierarchy of white women. In so doing, she effectively argues that since all Americans exist under an Anglo-Saxon hegemonic patriarchy, American Feminism has ignored the needs of African American women in favor of white women who seek parity with white men. hooks goes on to say that as these white women realized measures of equality for themselves, they simultaneously maintained their position within the patriarchal power structure as white individuals. She further contended that to some degree, white women had to make sure that their social movement did not totally alienate the group that controls the power structure, namely, white men.⁴

In support of this very notion, white female suffragists often found more comfort working with black male abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass. They saw the benefit of working toward full (black and white) male equality as a stepping-stone to their eventual goal of female equality, that is - *white* female equality. These women understood the hierarchy of patriarchal politics in that males – all males - would receive civil liberties long before any female – white or black. Also, southern female segregationists, who especially held the prevailing stereotypical view of black female promiscuity and immorality, advanced fierce protests within American feminism whenever black women received access to the podium.⁵

In her 1850 and 1851 speeches, Truth maintained that slave status systematically denied black women motherhood, protection from exploitation, and feminine qualities. All of which, she deemed "God given rights."⁶ Scholars often interpret her testimony as the foundation for the rally call of Black Feminists, "All the men are not black, all the

⁴ hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 21, 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶ Karlyn K. Campbell, "Style and Content in the Rhetoric of Early Afro-American Feminists," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72, no. 4 (November 1986).

women are not white, black women exist as black women."⁷ Inspired by her conviction and their personal experiences, conventioners passed a resolution that stated,

Resolved, That the cause we are met to advocate, -- the claim for woman of all her natural and civil rights, -- bids us remember the million and a half of slave women at the South, the most grossly wronged and foully outraged of all women; and in every effort for an improvement in our civilization, we will bear in our heart of hearts the memory of the trampled womanhood of the plantation, and omit no effort to raise it to a share in the rights we claim for ourselves,⁸

Bridging First-Wave Black Feminists and Early 20th Century Women's Clubs

Between the end of slavery and the beginning of the twentieth century, African American women countered separatist attitudes among their white counterparts by forming their own suffrage clubs and voters' leagues. These black women's clubs routinely sent delegates to the national and regional women's conventions and became instrumental in mid-twentieth century civil rights and women's liberation organizations.⁹ The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Association of Wage Earners, founded by Nannie Burroughs to publicize the plight of black working women,¹⁰ came from the efforts of these early women.

The lives of black clubwomen Mary Church Terrell, Amy Jacques Garvey, Alice Dunbar, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett endure as celebrated examples of the praxis of Black

⁷ Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, ed., *All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women are White, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: Feminist Press), 1982.

⁸ Vicki Gabriner, "Women 2000: To Separate the Light from the Darkness" The 150th Anniversary of the First National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1850," *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, 30 June 1999, 24.

⁹ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990), 221n22.

¹⁰ Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 234.

Feminism to their “situated location.”¹¹ These women took their “lived experiences,” in relationship to their political and socio-cultural status, and used them as springboards to community activism. Theorist Patricia Collins says when researching African American women’s history, the theoretical frame of Black Feminism becomes mutable with what and how these women thought and did in life and the ideologies and experiences that shape their existence and survival. Based on the intersectionality of time and circumstance, Black Feminism creates a “particular” knowledge, consciousness, and ability to empower self.¹²

Anna Julia Cooper exemplifies this very concept when one examines her contributions to the canon of black history.¹³ Her written work not only documents the lives of slave and former slave women, but also demonstrates [through her expressed level of social awareness (consciousness) and strategies of survival (empowerment)] the intellectual connection between black history and feminist thought. In actuality, her written work functioned as a form of social activism and her participation in literary circles contributed to the development of women’s clubs of the nineteenth century and the black women’s journalism history.

Noted black clubwoman Ida B. Wells-Barnett worked for equal treatment of all blacks and women's right to vote.¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, Wells-Barnett demonstrated her commitment to the uplift of black women and men and a reconceptualization of their

¹¹ Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 29; Patricia Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1998.

¹² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³ Anna Julia Cooper, Biographical Sketch, in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

¹⁴ Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida. B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

roles in society through journalistic endeavors and international activism (the mark of a true Afro-Pragmatic Womanist.)¹⁵ By 1910, Barnett determined that the primary way for blacks to uplift themselves could only be attained through the vote, "The Negro has been given separate and inferior schools, because he has no ballot."¹⁶

Unlike some of her middle-class club cohorts, but in the manner of women who came after her in the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, Wells-Barnett refused to participate in the developing bourgeois status of these clubs and instead used her journalistic talents to expose the economic and social realities of the southern-borne practice of lynching blacks without due process. In her 1895 internationally acclaimed pamphlet, *The Red Record*, Wells-Barnett detailed accounts of white woman who often found themselves attracted to black men, provided statistical data on the socially accepted practice of lynching as a de facto law with no constitutional support; and outlined the obligation of all African Americans to stand up for themselves in the public arena.¹⁷

Prior to the *Red Record*, she fearlessly wrote in her Tennessee newspaper, *Free Speech*, about the realities that many in mainstream America wanted to discount. For example, when local mobs attacked and killed two of her associates for simply owning a prosperous business, she penned a stinging diatribe against not only the perpetrators, but

¹⁵ Bettina Aptheker, "Ida B. Wells and the Memphis Lynching, 1892." *San Jose Studies* 3 no. 3 (1977): 34-40; Martin E. Dann, ed., *The Black Press 1827-1890: The Quest for National Identity*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971); Miriam DeCosta-Willis, ed., *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Alfreda Duster, ed., *The Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Paula Giddings, "Missing in Action: Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and the Historical Record," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 1-17; Robin Hardin and Marcie Hinton, "The Squelching of Free Speech in Memphis: The Life of a Black Post-Reconstruction Newspaper," *Race, Gender & Class in Media* 8, no. 4 (October 2001): 78.

¹⁶ Ida. B. Wells-Barnett, "How Enfranchisement Stops Lynchings," in *Ida B Wells-Barnett: An exploratory study of an American Black woman, 1893-1930*, ed. Mildred I. Thompson (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990).

¹⁷ Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 234.

also the community of Memphis, because it allowed such public injustices to prevail. In turn, residents of the city intentionally burned her office and home and made public announcements of their intentions to kill her. In a harrowing and narrow escape, Wells-Barnett fled the South and spent a few years reporting in New York and other Mid-Atlantic states. She also spent nearly a year lecturing throughout Europe, but eventually settled in Chicago, never again to return to the South.

From a Black Feminist perspective, Wells-Barnett's journalistic and social activism "responded in action to the authoritative standpoint of mainstream ideology."¹⁸ In other words, she was "talking back" to the white hegemonic system of American patriarchy and oppression. The term "talking back," and the title of another book written by hooks, comes from black culture's insistence that adults or authority figures receive unconditional respect on general principle and never suffer public confrontation on any established precept. Wells-Barnett's journalistic exposé of the acceptable southern habit of lynching became a social form of "talking back."¹⁹

In addition to her indictment against the atrocities of whites, Wells-Barnett also proved to have "words of fire" as described in the similarly titled book by late twentieth century Black Feminist Beverly Guy-Sheftall.²⁰ Focusing on the misogynist leadership of black men in the overall struggle for equality, she explains that when black women of history demonstrated a streak of independence from their male counterparts in their intellectual perspective or social activism, black men often considered women's words culturally divisive or "words of fire."

¹⁸ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-9.

²⁰ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: New Press, 1995), 220.

Wells-Barnett, not only publicly “talked back” with “words of fire” against the accommodationist ideology of celebrated black intellectuals such as Booker T. Washington, but also went against the expected behavior of the “cult of true womanhood” as aspired to by white women, black middle-class and elite women. In this “New Negro” era, Wells-Barnett acquired black elite social status, earned through hard work as a journalist/social activist and an upwardly mobile marriage; however, she remained a steadfast advocate for the plight of the common black citizenry. Ironically, later in life, noted intellectual (and frequent antagonist) W.E.B. DuBois claimed Wells-Barnett positively influenced his view of Black Feminist thought and its practice on the history and progress of black people.²¹

20th Century Civil Rights Movement Creates a Second-Wave of Black Feminists

As discussed in Chapter One, black women’s activism, manifested through some form of Black Feminism, continued from the 1920’s through the 1950’s via religious and club work, Garveyism, the labor and railroad movements, and both World Wars. Critical theorists note, however, that Second-Wave Black Feminism began to truly take root during the height of the 1960’s.²²

Contrary to accepted Modern Civil Rights history, black women directly influenced some of the era’s most historical events and organizations. Brief examples include JoAnn Robinson’s work to organize the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and Ella Baker who held the offices of NAACP Field Secretary, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Interim Director, and Founder of Student Non-violent Coordinating

²¹ Nellie Y. McKay, “The Souls of Black Women Folk in the Writings of W.E.B. DuBois,” in *Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York, NY: Penguin, 1990), 237.

²² Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial, 1979); hooks, bell. *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981).

Committee (SNCC).²³ Except for the presentation of *SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement* (1964), written primarily by white women, *The Combahee River Collective, A Black Feminist Statement* (1977), and Angela Davis' *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (1971), the American Civil Rights canon routinely cites no other seminal Black Feminist Statement as evidence of African American women's significant role in the Modern Civil Rights Movement.²⁴

Most Black Feminist scholars agree that the turning point for many African American women came in the planning phase of the 1963 March on Washington. The aforementioned notables disappointedly realized their need to move beyond Afro-Pragmatic Womanism's endorsement of a lone black male public image. They quickly came to the understanding that while African American women worked for years as the backbone to this movement, not one received an invitation to publicly speak at the massive rally on human rights.²⁵

Similar to First-Wave Black Feminist, several African American women of this era struggled with the intersection of their leadership roles and the expectations of their male counterparts; this proved especially true throughout the later years of the Modern Civil Rights Movement also known as the Black Power era.²⁶ Among other things, its nationalist platform encouraged African Americans to collectively ensure their own economic future, which became a true drawing power for many black women.

Unfortunately Black Nationalism also endorsed the subjection of women in its social

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

²⁵ Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 244.

²⁶ Ibid., 234.

mission. While black women supported the goal to acquire social, political and economic prosperity for all African Americans, they also had to constantly confront black male chauvinism that grew in popularity among contemporary nationalist organizations like SNCC, The Black Panthers, and Black Muslims.

For black women, their conflicts within African American civil rights organizations (especially during the final years of SNCC) became a genderized battlefield. With the new male-centered leadership of SNCC's Stokely Carmichael²⁷ and other Black Power Movement leaders, black chauvinism reached its zenith in the early 1970's and forced many African American women to "run for cover" under the umbrella of the Women's Liberation Movement.²⁸ Black women came to the burgeoning social cause to develop support networks and public platforms they could employ in their cooperative efforts with black men. Caucasian women, however, came to the Women's Movement to throw off the "oppression of male dominance," not to preserve, but increase their presence and power among white privilege.²⁹

"White women, many of whom were members of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women established in 1961 [and headed by Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt], reasoned that the only way to become a part of the system was to create a civil rights lobbying group. They believed they needed a 'NAACP for women,' an organization that would pressure government officials to

²⁷ SNCC Executive Secretary Stokely Carmichael's exegesis of the emerging Black Power Movement was more than most African American women simply could stomach: "The only position for women in SNCC is prone." Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).page number of this quote?

²⁸ Ibid., 235.

²⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”³⁰ Within two years, noted white feminist Betty Friedan, and two feminists of color – Aileen Hernandez and Pauli Murray, spearheaded the formation of the National Organization of Women (NOW).³¹

Black women, however, soon discovered that they did not have the same issues of labor, family, and community as did white women. African American women traditionally worked outside of the home and encountered different family dynamics (like absent husbands/fathers often for economic reasons) than their white counterparts. Also, African American culture influenced and shaped many black women’s ideological perspective of “community uplift” which sought a remedy beyond simply women’s rights.³²

For example, a major point of contention between black and white women arose from the 1970 statement of African American feminist thinker Frances Beal. At the Third World Women’s Alliance, she said, “Each individual must develop a high-political consciousness in order to understand how this system enslaves us all and what actions we must take in order to bring about its [Anglo-Saxon hegemonic patriarchy] total

³⁰ Ibid. By June of 1964, the first National Conference of State Commissions on the Status of Women was held in Washington, DC and 24 state commissions sent 73 delegates. “By the end of the year [1964], 33 states had established Commissions on the Status of Women and at the federal level, an Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women and a Citizen's Advisory Council were established by Executive Order to follow up on the report of the President's Commission.” *Feminist Chronicles*, “1964,” *Feminist Majority Foundation*, <http://www.feminist.org/research/chronicles/fc1964.html> (accessed October 10, 2005). As a direct result of African American efforts to attain civil rights, a proliferation of women’s rights became law. In the time it took African Americans to secure enforcement of voting rights already provided by the fourteenth amendment, Caucasian women fortified their political, social, and economic position within the status quo and surpassed both black men and women in the struggle for equity.

³¹ Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 242.

³² Combahee River Collective. “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women Are White, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (New York, NY: Feminist, 1982), 21.

destruction.”³³ Clearly black women’s mission in the Women’s Liberation Movement differed from white women.

An additional conflict between white and black women scholars stemmed from the social promotion of black women as “the mules of American women”³⁴ who carried the burden of servicing white males’ sexual appetite, cared for the privilege and sanctity of white woman and childhood, and perpetuated the negative image of “victim” in a legally separatist society. In response to this erroneous public perception, several African American feminist scholars endorsed the construction of Black Feminism as a theoretical concept.³⁵

For example, Bonita Aptheker’s discussion of the Moynihan Theory³⁶, which states that African American women essentially bear the ills of black people and should be viewed as social criminals, explained that this concept coincided with the Modern Civil Rights Movement to accomplish two things: (1) re-establish the experiences of black women as collectively unworthy of attention from public policy makers and (2) to send a warning to white women of their social destiny should they use civil rights to shift the power dynamics between themselves and white men.³⁷

Some white men (and women), such as former Assistant Secretary of Labor and U.S. Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, promoted the negative stereotype that black women

³³ Frances Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade (New York: Signet, 1970).

³⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Are Watching God* (J.P. Lippincott Inc. and Harper-Collins, New York: NY, 1937).

³⁵ Bettina Aptheker, “The Matriarchal Mirage: The Moynihan Connection to Historical Perspective,” in *Woman’s Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 129.

³⁶ Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

³⁷ Bettina Aptheker, “The Matriarchal Mirage: The Moynihan Connection to Historical Perspective,” in *Woman’s Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 132.

headed the African American family throughout history because they immasculinized the black male (due to his weakness and inability to show responsibility and remain monogamous). American society has historically portrayed Black women as stereotypically conniving, manipulative, overbearing, and socially criminalized. In his infamous report, Moynihan presented a distorted interpretation of labor statistics to further suggest that until assimilated African American men (imitated versions of the white mainstream populace) took on leadership roles as the nucleus of the black family, the United States Government should adopt a policy of “benign neglect” toward African American women. According to Moynihan, most black women traditionally manipulated social welfare programs and their public attacks on public policy served only to acquire for themselves more government assistance.³⁸

For all of the criticisms about Moynihan’s ideologies, he demonstrated a level of perception lost on his black male and white female contemporaries. His attempt to vilify black women in the public sphere shows that he had some insight into the collective power of these women to mobilize for social change. Moynihan clearly understood, and perhaps feared, that pressure for reform eventually would improve the lives of all African Americans - male and female.

Socially accepted and widespread thinking like this also played into why black women saw their struggle for equality different than that of their white peers. Collins says black women have had to combat the “social images” of themselves produced and promulgated by white mainstream America and its media– that of black women as sapphires (sexually promiscuous), mammies (societal role of deference), welfare mothers

³⁸ Ibid., 129.

(lazy, shiftless, and criminals), and cultural matriarchs (superwomen). Over the next two decades, Black Feminist scholarship focused on these very themes.³⁹

By the end of the Modern Civil Rights Movement and the dawning of the Second-Wave of Feminist thought, the gulf of tensions between black and white women had grown much wider. As white women became the primary benefactors of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the enforcement of these acts in the 1970's with Titles VII and XI, and Affirmative Action statutes, black women began to rethink and reconfigure their position within the overall Women's Liberation Movement. Over subsequent decades, seminal works from Collins, hooks, and others continued the critical theory tradition of African American women defining themselves through Black Feminism and activism. Placing black women's ideas and experiences at the center of analysis rather than framing their ideas around white middle-class feminist tenets, black theorists of this era encouraged the recognition of differences as well as similarities shared by mainstream and Black Feminist ideologies.⁴⁰

Late 20th Century – Defining Black Feminist Thought

Upon a close theoretical examination of the experiences of African American women during the Modern Civil Rights and Second-Wave Women's Movements, four

³⁹ Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Patricia Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1998; Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: New Press, 1995); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984); bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989).

⁴⁰ Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

primary themes emerged as the building blocks to naming and defining Black Feminism.⁴¹

Collins says the first theme suggests that African American women construct their own reality through the development of self-definitions and personal evaluations, which redefine and rebuke negative mainstream images of black womanhood. In doing so, they replace societal stereotypes with positive multi-dimensional representations. Second, black women need to deconstruct collective forces of domination that usually manifest its power through gender, race, and class oppression.

Third, Black Feminists should marry intellectual thought and political activism for certainly the good of the masses, but specifically for the good of African American women. Fourth, black women must understand and embrace their distinct cultural inheritance that spawns both an exhaustive energy and mastery of skill to combat and reform daily encounters with all kinds of discrimination.⁴² In summary, Black Feminism infers “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community.”⁴³

Some feminist scholars claimed that women's philosophical standpoint premised on either thought or action because merging the two curtailed the efficacy of both. In the actualizing of Black Feminism’s “self-conscious struggle,” however, theorists generally believe that black women need to possess a “both/and” ideology since they live as *both* African Americans *and* as women. Being black and a woman does not automatically

⁴¹ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study henceforth provides a definition of Black Feminist theory as a separate discussion from other forms of Afro feminist theories.

⁴² Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

make one a Black Feminist,⁴⁴ however, understanding the challenges of both helps African American and white women understand their own proximity or social location to mainstream feminism. Harkening back to the “double-consciousness” ideology of W.E.B. DuBois, hooks writes, “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole, but outside the main body.”⁴⁵ African American women have historically remained “outside the main body” of mainstream feminism.

Also, some theorists define Feminism as "a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression" and espouse that both black and white women need to have this as their common political goal. hooks, however, repeatedly asserts that “men are not the enemy, sexism and the patriarchy are” which significantly departs from conventional mainstream Feminist thought.⁴⁶ She explains that white women possess different perspectives on the roles of black men and women in this social movement. hooks says that black men’s social stake in both the First-Wave and Second-Wave Women’s Movements proved crucial to white women’s agenda. During both movements, many Caucasian women felt that including the specific agenda of black women bred more competition and subverted the racially separatist goals of mainstream white women’s efforts.⁴⁷ Most importantly, hooks demonstrated the significance of Truth’s speech as foundational to the reason that late twentieth century black women found no place of solace and solidarity among Second-Wave Feminists and thus formally gave birth to the Black Feminist Movement.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid.; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 16.

⁴⁵ bell hooks, preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), x-xv.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2-4.

Celebrated novelist, Alice Walker applies Black Feminist thinking, perhaps, from the most holistic standpoint.⁴⁹ Writing from a perspective that would become foundational to Third-Wave Feminist thought, Walker listens to the words of her predecessors in Black Feminist non-fiction and defines herself as “Womanist” rather than letting others define her.⁵⁰ She says that African American women remain duty bound to feminist activism for the sake of not only their progress, but also for that of all women around the world, “To the extent that black women dissociate themselves from the Women's Movement...this is a serious abdication from and misuse of radical black herstorical [*sic*] tradition: Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Fannie Lou Hamer would not have liked it. Nor do I.”⁵¹

Contrary to this notion of black women’s obligation to American feminist ideology, Africana Womanist Scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems says the most important struggle remains America’s recognition of full civil rights for the *entire* black race and not of just one gender.

It has been from the beginning that Africana women in particular have been and must continue to be concerned with prioritizing the obstacles in this society. Long before the question of gender and class came to the forefront in contemporary literary criticism and theoretical constructs, positions were taken and decisions were made about options available to the Africana women on the basis of her *race [sic]*. Thus, it was and remains evident that the Africana woman must first fight the battle of racism.⁵²

⁴⁹ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

⁵⁰ Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Clenora Hudson-Weems, “Africana Womanism: An Overview,” in *Out of the Revolution: The Development of African Studies*, ed. Delores P. Aldridge and Carlene Young (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books: 2000), 210.

While Hudson-Weems certainly acknowledges legitimate conflict of treatment between African American men and women, she says such issues should find resolution “within the context of the African [American] culture.”

Problems must not be resolved using an alien framework, that is feminism, but must be resolved from within an endemic theoretical construct of Africana Womanism...If our real goal in life is to be achieved-that is, the survival of our entire race as a primary concern for Africana women- it will have to come from Africana women and men working together. If Africana men and women are fighting within the community, they are ultimately defeating themselves on all fronts.⁵³

Over the last 30 years, Black Feminism and its related concepts have evolved into a viable discipline of moderate feminist theories.⁵⁴ While some may view the varying schools of thought among Black Feminists as divisive, actually they provide a reservoir of perspectives that have application to black women’s mutable circumstances.

For example, when examining the younger generation of freedom workers for this study, the core tenets of Black Feminism framed their stories and perspectives in that they wanted to define themselves as socially different from white women, but simultaneously spoke of a burgeoning desire to free themselves from sexual and gender oppression. The older women, however, indicated themes of Womanism/Africana Womanism and specifically the concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, which considers all facets of the black woman’s life – men, children, race, and class. In evaluating the experiences of these women, particularly as it relates to their communication efforts, they shared their personal stories with two distinct voices – Black Feminism and Afro-Pragmatic Womanism.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women are White, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: Feminist Press), 1982.

CHAPTER 3
USING ORAL HISTORIES TO ARTICULATE THE “VOICES” OF
FREEDOM WOMEN

Many scholars reside in opposing camps on whether oral history should be considered a viable method of research for rigorous scholarship. Since oral histories often focus on less traditionally authoritative voices of the proletariat class and underrepresented populations, some researchers and critics erroneously discount its intrinsic value.¹ Employed properly, however, an oral history unveils the reasons *why* or the meaning behind a given event or action. Use of oral interviews in historical research most efficiently provides first-hand accounts from actual eyewitnesses and participants of an event or era. This methodology also outlines an appropriate and effective process to examine the experiences of individuals within the context of their participation or membership in groups or organizations.² Thus, oral histories offer the perfect method to study the past activities of people who collectively worked toward a singular goal such as social reforms like the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

An intriguing and long-standing relationship between communication theory and oral history methodology dates back to before scholars academically formalized either one. Noted oral historian Paul Thompson says that in the fifth century B.C., Herodotus customarily used and crosschecked his oral sources with other verifiable information. By

¹ Bonnie Brennen, Class Notes, Advanced Qualitative Research Methods (lecture, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism, Columbia, MO, February, 26 2002). For the book you will want to cite the literature on the pros and cons of oral histories. Not your class notes.

² Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1973); Bonnie Brennen, Class Notes, Advanced Qualitative Research Methods (lecture, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism, Columbia, MO, February, 26 2002).

the third century A.D., Lucian's research also made use of oral sources and only after fleshing out any motives for providing said information, did he incorporate individuals' stories into his works.³

By the mid-nineteenth century, historian Jules Melchette, who wrote *The History of the French Revolution*, and critical theorists Karl Marx and Frederick Engels combined their own eyewitness accounts (and that of others) with written documentation in the *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*.⁴ Unfortunately the culture around these men, as still found today, primarily valued the stories of the privileged and routinely subscribed to traditional concepts of historical evidence. This conventional approach to history relies on official documentation that represents and reinforces the dominance, power, and status quo of the elite.⁵

By the twentieth century, however, Thompson developed a methodological paradigm of three ways oral histories lay bare the common man or woman's voice as a part of social history. He said oral histories center on: "(1) a single-life story narrative which conveys the history of a whole class or community or work threaded throughout the story to reconstruct a highly complex series of events, (2) a collection of stories which construct a broader historical interpretation by grouping them around common themes, and (3) cross-analysis where oral evidence is treated as a quarry from which to construct

³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Ibid; Bonnie S. Brennen, "Toward A History of Labor and News Work: Uses of Oral Sources in Journalism History," *Journal of American History* 83 no. 2 (September 1996): 571.

⁵ Such examples relate directly to British cultural theorist Stuart Hall's notion that our lived experiences influence not only our personal ideologies, but also what information we communicate and the manner that we communicate to others. His theory parallels the social science and communication theory of social construction of reality in that eyewitness accounts are framed by societal influences of power, dominance, and contemporary mores that help create what is fact or certain for these people's lived experiences. Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

an argument and emerges from the inner logic of that argument or theory.”⁶ This study of Black Press and communication strategies among African American women of Freedom Summer 1964 employed a combination of Thompson’s last two approaches.

Noted oral historian, Studs Terkel, underscores the role of oral narratives within the realm of historical documentation. "It's history from the bottom up rather than history written by generals."⁷ Terkel says oral history takes the account of official history and provides another layer from the perspective of those who experienced it first hand. For example, he writes about the lives and experiences of people who lived during the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the 1960s.⁸

In examining the relationship between accepted official histories and the often-dissimilar experiences of rank-and-file people who experienced it, researchers often discover inconsistencies with interpretations of a historical event or era. In the case of this study, approaching established journalism and civil rights history with the methodology of oral interviews and from the theoretical stance of feminism, namely Black Feminism and Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, changes its focus from the elite to the common person. Although often the most difficult to document,⁹ history scholars do well to remember that the rank-and-file man or woman recounts history from a critically important perspective: as someone who was there as it happened.

⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 203-205.

⁷ Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age: The Century and Those Who Lived It* (Chicago, IL: Highbridge, 1995), 1; Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ In research, scholars consistently find that imperfect people routinely recount events framed with faulty memories and a desire to portray themselves in a more positive or negative light than reality recommends. Kim Lacy Rogers, "Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History* 75, Spring 1988, 569.

Additionally, employing oral histories in the aforementioned manner opens new fields of inquiry within specific disciplines of communication; breaks down social, political, and cultural barriers with and within the masses; and most importantly, gives back to its participants a central role in history via their own words.¹⁰

Ways of “Doing Oral Histories”

For example, media scholar Bonnie Brennen combines all three of Thompson’s approaches to oral history to underscore the importance of rank and file workers in media institution histories.¹¹ Although her book provides a single narrative story of a specific group of reporters from Rochester, NY, it also collects their stories and groups them under common themes that link to her central argument - labor stories remain critical to media history. Getting the oral histories of these workers essentially performs two tasks: (1) it breaks from traditional communication history studies which celebrate elite interests of property and ownership within the industry and silences the stories of those who are the “foot soldiers” of production and (2) most importantly, it brings these production workers into the circle of history through their own words and remembrances.¹²

Most communication histories focus on the strategic maneuvers of media brokers like Benjamin Day, Horace Greeley, or John H. Johnson, but in *For the Record*, the reader hears stories of everyday reporters who protected their stake in the newsroom. In Brennen’s study, reporters (of rival papers) cooperatively shared information with one

¹⁰ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Bonnie Brennen, *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York, Newswriters*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Bonnie Brennen, preface to *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York, Newswriters*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xv.

¹² *Ibid.*, xii.

another from their beats so that each reporter received the details needed for the most complete coverage. They had no worry or concern about “scooping” each other, because their collective goal was to cover the next man’s back which insured that everyone continuously received good assignments. Whenever a new reporter did not cotton to this cooperative effort, the reporters collectively kept him out of the loop; which, in turn, meant he missed an important piece of information that most likely cost him his job.¹³

This study, too, used a combination of Thompson’s approaches to “hear” about press and communication strategies employed by the “rank and file” of SNCC and other Mississippi Freedom Summer Workers. In this study, the use of oral histories answered important questions about the everyday existence of female Freedom Summer workers in that it showed these women’s experiences embodied Black Feminist and Afro-Pragmatic Womanist theories and directly linked to the historical legacy of African American female activism as expressed through journalism and communication. The oral histories of this study also reinforces Brennen’s argument that accurate media histories should include accounts of rank and file workers as one of the most effective ways to tell history from the “bottom up.”

Employing a few techniques of the famed oral historian Studs Terkel, this study also asked respondents questions that forced them into moments of self-reflection. A primary duty of the oral historian is to understand that such accounts should provide opportunities of self-reflexivity; which in turn, bring immeasurable context to the personal narratives of history. For example, Terkel took the simple reflection of a

¹³ Ibid., 76.

mother's loss of a son to showcase the power of an individual's commitment to a cause that ignited an entire social movement.

In an interview with the mother (Mamie Mobley) of Emmett Till,¹⁴ whose violent murder ignited the beginning of the Modern Civil Rights Movement; Terkel establishes common ground and creates a comfortable environment with a brief discussion about the trees and landscaping in her neighborhood. He thanks her for her graciousness in granting the interview and hospitality of preparing a delicious cake and coffee for his arrival.

Terkel opens the interview by asking her "How would you describe yourself?" While a seemingly simple question, it shows depth and insight into the full purpose for conducting an oral interview-- to get a picture of the way the interviewee sees herself in the historical event. One of the most interesting aspects of oral histories includes the opportunity to hear the true "voice" of those studied. Quite contrary to most any other form of gathering information from a subject, oral historians seek to hear and perceive what the interviewee says and also what they do not say.

By collecting stories of Freedom Summer 1964 women, prompting instances of self-reflection, and grouping their responses by emergent themes, the narratives of people from varying and often opposing perspectives revealed the connection of their experiences and provided a broader interpretation of Civil Rights history.

¹⁴ This interview appears in his book and National Public Radio series on the issues of race in America. In it Terkel allows each participant to discuss his or her perspective on race in America. In one case, an Irish-descent white woman discusses the racially-changed landscape of her neighborhood due to "white flight" and how she came to embrace and enjoy her black neighbors. She said that she felt a true sense of community in her neighborhood that has drastically changed since her childhood. Terkel provides other stories on how blacks feel racially isolated and ostracized from the world of their white counterparts. For example, he shares stories of a professional black man who cannot get a taxicab downtown or the women who describes her father as very gentle and sensitive, but somehow intimidating to white women when he gets on an elevator. This approach fits Thompson's third method of interpreting oral histories— interweave them to develop a central argument. In this case, Terkel's argument is that America obsesses over the issue of race. Studs Terkel, *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel about the American Obsession* (New York: New Press, 1992).

Oral Histories of Civil Rights Workers and Freedom Summer Women

This study discovered not only the remembrances of first-hand witnesses to Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964, but also documented the way they saw themselves within the historical context of race, gender, and class of that period. Former 1964 SNCC field secretary in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and New York/St. Louis journalist Sheila Michaels echoes the sentiments of Terkel in that she encourages oral historians to not only look for what interviewees say, but also for what they do not say:

It is important to get the interviewee to talk about the problems of the Movement. Their feeling, which they did not invent for themselves, is that they would be betraying the Movement to show that it, too, was unjust; or that it would detract from the picture of the Movement that they would like to give. Most women have suppressed their stories willingly and for generations.¹⁵

Michaels says when conducting oral history interviews with former civil rights activists, it is important to tell interviewees in advance that they should make an accounting of their “whole life” experience as a conduit to understanding a specific period of organizational activism. “People, whose contributions have been overlooked, tend to see their part as minimal. When an interview is requested, they are forced to reconsider.”¹⁶ Conducting the interviews for this study revealed the life stories, people, and events that shaped their arrival and work in Mississippi’s Freedom Summer 1964.

Hampton and Frayer use a very similar oral history technique by asking interviewees to close their eyes and take themselves back to a particular event or place. They ask the subjects to describe everything around them, including their perceived role,

¹⁵ Sheila Michaels, “Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Overcoming Reticence, Denial, Pain & Shame,” © Sheila Shiki y Michaels, October 20, 2001, St. Louis, Missouri, 1-2; University of Southern Mississippi Archives, M373, Box 1, Folder 19; Kim Lacy Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of American History* 75, Spring 1988, 568.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

without the benefit of hindsight.¹⁷ This type of interaction provides snapshot perspectives of people's lived experience through an "event-driven" oral history.¹⁸ For example in their chapter on the Civil Rights Movement, Hampton and Frayer included a story from Fannie Lou Hamer who described her joy and appreciation when she met the President of Guinea. Her particular perspective brought insightful context to the event when she compared that meeting with the likelihood that she or any other poor black Mississippian ever would have the opportunity to meet then President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson, or any other American president for that matter.¹⁹

In David Halberstam's *The Children*,²⁰ he takes the stories of the eight young people who integrated the lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee in February of 1960 just days after others did the same in a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina. He relates the events of February 1960 like a romance novel. That is not to say that he romanticized their terrifying experiences, but rather that by listening closely to their voices, he transported the reader to the exact time and place of each person's experiences. He took the voices of unknown young people (many whom later became much quite celebrated) in the Movement and revealed not only their determination, but also their ingenuity and intellectual prowess to accomplish such an important social goal. Halberstam provides the narratives of these young men and women from a "bottom-up" approach; he links their memories to the untold accounts of one of the most important social movements in world history – the Civil Rights Movement of the modern era.

¹⁷ Henry Hampton and Steven Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990).

¹⁸ Henry Hampton and Steven Fayer, preface to *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), xi-xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁰ David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998).

Pictures Help Tell a Thousand Words

Brennen and Hanno Hardt²¹ explain the significance of using photographs in oral history studies. They say photographs function as products of society and enable cultural historians and media historians, to interrogate the power of visual evidence and to reconstruct historical conditions, "...Photographs become a part of a pictorial (print) media strategy to articulate an ideological position within a cultural discourse and reveals specific conditions of society – creates meanings from cultural debris of society."²² Photographs reinforce the prevailing social and political perspective in that they give context and provide a visual narrative in the process of social representation. hooks agrees that such images provide either dominant-view interpretation or "resistant representation" and says they "are ideological reproductions of reality viewed as realizations of objective truth."²³

Pictorial narratives also function as a source of collective memories and operate as a component of the historical process. Social science disciplines often use photos not only as a means of gathering and storing information, but also as a "record of historical consciousness" and a source of material evidence that suggests context and direction for the use of photos in cultural studies and critical communication studies. "Reading photographs" as a process of reconstructing history requires a complex negotiation between what people know and what they see. The reader draws on previous knowledge or experience to identify people in the photo. The incorporation of photos as historical

²¹ Hanno Hardt and Bonnie Brennen, eds., *Newsworkers: Toward a History of the Rank and File* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

²² Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History & Photography*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 4-5.

²³ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989).

evidence should include a critical evaluation of these elements as material culture. They provide tangible evidence of culture that highlight “particular relationships between individuals and society at a specific historical moment”²⁴ as well as offer a unique dimension to communication studies. Photos also “address the ideological conditions of seeing the world, making meanings, and representing reality.”²⁵

For example, the Modell and Brodosky study,²⁶ which used photographs during the in-depth interviews of generations of workers from a defunct steel town in Homestead, PA, effectively showed the connection between visual communication theory and history. They said:

We wanted to go beyond the assumptions made about photographs, that they ‘revive’ peoples’ memories, that they organize the past, and that they inspire an interpretation of ‘life’ ... We assumed that by analyzing the relationship between verbal accounts and a visual story, we would not only expand a method – using photographs during interviews and refine a theory – visual representations carry ‘different’ information from verbal representations – but also provide insight into peoples’ construction of the links among economic, social, and personal changes in an [sic] one-industry town.²⁷

This study of women’s press and communication strategies in Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964 used both iconic and little known photographs of its participants in the oral history process. Photos scanned and displayed on a laptop, hardcopy copies of archived pictures, as well as interviewees’ personal photographs became critically instrumental during the oral history interviews. As indicated above, the goal of

²⁴ Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History & Photography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 4-5.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky, “Envisioning Homestead: Using Photographs in Interviewing (Homestead, Pennsylvania),” in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum Publishers, 1996), 107-139, 142-144.

²⁷ Ibid., 144.

incorporating photos in the oral history process of this study evoked memories and provided insight into the women's construction of their stories.

Using Oral Histories to Study African Americans and African American Women

Historical researchers Jan Vansina and Alex Haley bring to modern communication history the ancient (predating the aforementioned historians of antiquity) African oral tradition of spoken history. *Roots* author, Haley, shares his encounter with an African griot (a professional oral historian) during the research for his book:

...And there's that language that's universal. It's a language of gestures, noises, inflections, and expressions. The old man, the Griot, the oral historian, Kebba Kanga Fofana, 73 rains of age (their way of saying 73 years, one rainy season a year), began now to tell me the ancestral history of the Kinte clan. ... The old man sat in a chair and when he would speak he would come up forward, his body would grow rigid, the cords in his neck stood out and he spoke words as though they were physical objects coming out of his mouth.²⁸

While Haley popularized the role of the ancient 'griot' in his celebrated book and movie *Roots*, Vansina further explains that African griots traditionally trained in only one of the following five areas of their tribe's oral history: 1) formulas, (2) names of people and places, (3) private and public poetry, (4) various types of stories, and (5) legal and other miscellaneous information.²⁹ In actuality, this form of oral history directly links with the communication theory of gatekeeping in that only a few elite individuals access, filter, and dispense valuable community information. One may argue that the African griot learns to retain specific details of information by pure rote and does not put his own opinions into record; as mentioned earlier, however, all humans process and remember information based on influences outside of their control. And so, researchers must keep in

²⁸ Alex Haley, "Black History, Oral History, and Genealogy," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Publishers, 1996), 257-81.

²⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

mind that even the revered ancient griot as well as the contemporary oral history subject function as keepers of information.

For example, in 1999, Rhonda Y. Williams conducted an oral history of two African American women, Shirley Wise and Goldie Baker, who became tenant activists within their housing development. As Williams discusses in her article, African and African American women, in particular, buy into the tradition and value of preserving narratives orally passed from one generation to the next as a responsibility not only to themselves, but also to their community.³⁰ Kim Vaz further explains, this cultural characteristic makes black women's stories well suited for oral histories. She says their histories address the phenomenological and psychoanalytical aspects of their role and experiences in society.³¹

The stories of these two women trace the evolution of their housing community and its entrenched problems of classism, racism, and sexism. Williams lets the reader in on the internal development of each woman's journey, as they became involved in civic activism. By accessing the "voice" of these women's interpretative stories, Williams also discovers an important element particular to this subject -- anger. As a result of their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 1970's and subsequent disappointments, their lives as well as their families' or community's wellbeing seemed always defined by this anger. Their tonality and body language conveyed wrath as they shared their activist stories publicly. Their channeled negative energy transformed into a catalyst for change. Activism worked as a salve to heal their hidden sociological wounds.

³⁰ Rhonda Y. Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information: History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 41.

³¹ Kim Marie Vaz, ed., *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

Goldie Baker's discontent became a corrective struggle within the proletariat Women's Movement. Williams asserts these women evolved not only in terms of their actual leadership roles, but also in their own analysis of power dynamics and their challenge to public images.³²

Goldie Baker, whose grandmother and mother organized around social justice and poor people's issues, also came to public housing activism via some of the same personal assaults on her rights and family needs as her ancestors. The manifestation of her legacy of activism resulted from personal beliefs, knowledge, and growth as an activist, which she discovered via self-reflection during the oral history interviews.

This type of personal analysis or introspective thinking bears the richest oral histories because the reader experiences the subjects' words and reflections on the event. Like Goldie Baker and Wise, many of the women selected for this study experienced anger, which emerged out of personal daily confrontations with the laws and mores of mid-twentieth century Mississippi. As a result and without exception, every woman in this study developed what they viewed as a culturally authorized and unmitigated right to speak as activists and history-tellers of their communication work in 1964 Freedom Summer.³³

Oral history certainly performs the function of vernacular expression in that its narratives represent a "voice" from the participants' experience. The subject's self-interpretation leads to a purer knowledge or understanding for the researcher and a more

³² Rhonda Y. Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information: History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 41.

³³ *Ibid.*

accurate representation or "thicker description" for the reader.³⁴ For black women, this type of voice represents more than the audible sounds emanating from the subject, but rather embodies varying articulation expressed through spoken and unspoken communication of the body.³⁵ Unlike simply "telling" or recounting a "story," an oral history interviewee reconstructs the past through his/her frame of reference that may or may not allow the interviewer access to information. As in the case of most narratives, oral histories show evidence of intent and purpose in the performance of communicating the event.

This study took special note of the "self-reflection" of the oral history participants and the "re-construction" of themselves in the process of remembering experiences of an event. The success of this study depended on the perceptiveness of the interviewer to determine whether these women see themselves differently than other historical sources have portrayed them and whether they remember their stories from the advantage of time or truly just as the events happened. Thompson maintains that researchers should not necessarily view oral histories as a tool for social change, but rather as an instrument to reconstruct both content and purpose of a particular history. As the historical focus changes, new areas of scholarly inquiry take place and this in turn gives back to those who experienced that history a central place.³⁶

Using an oral history methodology for this research study provided the best environment for African American women leaders of Freedom Summer 1964 to share the

³⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1973).

³⁵ Rhonda Y. Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information: History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 44.

³⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 22.

interpretation of their lived experiences. This study accomplished its goal by using the second and third strategies of Thompson's methodology for collecting stories, which constructed a broad historical interpretation and grouped the narratives around emergent themes. Based on the converged logic of Black Feminist and Womanist theory – Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, these themes developed an argument for the weight of their contributions to Black Press history. It also mimicked the Modell and Brodosky study³⁷ in the use of photographs to analyze the relationship between the verbal accounts and visual stories of these women. Use of photographs in this study provided insight into the ways Freedom Summer 1964 women personally constructed the links between economic, social, and personal influences that shaped their communication efforts during the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

Through these types of studies, researchers enter a minority sphere of discourse within communication history methodologies and find their ideological location contrary to traditionally elite conservative influences. In short, this particular historical process creates a forum for the voices of “resistant representation.” Studs Terkel puts it well in his paraphrase of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* - “...in their remembering is *their [sic]* truth.”³⁸ Thompson's adage provides the underlying mantra for this study, “...The past matters to the present, but whose voice or voices are to be heard?”³⁹

³⁷ Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky, “Envisioning Homestead: Using Photographs in Interviewing (Homestead, Pennsylvania),” in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum Publishers, 1996), 107-139, 142-144

³⁸ Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

³⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT WAS WOMEN'S WORK IN FREEDOM SUMMER?

An important finding of this study highlights the generational and ideological strata that emerged among its participants. As the late Rosa Parks once inferred, the political identity of black women of the Modern Civil Rights Movement underwent major transformations, “Nowadays, women wouldn't stand for being kept so much in the background, but back then [the heyday of the Modern Civil Rights era,] women's rights hadn't become a popular cause yet.”¹

The two-fold goal of this chapter articulates the voices of these women, as their personal and political feminist perspectives emerged, and demonstrates that their theoretical constructs laid the foundation for their professional life choices.² Using Black Feminist theory and the emergent concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism,³ this chapter

¹ Rosa Parks, *My Story*, (New York, NY: Dial Books, 1992), 166.

² For example, Rosa Parks' life profession became evident after leaving Alabama: “Thus it was in a bittersweet mood that the Parks family moved to Detroit, where Rosa Parks almost immediately made contact with local chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League. As had been the case in Montgomery, civil rights activism remained her true vocation. Now, however, that activism began to focus not only on civil rights in general, but also women's rights within the broader movement.” Douglas Brinkley, “Rosa Parks,” *American History*, August 2003, 48.

³ As outlined in earlier chapters, this developing idea explains the relationship between women's communication work during Freedom Summer 1964 of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, the proximity of their burgeoning feminist perspectives, and the effect that this dynamic had on their subsequent choice of professions as social activists or creators of media. Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, as revealed in this study, showed that middle-aged African American women (during Freedom Summer 1964) often viewed themselves as the backbone to organizing efforts, but also assumed a “humanist” vision and posture in that they didn't begrudge the publicity of their male counterparts. These older women believed that media emphasis on the “total” struggle proved far more important at the time than their individual or gender struggles. They made a pragmatic and conscious choice to identify black men as the vanguard of the Movement; thereby, reshaping America's posture toward the value and accomplishments of African American men in general. They demonstrated a life's vocation to social advocacy that often included holding a grass-roots-supported political office while married with children and indigenous to the region targeted for activism. Unanimously, they viewed the opportunity to work as social activists as the only hope for their family and their community. The older women of Freedom Summer relied on alternative or

examines the social construction and political identity of these women during their Movement years and from what feminist perspective (if any) they now view their role in civil rights and journalism history. Looking to the examples of women who became the mothers of the Modern Civil Rights Movement (Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Septima Clark, and Dorothy Height), most of these social matriarchs came out of the tradition of Nineteenth Century First-Wave Black Women's Clubs and Church Auxiliaries led by the likes of Anna J. Cooper, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell.⁴

The next generation of black matriarchs, in the Mississippi Freedom Movement, Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, Victoria Gray Adams, and Unita Blackwell, provided a theoretical "bridge" between First-Wave and Second-Wave Black Feminist activists. The findings of this study suggest these women, who were older, married, and had familial responsibilities, took on a more communal or Afro-Pragmatic Womanist perspective of their role in the Movement compared to their younger, single, and unencumbered Feminist and Black Feminist counterparts of Freedom Summer 1964. Offering the caveat that not all African American women approach Black Feminism (or

creative means of communication as the primary tool of facilitating their goals and viewed their posture as affecting and affording younger women of the Movement unprecedented opportunities in how they viewed the world and their choices of career occupations.

⁴ Bettina Aptheker, *Women's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990); Patricia Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 746-747; Christina Greene, "The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper Including: A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters; The Power of Femininity in the New South; Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930," *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 172; Mark D. Matthews, "'Our Women and What They Think': Amy Jacques Garvey and The Negro World," *Black Scholar* 8, no. 9 (1979): 2-13; Ula Taylor, "'Negro Women are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers': Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2000); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151.

any branch thereof) from the same perspective or agency (naming and defining themselves as such),⁵ the following discussion explains how these trailblazing activists saw their role as women leaders in the Freedom Summer Movement.

Many Black Feminist scholars align Hamer and Devine with the “humanist”⁶ vision of the theory. Their “words and deeds” inherently define them also as Afro-Pragmatic Womanists.⁷ Evidenced by public acknowledgement of her constant struggle to eradicate anti-binary thinking, Hamer often said she empowered men *and* women, poor *and* rich, and black *and* white; thus actualizing a humanist vision of community activism.

Ain't no such thing as I can hate anybody and hope to see God's face.⁸

Sometimes I really feel sorrier for the white woman than I feel for ourselves because she's been caught up in this thing, caught up in feeling special. I been watching you, baby. You had this kind of angel feeling that you were untouchable.... But [the white woman's] freedom is shackled in chains to mine, and she realizes that she is not free until I am free.⁹

⁵ Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Patricia Collins, “What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond,” *Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1996).

⁶ Like Collins, I use the term “humanist” to provide “an Afrocentric historical context distinct from that criticized by Western feminists.... I [Collins] use the term to tap an Afrocentric humanism as cited by West (1977-78), Asante (1987) and Turner (1984) and as part of the black theological tradition (Mitchell and Lewter 1986; Cannon 1988). See Harris (1981) for a discussion of the humanist tradition in the works of three black women writers. See Richards (1990) for a discussion of African American spirituality, a key dimension of Afrocentric humanism.” Novelist Margaret Walker offers one of the clearest discussions of black humanism. Walker claims: “I think it is more important now to emphasize humanism in a technological age than ever before, because it is only in terms of humanism that society can redeem itself. I believe that mankind is only one race—the human race. There are many strands in the family of man—many races. The world has yet to learn to appreciate the deep reservoirs of humanism in all races, and particularly in the black race” (Rowell 1975, 12); Patricia Hill Collins, “Defining Black Feminist Thought,” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 19-40, n7; Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

⁷ Both women worked their entire adult lives to relieve the plight of the entire black race. At that time, they believed that a positive public image of black men far outweighed their own personal gendered battles. Native Mississippians, they were both married and quite committed to their respective husbands and children and like the older women of this study (whom they groomed for public service), they also viewed the Movement as *the* only hope for change.

⁸ June Jordan, preface to *Civil Wars* (Boston, MA: Bacon, 1981), xi.

⁹ Emru Townsend, “Fannie Lou Hamer,” *Black History Pages*, <http://www.blackhistorypages.net/pages/flhamer-2.php> (accessed October 10, 2005).

Hamer spent the rest of her life working as a grass-roots organizer of several anti-poverty programs in her home state of Mississippi. Picking up where she left off at the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, she worked to bring blacks and whites and men and women (evidence of her Afro-Pragmatic Womanist perspective) together within the Democratic Party. The following short biographical description of Hamer as a life-long full-time social activist exemplifies her as an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist.

In 1965, "Mississippi" magazine named her one of six "Women of Influence" in the state. In 1968, she helped create a food cooperative, to help the poor obtain more meat in their diet. In 1969, she founded the Freedom Farm Cooperative in which 5,000 people were able to grow their own food and own 680 acres of land. In 1972, she helped found the National Women's Political Caucus. During the last ten years of her life, she worked on issues such as school desegregation, child day-care, and low-income housing.¹⁰

As one of the primary interviewees of this study, the recently deceased the Reverend Victoria Gray Adams'¹¹ unknowingly initiated this study's developing concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism when she explained that women commonly took on leadership roles within the Freedom Movement, but with good grace allowed the "face" of their efforts to publicly appear in the form of men and youths.¹² Born in 1926 in Palmers Crossing (now a suburb of Hattiesburg,) Mississippi, to Jack and Anna Mae Jackson. Adams' mother died in childbirth not long after her third birthday and her paternal grandparents raised her and her younger sister on a few sharecropping plantations and then their own farm.

¹⁰ Essortment, "Who is Fannie Lou Hamer? Profile of Fannie Lou Hamer, Organizer of the Mississippi Freedom Party and Party Delegate, Field Secretary for SNCC and Grass-Roots Organizer," http://nd.essortment.com/fannielouhamer_rgrh.htm (accessed October 10, 2005).

¹¹ See Appendix J (Photos of Victoria Jackson Gray Adams).

¹² Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

Palmer's Crossing was an all black farming village located just a short distance from the segregated southern city of Hattiesburg. Adams remembers that most of her interactions were with other blacks and that they rarely went into the mostly white city because they existed primarily off of the labor and produce of their collective farms. Her family impressed upon her early in life the importance of education and standing up for one's rights. Adams remembered her grandfather, whom she referred to as "Daddy," as the one who gave her the "bold spirit of activism,"

When we were on one plantation and the agent, not the boss man, the agent decided all the kids above a certain age didn't need to go to school and that they needed to be in the field chopping cotton. Daddy said, 'Well, my kids are going to school.' He got word to everybody else who wanted their kids to go to school and he'd walk them to school. Every morning, he put extra shells in his hunting sack, loaded his double-barrel shotgun, and walked us and everybody else that wanted to go to school to the school bus. We went to school.¹³

In 1945, Adams began college at Wilberforce University, but by the next year her family could no longer afford to send her and she went to school in Mississippi. She met and married her first husband Tony Gray and they had three children. She initially became involved in the Civil Rights Movement with the Delta Ministry, but by the summer of 1964 (the same year she divorced her first husband) she was selling cosmetics door-to-door to support her family and working as a field secretary for SNCC.

With a resonant voice weathered by time, the doe-eyed matriarch further explained that neither she nor her associates anticipated that their level of involvement would become so central to the Movement and certainly did not expect significant public recognition for their efforts.

I came from the southeastern part of the state [Hattiesburg, Mississippi], but because there were so few adults who were willing to step out there and become

¹³ Ibid.

visually involved in the early days of the Movement. We [Hamer, Devine, Blackwell, and Adams] were kind of rarities and that caused our paths to cross. We were the darlings of the student community and you know you don't plan to become these people in these positions.¹³

Among the older women of this study, Adams perhaps had the most celebrated career in social activism. Towards the end of 1964, Adams became the first black woman to run for the U.S. Senate on the MFDP ticket.¹⁴ Also, she was one of four African American female MFDP delegates to the August 1964 Democratic Presidential Convention in Atlantic City. One of only a few females (with Ella Baker) and a long time board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Adams devoted her life to not just civil rights for African Americans, but had been a staunch advocate for human rights around the world. Two years after the Freedom Summer Project, Adams married her second husband Rueben Adams (of 40 years) and bore her fourth child. Like the other Afro-Pragmatic women, she continued her social activism throughout her life as a wife and mother. Although retired from duties as Virginia State University Campus Minister, Adams continued her social activism throughout the nation by conducting workshops for small townships, young people, and most anyone willing to work as community activists until her death in August 2006 at the age of 79. Her life motto was "Life shrinks or expands in directions proportionate to the courage with which we live it."¹⁵ Adams was an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist.

A second primary source among the older women of this study, Unita Blackwell,¹⁶ echoes Adams' sentiment in her explanation of the role and perspective of middle-aged

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Appendix G (Victoria Gray Adams U.S. Senate Poster).

¹⁵ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

¹⁶ See Appendix J (Photos of Adams).

female activists:

Women were the glue that held the Movement together as the upper glue that holds most things together in the community. You see those, over there, if it were not for those [in the home of Blackwell - Blackwell holds a picture of Adams, Hamer, Devine, and herself] over there I wouldn't have been the chairman of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Those women had influence. Those women had wisdom. Those women had courage and that's why they came to the Movement. They were in those positions at the appropriate time and they never shirked the hard decisions. That's all.¹⁷

Blackwell, a tall ebony-hued woman of Choctaw Indian and African-American descent, was born March 18, 1933 on "Mr. Hamilton's plantation" in Lula, Mississippi to third-generation sharecroppers. Her birthplace is situated 58 miles southwest of (Memphis) Tennessee/Mississippi border and 133 miles northeast from the little community of Meyersville, which would not only become her home through marriage, but was also the town that elected her as the first black mayor in Mississippi history. The middle child of only three children (an older sister by four years and a younger brother whom her mother miscarried) in an era when (particularly sharecropping) families had many children in part due to the lack of access to birth control and the practical necessity of having as many hands as possible to help pick cotton and increase the family income level, Blackwell had opportunities as a black Mississippian that other women from her home state only dreamed.

Although Blackwell spent her summers and the first month of each school year picking and cutting cotton, she and her sister annually "migrated" (in reality the siblings snuck off the plantation during the fall, winter, and early spring to visit a neighboring aunt and attend school thereby circumventing Mississippi law of educating blacks for

¹⁷ See Appendix K (Photos of Unita Blackwell), Unita Blackwell, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, February 27, March 12, March 13, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Meyersville, MS.

only three months a year)¹⁸ to West Helena, Arkansas (only 13 miles from her birthplace of Lula, Mississippi) where she grew up and attended high school. Her father doted on her and her sister to the extent that he willingly committed a significant social taboo on their behalf in the heyday of Jim Crow – arguing with a white man in public.

The plantation owner wanted my mother to take me to the field and make me pick cotton, and I'm a little bitty something, you know. My daddy was not going to have it. He said, 'we were his wife and baby, not the plantation owner's, and he [Blackwell's father] tells us all what to do.' And so, my daddy's temper did not deal well with that. And so, he had to get himself out of Mississippi.¹⁹

Upon his departure from Mississippi and his family, he found a job in an ice plant in Tennessee that allowed him to fund his children's travel and board with their aunt in West Helen, Arkansas. Because her family was so small and demonstrated the wherewithal for mobility in facilitating the girls' yearly move relatively northward, Blackwell worked and experienced a portion of her early life away from the harsh brutalities of Mississippi. At the age of 25 and while working and taking a few classes at a local community college in Arkansas, she met and married her husband Jeremiah Blackwell. But, soon after their nuptials the couple returned to her husband's family homestead in Meyersville, Mississippi to care for his ailing grandmother. Blackwell says that even though she became a wife and mother, she still had a great desire and much determination to finish college.

Just because I was getting older and having a family didn't mean I wanted to give up getting a degree. I would work and go back to school, work and go back to school and that's how I got my [first] degree. When I became a fellow, I received a fellowship because of all of the work I've done with the Movement and all, I

¹⁸ Unita Blackwell, oral history interview by Michael Garvey, April 21, 1977 and May 12, 1977, Meyersville, Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi. Oral History Program: F341.5.M57 vol. 334

¹⁹ Ibid.

kept at it and I got my Master's. I say to young people just keep going to school until you get it.²⁰

She goes on to explain that her family were not activists in the sense of direct-action protesters, but that her grandmother and mother often taught her and her sister the difference between right and wrong and that they should always stand up for what's right and what they believed in.

I was brought up knowing that something was wrong with this picture. I use to hear some of the older blacks, my grandmother's folks and such, say that black folks used to vote. They really did! But, that was a short period [Post-Civil War Reconstruction era of 1865-1868] and now that had been taken away in the '60's and my grandmother used to say 'child, there is nothing wrong with it [organizing to register to vote.] We are not going to worry about it; we are just going to pray on it.'²¹

Blackwell says she came from a family of women who would sit down and tell their young daughters things they should and should not get involved in. Her living foremothers (grandmother, mother, and aunts) never directly joined any civil rights organization (since that would have been punishable by banishment or death) and stayed within the socialized behavior of their generation for the *pragmatic* reason stated above. They did, however, encourage the younger Blackwell to make a difference and fight for what she knew in her heart to be right. Blackwell remembered her mother's query about why whites resisted black's voting when they depended so heavily on the existence of African Americans as an integral component of their shared community and that the responsibility to vote still existed whether the right to do so had been denied or granted.

'God loves all folks and we just don't understand why they did not want us to vote, don't want us to be a part [of the community.] We cook their food, and clean their houses, and take care of their children, but me – I'm going to vote for

²⁰ Unita Blackwell, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005, Meyersville, MS.

²¹ Ibid.

myself.' It might seem simplistic, but it made marvelous sense to me and I knew what they [her foremothers] were talking about. For example, my mother worked for Chicago Mills in West Arkansas during World War I. She had to go to work at 5:45 in the evening and got off at 4:15 in the morning, but she couldn't register to vote in Mississippi.²²

Blackwell hands down this same legacy of support in faith, but with direct action, years later in her Afro-Pragmatic Womanist approach to Freedom Summer 1964. Her support of traditional public male leadership tempered with direct-action activism afforded the younger generation of women opportunities to express their more feminist approach to social activism.

The time for us getting up and involved with a whole lot of things came about in the 1960's, the early '60's. A lot of people were afraid; a lot of us were afraid. And, you could be afraid; but I was always taught that 'God helps those who help themselves.'²³

Blackwell says she became involved in the Movement in the early 1960's when a number of local blacks began to talk about freedom from the oppression of the deeply entrenched and unjust sharecropping and Jim Crow system of Mississippi. She says she began organizing although she was not exactly sure what that meant or what they would do, but she remembers that she and her neighbors did know that they had been deprived of an aspect of citizenship that they and their ancestors rightfully earned – they had been denied the right to register to vote.

They [the SNCC students] said that I was an organizer, even though I didn't know that I was an organizer. But, that's what they said I was doing, so that what I did and that was to ask my friends and neighbors to come and let's go on down to the courthouse and try to register to vote.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Blackwell remembers her first contact with SNCC was through local black church meetings and the students would ask people to join them and go to the courthouse to register to vote. She remembers that by the fall of 1963, SNCC Field Secretary Charlie Cobb knocked on her door and asked if she was the woman who everyone said was organizing people to vote. She says that initially she and her husband opened their homes to the Movement simply because they knew it was the right thing to do. In time, however, they did so because it was the only thing to do.

Like most local women, Unita Blackwell, only partially spent much time in the SNCC office; other times, she worked as field canvasser and Freedom School teacher. A bit older than most of the office workers at that time and a native Mississippian, she had a somewhat different view than the younger female staff. Blackwell underscores the mindset of the older women of this study and provides an explanation for why Afro Pragmatic Womanists pledged loyalty to the uplift of African American men.

I don't think people understand the climate for black males in the 1960's; we tried to protect one another. They [whites] treated them [African American men] so very bad; we were coming out of an era when [white] men were the head of everything. As we looked back over it, we hadn't seen [black] men in these roles [as social leaders] before and we knew the police could beat and kill them at the drop of a hat. Now, the men in this [Freedom Summer] Movement, I knew those guys [Bob Moses, Amzie Moore.] And, yes they were beaten and everything only because they would try to help us women organize.²⁵

With Adams, Devine, and Hamer, Blackwell attended the 1964 Atlantic City Presidential Convention as a MFDP delegate. Continuing in the tradition of Afro-Pragmatic Womanists, by the early 1970's, she served as a community development specialist with the National Council of Negro Women. Having received a Master's in

²⁵ Unita Blackwell, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005, Meyersville, MS.

regional planning from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and a fierce orator and advocate for rural housing and development in the South, Blackwell's participation in the Carter Administration's Energy Summit at Camp David took her to the highest levels of social activism. As a fellow of the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, she still advises regional, state, and U.S. Government agencies on the plight of the rural poor and has published her autobiography *Barefootin: Life Lessons from the Road to Freedom* in 2006. With the skills, experience, and education Blackwell acquired, clearly she could have gone on to a full-time professional life in various political and social planning arenas. But, like Adams, Blackwell too has continued in a life of social activism and should be considered an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist.

A third primary interview source for this study, Dr. L.C. Dorsey²⁶ affirms these sentiments and underscores the reason for the collective perspective of this group of women towards their historical image. She explained that *local* black women designed and executed the clerical duties, organizing of childcare and summer reading/activities, and clothing and voter registration drives in most of the Mississippi civil rights organizations.

The majority of the foot soldiers in the Movement throughout the South were women...women and their children. The people who were going to jail, who were in front of those fire hoses with the dogs tearing their clothes and stuff off and tearing their flesh were women and women were workers.²⁷

²⁶ See Appendix L (Photo of Dorsey).

²⁷ L.C. Dorsey, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS.

Dorsey acknowledges that historically women have always been the workers in the American church and that their labor of service for the betterment of the local community was not new for them.²⁸ She maintains that initially in the Movement field workers (or as she put it, the ‘get out and knock on the door people’) to a large of the extent were local women and young students from outside of Mississippi.

To give an example, [look at] the Black Nurses Association (BNA.) All the nurses in Mississippi [and most other states in that era] used to be women and the Black Nurses Association were the people who were out there working with the NAACP and everyone else because our problems were more than just health [related.] They [the BNA] would lead us [in social activism] and they were all women. But, in the organizations where you had men and women who started with the church and some of the other civic groups, you had men in leadership roles and women were the ones who raised the money, who did the work, who did all of this and that was no different when we moved into the Civil Rights Movement.²⁹

Dorsey goes on to explain that while men initially led these organizations, trailblazers like Hamer, et al not only challenged their right to speak as part of the collective, but also ironically elevated the public image of black men in leadership. She says the “socialization” of the period and the growth of the Freedom Movement into the late 1960’s, allowed the younger generation of women to simply take their leadership roles to the next level.³⁰

Dorsey somewhat functions as the “bridge” between Afro-Pragmatic Womanists - Hamer, Devine, Adams, and Blackwell and the younger generation of the Freedom

²⁸ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Elsa Barkley Brown “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁹ L.C. Dorsey, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

Movement who leaned more towards traditional Black Feminism. Now a retired sociology professor at Mississippi Valley State University, Dorsey comes from a long line of Mississippi and Alabama sharecroppers. Born in 1939 on the Walker Family plantation in the Delta region of Washington County, Mississippi, she dropped out of school in the 11th grade, married and promptly had six children. Following the same track of an impoverished life as the women before her, Dorsey initially became involved with Freedom Summer through the health advocacy organization Mississippi Delta Ministry.

In the black community young white men and women who came from the universities and colleges in the communities was spread out all over the county talking to us about this wonderful movement or about our right to participate in the political process, talking to us about equality, talking to us about the issues of responsibility for ourselves and making sure that we were represented in government and they were working together.³¹

As with the oldest women of this study and in keeping with the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist concept, Dorsey was married with children and saw the opportunity to work with other Freedom workers as the single hope for her family and her community.

We were sure that things would change. That with the Movement there would come justice; there would be an end to lynching; there would be an end to the raggedy houses we lived on the plantation...and in many ways there was change.³² We envisioned...that we were not going to get pulled out of our houses at night and whipped by a boss man on the plantation or by some angry white men who thought we had stepped out of our place or who thought we had done something deserving of a beating.³³

Dorsey describes the type of work the Delta women performed and how their activism had a profound effect not only on the development of their ideological perspective towards a unified cause of action, but also brought positive change from the politically and socially oppressive system of Jim Crow in Mississippi.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., 27.

³³ Ibid., 24.

In some the offices in Mississippi that I had access to, much of the work of actually writing up reports and collecting data was done by women. We were the ones who raised money, who ran the organizational offices, who went in and canvassed in the community and we were happy to do this, we didn't have jobs or anything.³⁴ It was no longer just the NAACP, the SCL conference of other organizations, the Delta Ministry you know, which eventually dissolved under one umbrella to be COFO. Everybody was in it together and everybody was responsible to try and make sure that we articulated and agreed upon our agenda for social change.³⁵

Understanding the mind set of such indigenous women who began organizing *before* Freedom Summer 1964, brings critical contextual information not only to the oral stories of this study's respondents, but also explains, in part, why the older women forsook public notoriety of their activist efforts.

In keeping with her role as a "bridge" between the older and younger women of this study, Dorsey (similarly to the older women) continued her life of full-time social activist for many years after the Summer Project. Foreshadowing the younger generation of women from this study, however, she also used experiences and skills acquired through her social activism to forge a professional career in journalism and then higher education.

Beginning in 1964 as an *Operation Head Start* Community Development Specialist, she devoted her life to advocating economic independence within the downtrodden Delta areas of Mississippi. In 1966, she took on additional responsibilities in *Operation Help*, which provided job training and assistance for the area's poor. By 1968, she received her GED through Tufts University's STAR (Systematic Training and Redevelopment) Program. In 1973, she received her Master's degree in Social Work from Stony Brook University in New York via an experimental program that offered graduate degrees to African Americans without undergraduate degrees. Later that same

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

³⁵ Ibid., 22.

year, Dorsey returned to Mississippi and began work as Director of Social Services for the Mid-Delta Head Start Program in Greenville.

She served as Associate Director of the Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons from 1974 until the doors closed in 1983 due to lack of funding. As a result of her work with the prison system, she concurrently served on President Jimmy Carter's National Council for Economic Opportunity from 1978 to 1979, during which time she received her doctorate in Social Work from Howard University. Her activities working to reform Mississippi state prison policy generated several articles and editorials for the *Jackson Advocate* and the *Southern Coalition of Jail and Prison Reports*. By 1983, her book *Cold Steel*, an exposé about Parchman prison life and later one of the primary sources for Eddie Murphy's 1999 movie *Life*, brought her national recognition.³⁶

From 1988 to 1995, Dorsey served as the Executive Director for the Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, providing complete family medical care and social services for the widespread poor populations of Bolivar, Coahoma, Sunflower, and Washington Counties. She then worked as a clinical associate professor in the Family

³⁶ Publications for Dr. L.C. Dorsey:

Nonfiction: *Cold Steel*. Jackson, Mississippi: Dorsey's Inc., 1983.

Articles: "Freedom Comes to Mississippi," *Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons Reports*, Jackson, Mississippi, 1977; "Harder Than These Times," *Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons Reports*, Jackson, Mississippi, 1977.

Interview: L.C. Dorsey, interview by Kim Lacy Rogers, Owen Brooks, and Jerry Ward, July 18, 1997, Transcript, The Delta Oral History Project, Tougaloo College: L. Zenobia Coleman Library Archives, Tougaloo, MS.

Articles: Andy Kanengiser, "ACLU to Honor 2 Mississippians," *Jackson Daily News*, June 1, 1983; Gracie Bonds, "Author of Cold Steel Honored at Party Tomorrow," *Delta Democrat Times*, December 15, 1982; Leslie R. Myers, "Cold Steel Examines Prison Life," *Clarion Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, November 1982.

Author-related: USM Oral History Civil Rights Documentation Project. www-dept.usm.edu/~mcrohb/.

Medicine Department at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.³⁷ Named Mississippi State Educator of the Year in early 1985, Professor Dorsey retired from her teaching duties at Mississippi Valley State University in 2006.

Dorsey says that while the older women of the Movement made civil rights their life's work, she eventually saw herself as the link to the younger generation of women who used their experiences in the Movement to become professionals in their own right.

As I expanded my social work into the prison system here in Mississippi, began writing articles for some of the newspapers and prison journals, and completed my Ph.D. work in sociology, I guess you could say I became more of a professional career woman than a grass-roots activist. I guess I am sort of a late bloomer, because I didn't get my education and experience from the traditional route - college, working, and then a family (you know, marriage and children.) But, since I was younger than Mrs. Hamer and them, I guess I am more of a feminist because I've done things in my career that even some men haven't done.³⁸

The younger women (under 30 during the 1960's) of this study³⁹ mostly fit the profile of college students, non-southern whites or middle-class blacks, non-Mississippian, and possessed a very different mind set on women's treatment in the Movement than that of the older women. Most felt that because of their gender, they received second-class treatment in the Movement and, therefore, assumed a more Feminist or Black Feminist perspective. This proved true more so among the younger white females, but later became the lament of the younger black women as the Civil Rights Movement shifted toward a nationalistic Black Power perspective in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

³⁷ Mississippi University, Mississippi Writers Page, Copyright © 2004 The University of Mississippi English Department.

³⁸ L.C. Dorsey, interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS, 45.

³⁹ See Appendix H (Women Communicators in Freedom Summer).

These women sought a different route to leadership than that practiced by Hamer and the older women of this study and publicly decried any attempt to muffle their voices as activists both within and outside of Freedom organizations. Like most feminist scholarship suggests, the younger women of this study agree that a clear demarcation of perspective among social activists became part of the impetus for the Second-Wave Feminist Movement of the 1960's and the subsequent Second-Wave Black Feminist Movement of the late 1970's/early 1980's.

The youngest in the group of women of color in this study's younger generation of Freedom Summer workers, Judy Richardson,⁴⁰ was born outside New York City in 1945 and worked at the SNCC State Headquarters-Greenwood, Mississippi in 1964. She says Freedom Summer had a direct correlation to the development of her perspective as a young person, a black person, and a young black woman.

So what happened, though, for me was that as this young person, absolutely impressionable, coming from Tarrytown, New York [located 25 miles north of New York City,] I got this bird's eye view of the organization that I would never have gotten any other way. I saw the field secretaries, I learned how to talk to the FBI, an absolutely racist organization at that point and still is ...And so, all of these people are influencing me in a way that made you realize you had to do this for the rest of your life, you know, and that I was coming into a family, not just a movement.⁴¹

Richardson says she probably inherited her father penchant for social activism since he was a union organizer for the United Auto Workers in the infamous village of "The Sleepy Hollow Legend" of Tarrytown. In 1952, he suffered a fatal heart attack while on the assembly line of the General Motors Auto plant when she was only seven

⁴⁰ See Appendix M (Photo of Richardson).

⁴¹ Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

years old, but her mother encouraged Richardson to become an avid reader and pursue an advanced education. She won a scholarship to Swarthmore College (a northeastern liberal Quaker school) with seven other African Americans in the school's attempt to diversify its student body. Within the first few weeks of school, Richardson quickly became involved with the *Students for a Democratic Society* organization on campus and its civil rights protests.

On a lark, I went with them to a demonstration in Cambridge, Maryland. Most of the kids on the bus were white. But when I got to the mass meeting there were people like the local leader, Gloria Richardson, and a guy named Reggie Robinson. He was my age, out of Baltimore, and he was just a regular street person, but I watched him move the meeting -- he could do the rally talk, which I was never able to figure out. He could get people singing and get them organized. So, here was a group of people my age, who looked like me, who were thinking about things.⁴²

Richardson says her early upbringing was blue-collar and that "no Black middle class" existed in Tarrytown. She remembers that when she encountered them in her later teenage years, she felt they possessed a very elitist attitude.

It was one of the times, aside from race, that I realized I was being put down; I didn't like it, and it was the Black middle class that was doing it. But when I got to SNCC I found people who were not primarily middle class -- some were -- and all of us were working together, trying to empower people. Not the NAACP kind of people, whom we viewed as the teachers and the preachers, but more of the people who normally nobody paid any attention to. So, I saw people my age who were brilliant.⁴³

Some of those brilliant people who were her age possessed a sense of public service as an important component to their higher education experience. Richardson also goes on to

⁴²“Rebirth: A Discussion of Boston Freedom Summer, with Judy Richardson, Cynthia Silva Parker, Diana Auborg, Jeana Brown, Matthew Gibson, Tamara Mack-Lowe, and Chinyelu Martin” *Boston Review*, December 1994/January 1995.

⁴³ Ibid.

explain that her intersectionality⁴⁴ with SNCC and the Freedom Movement not only defined her as a Black Feminist, but also helped create her political, social and professional vocation.

We forget that the Movement, in some ways, really changed the world - it changed us as people. The transformative power that the Movement *absolutely* had on us, anyone who was involved, who was touched by it [understands]. Being in SNCC for me absolutely changed me; it changed my worldview; it changed the way I saw the world; and it changed the way I saw myself. It was probably one of the most powerful times in my life.⁴⁵

Richardson went on in 1965 to work as Julian Bond's campaign office manager in his successful first-run for the Georgia House of Representatives. While she continued her grass-roots activism by organizing a residential freedom school and still today talks to young people about the merits of social activism, she like many of the younger women of Freedom Summer, used their experiences to become a professional communicator.

By 1968, Richardson and a few other SNCC associates created the largest African American bookstore in the country in Washington, D.C. Drum & Spear Bookstore, and its in-house publishing company, had offices in the U.S. and Tanzania, East Africa and co-produced African and African American children's radio program in the nation's capitol for many years.⁴⁶ By 1978, Richardson became a content advisor, researcher and series associate producer of the famed civil rights documentary *Eyes on the Prize- Parts I and II*, which won six Emmy's and garnered an Academy Award Nomination under the

⁴⁴ Feminist term that says "systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by black women," Collins, 2000, 299.

⁴⁵ The Brookings Institute, "Race: The Great American Divide," *National Issues Forum* (transcript, The Brookings Institute, January 11, 2000), <http://apps49.brookings.edu/comm/transcripts/20000111.htm> (accessed October 10, 2005).

⁴⁶ Author's Note: I remember as a young child growing up in the Washington, D.C. area listening to Richardson's Saturday morning show on Howard University's WHUR and her 1969 visit to my Kindergarten Graduation at Praganar Preschool located not far from the University campus.

Blackside Production Company.⁴⁷ She conducts teacher-training workshops focused on the series and its application to a variety of disciplines. During her tenure with Blackside Production,⁴⁸ she also co-produced a PBS documentary titled *Malcolm X: Make it Plain* (winner of both an Emmy and a Peabody Award). Currently as a senior producer at Northern Lights Production Company (Boston, MA)⁴⁹, she and other SNCC women have compiled an anthology of women's literature due out in 2006. Titled *Hands on the Freedom Plow: The Untold Story of Women in SNCC*, the book chronicles the social activism of over 50 women during the southern Freedom Movement.⁵⁰

Another primary source from the group of younger women of this study, Sheila Michaels⁵¹, was born to Jewish parents Alma Weil and Ephraim London (who would later become a leading First Amendment lawyer) in 1939 St. Louis. Raised by her maternal grandparents in Bronx, New York during her primary school years and later by her mother and stepfather in Missouri, she grew up in an upper-middle class family setting. The eldest of three, she had two younger brothers from her mother's second marriage, Michaels was doted on by her maternal grandparents and came from a long line of radical lawyers on her estranged father's side of the family (including her paternal

⁴⁷ In April 2005, Blackside Productions gifted its holdings to the archives at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

⁴⁸ Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO, Blackside Productions, Washington University Archives, St. Louis, MO.

⁴⁹ Northern Light production credits include producer/director/writer for *A Fragile Freedom: African American Historic Sites*, made for and aired on the History Channel in February, 2002; producer/director/writer for *Building on a Firm Foundation* about abolitionist activism in Boston's African American community during the 1800's for Boston's Museum of African American History; and producer for *Long Road to Justice*, a video on the African American experience in the Massachusetts courts for a traveling exhibit which premiered at Boston's new Edward Brooke Courthouse at Government Center. She is now working on the autobiography of Paul Laurence Dunbar for the National Park Service in Dayton, Ohio.

⁵⁰ Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO, Blackside Productions, Washington University Archives, St. Louis, MO.

⁵¹ See Appendix N (Photo of Michaels).

grandparents Horace London and Rachel Saffron London and paternal great-uncle Meyer London, the first American Socialist Congressman.)

A budding-journalist with the newspaper at the College of William and Mary, Michaels' early activism led to her dismissal from not only the paper, but also the school. Upon her return to the Midwest, she worked in public relations for a St. Louis television station and then as a ghostwriter and editor back in New York City. While taking night classes at Columbia University, Michaels became involved with CORE and by 1962 found herself first in Jackson, Mississippi working for SNCC, and then later by 1964 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi working under the umbrella organization COFO.

Michaels says the way some men (both leaders and rank-and-file workers) reportedly behaved in the Movement helped shaped her perspective of women's treatment and prompted several of her peers to speak out against sexual inequality. She further explains that perhaps the most debasing characteristic of the Freedom Movement was that, although she had been formally trained as a journalist, her gender dictated that her primary duty was to perform clerical/secretarial tasks:

Well, women never got the credit for their organizing work and this was obvious. We were kept in the office. There was this office full of women and a couple of females doing the office work, doing the secretarial receptionist, greeting, putting out news releases and everything.⁵²

Additionally, Michaels remembers that some of the very men who publicly advocated civil rights, equality, and respect for African Americans privately trampled those same rights of women via sexual harassment and chauvinistic behavior. For example, she remembers a time prior to Freedom Summer in 1962 when the late former

⁵² Ibid.

SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman allegedly sought retribution for refusing his sexual advances. Recalling an instance of reportedly inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment, Michaels said,

He [Forman] knocked my purse over while he was reaching for me and everything scattered all over the floor. I couldn't believe he was making a pass at me in the SNCC office! For God sakes, everything is bugged, you know? And, there were probably cameras pointed at us right through the window across the street. Of course, I would never have anything to do with a married man. So, anyway, he had a long simmering resentment about this.⁵³

Michaels goes on to explain that, two years later, she was assigned to work with a young Marion Barry, now the former Mayor of the District of Columbia, who was a SNCC field secretary during the Freedom Summer. She says that Forman knew that she and Barry were close platonic friends who worked well together and often found much success in their field projects. Michaels contends that Forman pulled her from Barry's project, which left Barry without the support he needed, simply to spite her and out of jealousy of her and Barry's relationship.

...Marion [Barry] suddenly realized that he had lost status [as a field secretary because Michaels had been pulled from his project in Mississippi]...he [Barry] said to Jim [Forman,] 'She [Michaels] has to come back [to Barry's field project.] And Jim [Forman] said, 'Well, she's not going to come back.' Well it was very clear that Jim [Forman] was pretty mad at me [Michaels] for having turned him down...and I was transferred down to the Hattiesburg Project.⁵⁴

On this issue of sexual interplay between the younger generation of black men and white women, Richardson adds a very salient point. She remembers Freedom Summer, in particular, as the genesis of "Free Love" among many of the young college students. This project granted most youth workers their first opportunity to work, live,

⁵³ Sheila Michaels, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 5, 2005 and April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

worship, and build a kinship with people from other ethnicities and classes. For men and women from every demographic profile, the summer work (and the Modern Civil Rights Movement at large) gave them the chance to privately create a community that displaced American cultural and social mores. It was through this time of exploration that some of the younger generation of black men felt bold enough to not only go against the well-established and vitally dangerous taboo of sexually approaching a white women, but to also go as far as punishing them when advances were rebuked (see Michael's experience with sexual harassment).

For black women, this dynamic among black men and white women proved disturbing on several levels. First, it fed into Western propagandist concept that *all* men, particularly black men, viewed white (or non-black) women as the only true love interest of value. Second, it assigned greater value to one group of workers over others in the midst of a social movement supposedly aimed at equalizing the playing field for all individuals. And third, it fostered a major point of contention between black and white women not only during Freedom Summer 1964 and the overall Modern Civil Rights Movement, but also in the subsequent Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970's and certainly until this very day. Richardson remembers that she became fiercely resentful that all kinds of people made monumental sacrifices for what at times seemed like a "summer camp love-in."

I mean, at times, I simply could not believe it. Here I am, giving up my opportunity to be in college, on scholarship mind you, and putting my life on the line, just so you can get laid by a white girl! You know, I was pissed. I mean, I was definitely down for the cause of the Movement, but damn, the way some, not all, black men went after those white girls and the way some of them [white women] enjoyed those days of

“experimenting” and “experiencing” the Mandingo myth, really angered me...that just wasn’t why we were there.⁵⁵

Anglo-Latina Freedom Summer worker Terri Shaw⁵⁶ concurs on how young people’s burgeoning sexuality intersected with the circumstances of Freedom Summer.

A lot of people have written about the problems with sex, which I don't think it was as bad as people feared, but certainly was of concern [reading from her diary], "Joyce [Brown, an young African American women student worker from Xavier University] had a meeting about sex which was just with the women." She had a meeting *just* with the women. And then, "Mrs. Woods [a local home host] made a strong plea for discretion. She said the cops watch us every minute and know every house we stay at." And then it was brought up again also at "A memorial service for the three workers who died, in Reverend Cameron's church, Faith Tabernacle Baptist."⁵⁷

Shaw admits that her conflicts with some of the Movement men, however, stemmed from a lack of experience as an activist and agrees with Michaels that unfair gender expectations prompted much of the sexual discord. Upon reflection, she also concedes that any researcher who uses her diary as sole historical evidence of her experience relies on erroneous and misplaced sentiments. Shaw underscores the importance of time and distance from the events that allow her to give a more “balanced” account of what took place.

Well, it was not good. You know, I wanted to do a good job, and I worked very hard, but I certainly had a hard time getting along with people. I wish I could be more balanced about it, because I think my diary is not balanced, because I complained a lot about the problems I was having. I mean, I certainly had good relationships with some people, but I had conflicts with Sandy [Leigh], my project director, and a couple of African

⁵⁵ Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO, Blacksides Productions, Washington University Archives, St. Louis, MO.

⁵⁶ See Appendix O (Photo of Shaw).

⁵⁷ Terri Shaw, archival oral history interview by Stephanie Scull, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

American women, I had conflicts with, and I left the project early because of the conflict with Sandy.⁵⁸

Born in 1940 Washington, D.C. and the eldest of two daughters to Venezuelan and American parents, Shaw moved a great deal because her father did consulting work for the U.S. Labor Department. During her early childhood she lived in Ohio (twice), Guatemala (twice), and Venezuela; consequently she brought a frame of reference about cultural diversity to Freedom Summer that even most northern Caucasian student-workers did not possess. After graduating from Antioch College (Ohio), where she was an active member of the college chapter of the NAACP, she worked for the *Buffalo Courier Express* for a year before going to Mississippi. Like Michaels, Shaw maintained that most of the challenges she faced with male leaders stemmed from the fact that she (unlike many women in the Movement) had actually been trained as a journalist.

I felt that I had worked as a journalist and I knew how journalism worked, and he [Hattiesburg Field Secretary Sandy Leigh] did not want me. He wanted to control the way I dealt with outsiders, and I think sometimes I rebelled against his authority in that.⁵⁹

Shaw goes on to explain the circumstances that led to her departure during Freedom Summer and maintains that like Leigh, most men did not value the skills she and women like her brought to the Movement.

The immediate issue was that Susan Patterson, my [Freedom Summer] roommate, was arrested in the [Hattiesburg] library, for trying to integrate the library with the freedom school students. I wanted to call my newspaper in Buffalo, because I thought it was a great story: 'Buffalo Debutante Arrested in Mississippi.' And, I did call them, and they put a story on the front page. So, I thought that was a great journalistic coup. But, I had done it against his [Sandy Leigh] orders, so he asked me to leave.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

She said that in reflection, she really does not know why she felt the need to “rebel against his authority, because he was clearly in charge.”

And so, I left, and it was too bad...it was really hard for him [Leigh], and I shouldn't have done that. But, I rationalized [my defiance] by saying it was more important to get the story out. A lot of times, I would want to publicize something and he would be very reluctant to do it. I think, partly it was just a control thing; he wanted to be in charge.⁶¹

Shaw remembers at that point she felt that she “probably would do better as a journalist rather than as an activist, anyway” and that she didn't seem to be right person for day-to-day social activism. Of course, this didn't mean that civic causes no longer concerned her. Her upbringing instilled a sense of one's social responsibility to make sure that “right” championed over “wrong” and in her mind racism most definitely was wrong.

You know, we traveled, and when I was about ten, I remember being in the Atlanta airport and seeing separate drinking fountains and bathrooms, “white” and “colored.” Previous to that, my parents may have spoken about it at home although they wouldn't have used the term ‘racism.’ They may have talked about segregation, and Jim Crow, but I think that was the first I heard of it. Also, I went to a Unitarian church and I remember we attempted to do a few little activities with a black church and Karamu House, which was a social-work community theater.⁶²

Shaw went on to receive a Master's degree in journalism from Columbia University in 1965, and worked with the Associated Press in 1966-1968. After much travel and work in South America (the home of her parents), she received a fellowship from the Washington Journalism Center in the early 1970's and subsequently began her career with the *Washington Post* as an assistant foreign affairs reporter. She continues to work for the newspaper as a special assignment columnist and translator for South American affairs.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Ironically, former SNCC Field Secretary Lawrence Guyot made an important connection between what these women experienced in the Freedom Movement, specifically the white women, and the impetus of the Second-Wave Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970's and the subsequent Black Feminist Movement of the 1980's.

We [SNCC] do the politicizing of the gender question in America...Mary King [and Casey Haden et al] issue a manifesto about the empowerment of women on the gender question [and the mistreatment of women in the organization]...it's printed [and distributed] throughout the country and...we have a jumping-off point about *women's* rights in this country.⁶³

An individual's frame of reference absolutely shapes and informs the process of developing their personal ideologies and politics. The circumstances of growing up black, poor, and female in Mississippi certainly had a profound impact on the way older women of this study approached their work as social activists. Additionally, their social condition immediately prior to and during Freedom Summer most definitely dictated which issues of empowerment were of greater importance to them. While these women understood the benefit of their leadership to the Movement and the progress of women's social status, they also recognized the significance of a positive public perception of black male headship.

Adams and Blackwell's contributions to Freedom Summer, and the Modern Civil Rights Movement in general, help define and describe Afro-Pragmatic Womanism in action – they are the prototypes. While Dorsey “bridges” the two groups of women, via her initial introduction and association with the Movement as an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist, she later took on a more Black Feminist approach and moved her activism career into the ranks of professional journalism, social work, and academia. Like Dorsey,

⁶³ Lawrence Guyot, informational interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 11, 2005, Ruleville, MS.

the younger generation of this study's women initially approached the Movement from the same Afro-Pragmatic Womanist perspective. The intersection of their backgrounds and educational training, however, caused a shift in their worldview toward a more Feminist perspective. They not only spoke out for what women should be allowed to do as Movement activists, they also did it.

As evidenced in the above discussion, this issue of women's empowerment within Freedom Summer became a sticking point primarily among the women of this study who had been trained as communication professionals *prior* to the project and were non-Mississippians. While women, like Michaels and Shaw, rightly saw themselves as part of the cooperative effort of the voter registration cause, they soon developed a self-awareness that some men failed to utilize the women's journalistic skills to the fullest. This was not because of any deficiency on the part of Michaels and Shaw, but rather illustrated the expected role of "women's work" in social activism.

Of important notice is that although the younger women went on to have successful careers in journalism, they did not withdraw their support from the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, their life's journeys have demonstrated a commitment not only to the rights of African Americans, but also to that of women and other disenfranchised individuals. For these women Freedom Summer initiated the catalyst that would forge the next American social cooperative – The Women's Liberation Movement.

Ironically, Michaels and Shaw, both of Caucasian descent, remembered conflicts with their male peers as sometimes discriminatory based on the control of gendered roles in the workplace and the treatment of women as sexual conquests. Whereas, Richardson's (of African descent) memories centered on her introduction into and training for

journalistic activism and was only negatively framed by the sexual indiscretions of ‘free love’ between black men and white women.

The fact that within the same work environment Richardson gained on-the-job training as a journalist and said she was not sexually harassed; but Michaels and Shaw felt unvalued as journalists and sought after for sexual gratification paints an interesting but conflicting picture. This dynamic among the younger women of Freedom Summer proved a microcosm of later tensions between Feminists and Black Feminists. It also suggests a possible reason for the dissention between the younger and older women of this study on issues of sexuality and gender. Overall, these women saw their conflicts differently not only through the lens of their ethnicities, but also through the experiences of class (upper-middle class for the former and working class for the latter) and cultural history. Keeping all of this in mind, the next chapter adds another layer to the women’s voices of Freedom Summer as it examines their journalistic and communication activities and sets up a framework for the discussion of their subsequent professional life choices.

CHAPTER 5

GETTING THE WORD OUT IN 1964 FREEDOM SUMMER

This chapter addresses this study's African American women leaders of Freedom Summer 1964 and their connection to journalism history. The notion of women, particularly African American women, playing an important role in the communication activities of the Freedom Summer Movement of 1964 Mississippi does not fit into the public memory of that time and rarely finds its way into the historical accounts of the entire Modern Civil Rights era. Using oral history interviews of the aforementioned women of this study, the following documents the experiences of these female freedom workers whose roles as organizational leaders also often introduced them to the world of journalism/communication and the self-discovery of themselves as activists and media professionals.

Developing a Communication Strategy

In order to fully appreciate the pivotal roles that these women played in communication history, one must first understand the communication philosophy of Freedom Summer's primary civil rights organization - SNCC. A journalist at heart, SNCC Executive Director James Forman understood the practical link between the group's grass roots mission to foster social change and the power of the press to determine the organization's success. A graduate of Chicago's Roosevelt University and after completing some graduate work at Boston University, Forman began his career as a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* and covered the 1957 Little Rock incident. After covering a few stories for Chicago's *Tri-State Defender* (Arkansas, Memphis, and

Mississippi), he began to organize several mass protests in Tennessee and his birth state of Mississippi. By 1960, he had joined CORE, and been jailed in 1961 with other SNCC Freedom Riders¹ on the ‘Journey of Reconciliation.’² A seasoned pressman and social activist, by the summer of 1964, he had a definitive media strategy in place for the newest civil rights organization - SNCC.³

I felt very strongly about the importance of field staff sending in frequent and detailed reports on their activities – so strongly that at one point, we in

¹ See Appendix I (Map of 1961 Freedom Rides).

² Beginning on May 4, 1961, CORE students boarded Greyhound buses and traveled from Washington, D.C. throughout the southern states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama with the intent to arrive in New Orleans on May 17, 1961, the anniversary of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Important contextual background to this event includes the fact that veteran civil rights organizer/pacifist and CORE Field Director Bayard Rustin headed the first Journey of Reconciliation in 1947 which tested and unsuccessfully attempted to integrate buses in upper southern states as a result of the previous year’s Supreme Court decision (the 1946 Irene Morgan case) that stated, ‘segregated seating of interstate passengers was unconstitutional.’ Rustin reflected on the political and legal circumstance of that time, “You will also remember that 1946 is a crucial period, because many blacks who had been in the army were returning home from Europe. There were many incidents in which these black soldiers — having been abroad and exposed to fighting for freedom — were not going to come back to the United States on their way home and be segregated in transportation. Therefore, the combination of these blacks (who were already resisting) and the Irene Morgan Decision (which gave blacks the right to resist segregation, particularly in interstate travel), we in CORE decided immediately that we were going to create a nationwide protest with nine blacks and nine whites who would go into buses all over the upper south with blacks sitting in the front and the whites sitting in the back to challenge this.” Bayard Rustin, “Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin: Oral History,” in *Columbia University Oral History Collection*, NXCP87-A1625, Interviewed by Ed Edwin, September 12, 1985 as cited at <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6909/>.

The second of such trips in 1961 also threatened to end unsuccessfully with the infamous bus burning incident in Anniston, Alabama. Several students from the Nashville CORE office, however, drove to Birmingham to pick up the journey where the previous riders left off. After days of intense and sometimes public wrangling between Alabama Governor John Patterson (who ironically financially supported Kennedy’s first election, but now had to answer to the state’s White Citizens Council and its constituents), President John F. Kennedy, his brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and Justice Department Aid John Seigenthaler; buses resumed the route on May 20, 1961 until Mississippi authorities finally arrested the protesters in Jackson on May 25. The courts sentenced the riders to 60 days at the infamous Parchman State Penitentiary, and every student was charged with violating *state* laws of segregated public transportation. Although the students never arrived on the buses in New Orleans that month, they attempted the rides throughout the summer and were repeatedly arrested. Their efforts, however, put African American civil rights on the agenda of mainstream America. Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1987), 145-151, 159.

³ Forman later wrote several books and pamphlets and created the short-lived *Washington Times* (Washington, D.C.) newspaper and the Black American News Service. Joe Holley, “Civil Rights Activist James Forman Dies at 76; Key Organizer of SNCC,” *Washington Post*, B06, January 12, 2005; David Swanson, “Think Piece: Jim Forman and the Liberal-Labor Syndrome,” *The Black Commentator*, Issue 22, January 20, 2005, http://www.blackcommentator.com/122/122_james_forman.html (accessed October 10, 2005)

the Atlanta office took the position of 'no field report, no subsistence check.' The point was not to burden the already overworked field secretaries with another task, but to strengthen our network of communications.⁴

One of many obituaries describes Forman's reputation for subscribing to the marriage of communication and social movement ideologies. Those who knew and worked with him remembered that he understood the intrinsic value of mass communication to the success of a social movement. For every speech he delivered, workers had "to copy the transcript and publish [it] in local newsletters."

He was an incessant organizer. And in 1969, among the expenses for which he and others demanded money in "The Black Manifesto" were: "four major publishing and printing enterprises for black people," and "four television networks to provide an alternative to racist and capitalistic propaganda."⁵

A good student of Gandhi⁶ and other social movement leaders, Forman understood that that the goals of the Civil Rights Movement would never be met unless the horrors of "the beast called Mississippi" became national and international public knowledge – and the young people of SNCC were just the ones to do it. Immediately following the first SNCC meeting in 1960, he persuaded Morehouse English student Julian Bond⁷ to postpone the last semester of his senior year and take on the national role

⁴ James Forman, *The Making of a Black Revolutionary* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 27.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Among many other kinds of non-violent protest, Indian human rights leader Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi, spearheaded the 'Salt Wars' against the imperialist British government by leading thousands of protesters to the banks of the Dandi Sea to collect their own salt rather than pay the colonial-imposed salt tax. The march started March 12 and ended on April 5, 1930 as thousands of fellow Indians witnessed Gandhi walk into the sea and scoop up a handful of salt. He did this as a symbol of peaceful defiance of a law that oppressed his people. Similar to many social movement leaders, Gandhi non-violently manipulated the press in order to put the agenda of his people on the global radar. He wrote, "I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might." Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1987, 123.

⁷ "Julian Bond was one of several hundred students from across the South who helped to form SNCC on Easter Weekend, 1960, and shortly thereafter became SNCC's Communications Director from

of Communications Director. Bond comments that he initially saw the organization's communication strategy as an effective fundraising effort. "...cause publicity was money. If you got your organizational name in the *New York Times*, you could reprint that, send it out to your mailing list and they'd send you some dough."⁸ Later, Bond and Forman developed a comprehensive communication strategy for SNCC.

Before further examining SNCC's communication strategy, this discussion must pause to provide a contextual picture of the political and social landscape of the period between the first meeting of SNCC in 1960 and the voter registration projects of 1963 and Freedom Summer 1964. Of direct significance to the development of SNCC's voter registration campaign and strategy was the fact that the second 'Journey of Reconciliation' proved a major embarrassment for the Kennedy Administration and the White House's response to the Freedom Rides had become a point of contention among African Americans who swung the national vote to elect John F. Kennedy to the Presidency in 1960.⁹ It showed not only the country, but also the rest of the world (who were constantly subject to the imperialist and superior attitude of the United States on human and social rights with its foreign policy on Communism during the height of the

1960-65, heading the organization's printing and publicity departments, editing the SNCC newsletter, *The Student Voice*, and working in voter registration drives in rural Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, "Julian Bond: SNCC, NAACP, 1960-Present," <http://www.crmvet.org/vet/bond.htm> (accessed October 11, 2005). In 1965, he was elected to the Georgia State House of Representatives and he began his fourth term as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the NAACP in 2004. David Hudson, "NAACP's Julian Bond Speaks on First Amendment and His Supreme Court Triumph," *Freedom Forum*, <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=14675> (accessed October 11, 2005).

⁸ Steven Kasher, "Interactive Introduction," *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*, <http://www.abbeville.com/civilrights/introduction.asp> (accessed October 11, 2005).

⁹ The Kennedy Administration's mantra of "minimum civil rights legislation, maximum executive action" gave, particularly African American voters, the appearance of political savvy John F. Kennedy demonstrated to the American public that he understood the chances of gaining civil rights for African Americans would have a better chance of success if facilitated through executive orders from his office rather than passage through the Dixiecrat-controlled Congress. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 399.

Cold War)¹⁰ that the Kennedy Administration was at a loss when it came to civil rights. This was evidenced every night on television by the gruesome events happening in its own backyard and Kennedy's naive assumption that the best way to implement civil rights in the South would be through modification of the political process versus enforcement of constitutional legislation.

To counter these internal tensions, the Kennedy Administration, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in particular, created a diversion for the resourceful and energetic SNCC and CORE from testing literal integration. The youth of the Movement received friendly "mandates"¹¹, and lip-service White House support that the most plausible and only acceptable strategy of civil action should be African American voter registration in the South. Clearly the northeastern privileged Kennedys had no earthly idea of the climate in the South and had not listened to Nina Simone's song *Mississippi Goddamn*.¹²

¹⁰ See Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹¹ "On June 16, [1961] Attorney General Kennedy received in his office a delegation from the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee... They all hoped to secure some additional federal help for the Freedom Rides, but what they received instead was a counterpoint from the Attorney General. The Freedom Rides were no longer productive, he said. The committee members would accomplish more for civil rights by registering Negro voters, and if they would agree to move in that direction, he would do everything he could to make sure they were fully supported and protected. He mentioned the confidential work already under way to secure a tax exemption and large foundation grants... By educating and registering Negro voters, he said, they might not make immediate headlines, but they could alter the politics of the South... They went so far as to extend confidential promises that the Administration would arrange draft exemptions for the students—so long as they confined themselves to quiet political work. Harris Wofford [Special Assistant to the President on Civil Rights] put the choice to them most graphically: They could have jails filled with Freedom Riders [who most likely would be sentenced as "draft dodgers"] or jails filled with white Southern officials who tried to obstruct federally protected voting rights. They could be persecuted or protected." Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 480.

¹² "The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam / And I mean every word of it / Alabama's gotten me so upset / Tennessee made me lose my rest / And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam / Can't you see it / Can't you feel it / It's all in the air / I can't stand the pressure much longer / Somebody say a prayer... / This is a show tune / But the show hasn't been written for it, yet / Hound dogs on my trail / School children sitting in jail / Black cat cross my path / I think every day's gonna be my last / Lord have mercy on this land of mine / We all gonna get it in due time / I don't belong here / I don't belong there / I've even stopped believing in prayer / Don't tell me, I tell you / Me and my people just about due / I've been there so I know / They keep on saying 'Go slow!' / But that's just the trouble / 'do it slow' / Washing the

What was hailed as a “cooling off period,” actually fostered one of the most important turning points in the Modern Civil Rights Movement – Freedom Summer 1964. Six months after the death of President Kennedy in the fall of 1963, Forman, Bond, and Assistant Communication Director Mary King (a white northern college student and the only female communication officer at the national level) had moved into action to create a communication plan to promote and facilitate Mississippi’s Voter Registration and Freedom Schools in the hottest bed of the South.¹³ Embracing the organization’s communication philosophy, Mary King explained three reasons for its media tactics:

(1) Public awareness was crucial to our strategy. Without national exposure and mobilized public opinion, there was no point in the struggle. The sacrifice would be lost in oblivion,

(2) the psychological effect of the visuals of the press made the perpetrators face up to the immorality of their violence. The idea of looking into the mirror nightly on the evening news would make it hard for them to continue their public hate and face the conscience of others, and

(3) It's difficult to grasp now that anything as pedestrian as registering potential voters or as prosaic as gathering in a church could have been a life-threatening act in the United States of America only twenty-five years ago. Whatever small protection we had came through news reports. The presence of a reporter at a jail or a telephone inquiry from a newspaper was often the only step that let a local sheriff know he was being watched. With the

windows / ‘do it slow’ / Picking the cotton / ‘do it slow’ / You're just plain rotten / ‘do it slow’ / You're too damn lazy / ‘do it slow’ / The thinking's crazy / ‘do it slow’ / Where am I going / What am I doing / I don't know / I don't know / Just try to do your very best / Stand up be counted with all the rest / For everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam, / I made you thought I was kiddin' didn't we / Picket line, School boy cots / They try to say it's a communist plot / All I want is equality for my sister my brother my people and me / Yes you lied to me all these years / You told me to wash and clean my ears / And talk real fine just like a lady / And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie / Oh but this whole country is full of lies / You're all gonna die and die like flies / I don't trust you any more / You keep on saying ‘Go slow!’ / But that's just the trouble / ‘do it slow’ / Desegregation / ‘do it slow’ / Mass participation / ‘do it slow’ / Reunification / ‘do it slow’ / Do things gradually / ‘do it slow’ / But bring more tragedy / ‘do it slow’ / Why don't you see it / Why don't you feel it / I don't know, I don't know / You don't have to live next to me / Just give me my equality / Everybody knows about Mississippi / Everybody knows about Alabama / Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam / That's it!” Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” *In Concert*, Verve, 600702, <http://www.boscarol.com/nina/html/where/mississipigoddamn.html>.

¹³ Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

exception of those involved at the time, no one knows how important the effective use of the news media was to our safety, and even our lives.”¹⁴

Together the three (Forman, Bond, and Mary King) developed a national plan¹⁵ to distribute and receive information from field offices whereby each project director (responsible for a particular area/county) provided daily information to his or her corresponding communication director, who in turn sent daily reports to the regional field secretary, who sent weekly updates to the state headquarters (in this case, Jackson, MS), and the information then made its way to the national office in Atlanta and included in the organization’s publication *The Student Voice*.¹⁶

An important point not to be lost on the boldness and proficiency with which these young people employed press agency is the fact only a handful of publications existed in the state of Mississippi. And, to be in possession of any newspaper, membership card, pamphlet or flyer counter to the status quo of Jim Crow and segregation most likely meant arrest and death or at the very least necessitated permanent flight.

Perhaps one of the crudest forms of communication strategizing took place within the SNCC organization and laid the groundwork for the building of each field office.¹⁷ Customarily, male staffers researched and studied the political and economic histories of each county to determine “target communities” for the organization’s primary work of

¹⁴ Mary King, in “Interactive Introduction,” *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*, <http://www.abbeville.com/civilrights/introduction.asp> (accessed October 11, 2005).

¹⁵ Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁶ See Appendix B (*The Student Voice—June 2, 1964*).

¹⁷ SNCC initially set up offices in southwest Mississippi in 1960-1961, however, extreme violence and local upheaval caused them to leave the region and in early 1962 regroup further north in Jackson, MS. Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

voter-registration. These SNCC “advance men” mapped out the corporate, financial and political networks in targeted communities and relayed the information back to headquarters. Such in-house intelligence reports provided field workers with an effective transition into new areas as they spent their first few weeks meeting with local leadership and developing a customized plan of action to reach residents.¹⁸

SNCC staffers were the first paid civil rights workers to base themselves in isolated rural communities, daring to “take the message of freedom into [rural] areas.”¹⁹ SNCC workers were more numerous and less transient than those from other civil rights organizations; their method of operation was different as well.²⁰

Guyot confirms that a basic strategy of the SNCC communication philosophy was to shine a spotlight on Mississippi as the place “where the *bigger* [and traditional] civil rights organizations feared to tread.”²¹ He said the organization publicized Mississippi as

¹⁸ Lawrence Guyot, archival oral history interview, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi University, M317, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.

¹⁹ Guyot’s comments about “the first paid civil rights workers” relates *only* to the fact that they were the first to establish their headquarters in rural areas of Mississippi and receive a living income from the group that sent them (ibid.). While NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers (1954) traveled throughout much of Mississippi, his civil rights operation was based in the capitol city of Jackson, and his primary income came from selling insurance. Dr. Gilbert Mason Sr. also had his own primary source of income. Mason, a local physician who was a founding member of the Biloxi NAACP and the leader of the Gulf Coast “Wade-in to Desegregate the Sand Beaches” (1957) initiative, was also the major petitioner in the lawsuit against the Biloxi Municipal School district to desegregate the public schools. Aaron Henry, pharmacist, civil rights leader, politician, and president of the Mississippi NAACP (1959), began his career of social activism in 1951 as a founding member of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) in the all-black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. As the chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Delegation to the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Henry was one of two (Ed King was the other) seated in the infamous “Mississippi Compromise” which was later rejected by the delegates as a misrepresentation of the true demographic makeup of African American voters. Henry wrote the official position paper of the delegation’s stand. While Henry, Amzie Moore (an African American gas station owner and early activist with Medgar Evers), and Dr. T.R.M Howard (an African American surgeon and local activist) diligently worked throughout the rural Delta region for African American civil rights, their income did not come directly from the organizations they represented. Erle Johnston Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi; Dittmer, John *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995; Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁰ Ibid., 18.

²¹ As mentioned previously, the NAACP had long been involved in civil rights for Mississippians. Medgar Evers and Amzie Moore laid much of the groundwork for the Movement as far back as the late

a “social laboratory” for the litmus test of African American Civil Rights and that with media attention turned to such a traditionally ignored southern state, where crude bigotry reigned the day, the country would be forced to take a serious look at its overall treatment of blacks in America.

We had learned that these people [white out-of-state student workers] would bring with them more FBI agents and more cameras than anything else. We saw that as it relates to national press and federal presence; federal presence meant less violence. My support [of the Freedom Summer Project] was based on the fact that we were committed to an interracial society and, *pragmatically [sic]*, that white volunteers would bring with them the country, as it relates to press, as it relates to federal government, ad infinitum.²²

The first major voter registration organizing of SNCC in Mississippi happened in 1963 as a way to communicate to the rest of state, other civil rights organizations, and the United States government that rural disenfranchised blacks had a stake in the American political process and took serious their obligation to help develop public policy – through exercising their right to vote. In the fall of that year, SNCC initiated the “Freedom Vote” campaign and demonstrated that a large number of African Americans wanted to vote compared to the number of citizens registered (or better yet, allowed to register) to vote. The outcome of the mock vote also signaled a change in the balance of power in Mississippi. Perhaps most importantly, the event met its goal by drawing the attention of the U.S. Justice Department and the mainstream media.²³

1950s. Together, Evers and Moore broke up the fields of hardened hearts in Mississippi and planted the seeds of courage and cooperation in preparation for those that followed—the women and youth of Freedom Summer 1964. Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 208-220.

²² Statement taken from Lawrence Guyot, informational interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 11, 2005, Ruleville, MS.

²³ “There is no denying the effect that Freedom Summer had on Mississippi's blacks. In 1964, 6.7% of Mississippi's voting-age blacks were registered to vote, 16.3% below the national average. By 1969, that number had leaped to 66.5%, 5.5% above the national average,” Lisa Cozzens, “The Civil Rights

This critical publicity move by SNCC set the stage for “Freedom Summer of 1964” when over a thousand out-of-state volunteers (mostly white college kids) worked with local black leadership to conduct Freedom Schools, increase the state’s literacy rate, register more than half of the African American population, create a new state political party, challenge and change the balance of political power, and help bring about an unimagined reality to a people long considered hopeless victims of Jim Crow.²⁴

It [SNCC] evolved from a coordinating agency to a hands-on organization, helping local leadership in rural and small-town communities across the South participate in a variety of protests, as well as in political and economic organizing campaigns. This set SNCC apart from the civil rights mainstream of the 1960s. Its members, its youth, and its organizational independence enabled SNCC to remain close to grassroots currents that rapidly escalated the southern Movement from sit-ins to freedom rides, and then from voter drives to political organizing.²⁵

Most civil rights scholars agree that the work done by SNCC and CORE, and more importantly the national *publicity* from it, led to the legislative creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.²⁶ “It is no accident that SNCC workers have learned that if our story is to be told, we will have to write it, photograph it, and disseminate it ourselves,” says Mary King, former SNCC Assistant Communication Director and a co-author of the 1964 SNCC Women’s Conference Paper.

Guyot further explains that they made sure the “news” of Freedom Summer Work traveled outside of Mississippi and then on to lawmakers. For example, SNCC had an intra-state news network called the *Wednesday Club*.

Movement 1955-1965: Introduction." *African American History*,
<http://fledge.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65> (accessed October 11, 2005).

²⁴ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 284.

²⁵ Julian Bond, “SNCC: What We Did,” *Monthly Review*, October 2000, 16, 20-21.

²⁶ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995).

You have people--a field secretary who might leave a jail in Mississippi and go to [Kalamazoo] Michigan to talk to sixty people who would be on the phone the next morning talking to their congressman saying, 'I want something done about this. My son is down there and, you know, let's get something done.'²⁷

He goes on to say that when local citizens found two black students (from Alcorn State, MS) dead in an earthen damn, the mainstream media ignored the killings. When the media discovered, however, that two of the three students murdered in Philadelphia, MS in the summer of 1964 were white, the national media exploded and kept the spotlight on the state of Mississippi throughout the rest of that and the next year.

It became clear to civil rights organizers that the involvement of Caucasian kids equaled intense and immediate national media attention.²⁸ Shaw agrees, "Oh, absolutely. Yes, the publicity was very helpful." Victoria Gray Adams adds, "Unless we found ways to focus national attention on what was happening in Mississippi, they were going to wear us down...or shoot us out or whatever was necessary to stop us."²⁹ Dorsey concurs with this perspective,

Well, I think the Black Press (not only in this most recent movement in the '60's) was key to both recruiting people [to the causes of African American Civil Rights,] but also in reporting what was going on to gain support and sympathy from people who were not physically involved in the Movement. But, the press also is like an organizing tool. So the role that journalists had in the '60's was that they were the people who were

²⁷ Lawrence Guyot, informational interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 11, 2005, Ruleville, MS.

²⁸ The debate in SNCC where Bob Moses contended that they desperately needed especially white volunteers for the help and protection. "We're tired, and we're targeted." John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995) Moses felt that without the student's help, the contagious philosophy of the Klan and White Citizen's Council would bring about the extermination of the black leaders and, therefore, the Movement (ibid.).

²⁹ Terri Shaw, archival oral history interview by Stephanie Scull, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS; Adams, Victoria Jackson Gray. Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

often at risk. But, they put aside their fear and went into every hot situation.³⁰

Mary King explained that the use of her “hot list” of sympathetic reporters often provided the network she needed to get SNCC reports out into the mainstream media. She remembered that the mere presence of a reporter (black or white) at the jail or courthouse or a simple phone call from a mainstream newspaper often proved the only measure to insure the safety of workers. Mary King said Forman charged her and Bond with mobilizing the press at a moment’s notice, which no doubt saved the lives of many Freedom workers.

I spent my days and nights telephoning our field offices or receiving incoming phone calls, and then telephoning the news media to place the stories obtained from our field secretaries. Whenever a field secretary was jailed or a church mass-meeting bombed, whenever night riders struck or fire bombings occurred, whenever a local leader’s home was shot into, or any other serious act perpetrated, Julian Bond and I went into high gear.³¹

Victoria Gray Adams explains that the Black Press initially took the lead in exposing the violence of the Movement and that the organization’s leadership depended on the its power to help their cause. She remembers that the Black Press was the primary resource that provided a sense of solidarity in often arduous and isolated circumstances. Adams said that because the local chapters were geographically spread throughout rural Mississippi, news from the Black Press, *The Student Voice* and *Tri-State Defender* in particular, on activities from all over the state kept them focused and encouraged.

For some of the people in the country, the Black Press was the *only* press; they subscribed to, bought and read. They were the ones who told the other story that was hard to print and called attention to the things that were going on...³²

³⁰ L.C. Dorsey, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS.

³¹ Mary King, in “Interactive Introduction,” *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*, <http://www.abbeville.com/civilrights/introduction.asp> (accessed October 11, 2005). Abbeville Press, The Civil Rights Movement,” Archives, <http://www.abbeville.com/civilrights/introduction.asp>.

³² Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

Dorsey remembered that quite a few professional journalists played a critical role in these communication networks and that field workers often reciprocated such cooperative efforts with information about the Movement that would otherwise be unattainable for most mainstream reporters.

Getting people, getting word to the leaders of the Movement who may have been in one part of the state and people who were in another part, it didn't always mean that you would be able to protect the person that was there. We were convinced had calls not been made, more people would have been killed. They all would have been killed. So journalists, by asking the right kinds of questions, by being there with cameras, notebooks, and tape recorders, really have been able to capture the story. They did this whether the story was one of justice denied or justice [won].³³

Adams concurred with Mary King and remembered that a combination of reporters from the mainstream media and front-line reporters of the Black Press brought embarrassing and international attention to a topic that the U.S. Government viewed as problem at home which should have stayed "behind closed doors."

The journalist was one who turned the light to the rest of the world on how vicious and violent the white people were in this country and what they were trying to keep people from doing. Registering to participate in the political process, trying to get equal pay for their work, trying to be able to go into any place, not [just] to 'colored only' public facilities. The papers were the ones who helped us do that. The black journalists were the ones that came down here and put their lives on the line in front of the dogs and the bully-clubs and the fire hoses and stuff to make sure that the world knew what was going on and they weren't the only people [who came and reported].³⁴

Michaels explained the important connection the office workers had with the press and that they understood the necessity of maintaining a constant communication link to field workers.

³³ L.C. Dorsey, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS.

³⁴ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

In terms of communication, we were on the telephone with the press all the time. We were certainly on the telephone with the Black Press all the time. This was in '64.³⁵

Michaels remembered when someone fired into the home of the Sessions family in Jackson, Mississippi, that police arrested SNCC Field Secretary Charlie Cobb as he attempted to investigate the shooting. She said that when Executive Director of Mississippi SNCC Bob Moses and others went up to the Delta to bail out Cobb, Moses gave her directions to write a press release and send it to the wire services. He warned her, however, not to expect a positive response or its appearance in the mainstream newspapers. Michaels remembered that, surprisingly, before she knew it, she had John Doar's and President Kennedy's telephone number in case anything else happened to Moses or Cobb.³⁶

She said that while some sympathetic reporters tried to help them, the majority of the mainstream press often twisted stories about life-threatening events that should have been reported as safeguards for the Freedom workers.³⁷ Michaels recalled that she and other office workers customarily gave pertinent information to the mainstream press and then found a very different story in the morning paper.

Always. Always. There would be some kind of a terrible slant to it [the news story] when things happened - like the burning of the bus. It wasn't just the southern papers, it was the northern papers, too and you just went out there with it because you didn't know what you were going to wind up with. You never know how anything is going to be in the paper. Because at that point, it [mainstream reporting] was just completely biased.³⁸

³⁵ Sheila Michaels, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 16, 2005 and March 15, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Adams provided insight into the importance of the Black Press to the Movement in 1964.

She recalls that as far back as Frederick Douglass, social activists have always had an instrument to reach people of concern.

He had the *North Star*, because you have to be able to get the people you are trying to organize to understand what you are doing. You didn't have the mechanisms to bring them all together in one place [like with television and the Internet], so you really needed a vehicle to deal with that.³⁹

Adams and her associates could not rely on the any friendship with the mainstream press and consequently, most African Americans were extremely distrusting of it. She contended, however, that once Black Press stories began to appear in the mainstream press, it peaked the interest of most everyone in the country. Adams said that for the first time in her life, cooperation existed between the Black Press and the small cadre of sympathetic mainstream American and international media.

They were the ones who said how the police came and beat people. They were with the photographers and others like him [Famed Black Press Photographer Ernest Withers] who waited out there with those dogs and fire hoses and took pictures so folks could see what was happening. When they [the Black Press] couldn't get in to report the story, it was the northern white press and their reporters that gave them copies of what had been done. The press that came from overseas also understood what was going on.⁴⁰

Adams remembered that when the three Freedom Summer workers (Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner) went missing and subsequently were found murdered and dumped in a construction site under tons of dirt, Withers traveled from nearby Memphis and photographed the events as they unfolded. She said he

³⁹ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

didn't let threats from angry mobs and authorities intimidate him, because he was a professional photojournalist and he had to get his story.

The people who didn't have televisions and who didn't have radios bought the Black Press, because it was their link to the rest of the black people in other places. Whether you were in Africa or whether you were in Detroit, we knew about the world through the Black Press. So, when this 1964 Movement started, [black media] folk were already there. They [the Black Press] knew their talent, experience and expertise was needed to make the project a success.⁴¹

Michaels corroborated and explained why SNCC depended on the Black Press and why the organization's media plan worked.

Well, by that time [1964,] Freedom Summer was national news, [but] early in the Movement the only people who covered many things that they [civil rights workers] did was the Black Press.⁴²

An African American Hattiesburg native NAACP worker, Raylawni Branch,⁴³ also remembered the limited and often clandestine presence of the Black Press in extremely violent southwest Mississippi.

The only press I remember here was the photographer, you know Herbert Randall, that came down and he really wasn't a press person, he was doing it as a school project [unbeknown to Branch, at the time he was officially working for SNCC].⁴⁴ There was some Black Press. Now at some point,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sheila Michaels, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 5, 2005 and April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

⁴³ See Appendix P (Photo of Branch).

⁴⁴ "In the spring of 1964, Herbert Eugene Randall, Jr., a talented young African and Native American photographer, had been awarded the John Hay Whitney Fellowship for Creative Photography. Using this fellowship, Randall was to spend a year photographically documenting contemporary Negro life. Shortly after receiving the fellowship, he met Sanford Rose "Sandy" Leigh, a Field Secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and director of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in Hattiesburg. Upon their meeting, Leigh suggested that Randall use his fellowship to photograph Freedom Summer activities in Hattiesburg. Herbert Randall did just that. During the summer of 1964, Randall not only documented the social and political efforts of the Hattiesburg Project, but also vividly depicted the hardships of Negro life in a racially discriminating Mississippi... Following Freedom Summer, Randall returned to New York to continue his career in photography, serving in several photographic positions with youth organizations; as Coordinator of Photography for the New York City Board of Education; and Photographic Consultant to the National Media Center Foundation. Randall received the Creative Artist's Public Service Grant for Photography for 1971-72, and his photographs has appeared in exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The Art Institute of Pittsburgh, and other

I'm sure there must have been some individuals that came and went back, but it was kept silent, so that nothing would happen to them.⁴⁵

Michaels highlights the importance of using Wide Area Telephone Service (WATS)⁴⁶ lines as a means to getting information to the Black Press and sympathetic mainstream press. She remembers that the WATS lines proved invaluable for poorly-funded SNCC because long-distance was extremely costly at the time. But, she also remembers that because of the way the WATS lines worked, security and privacy were major problems.

Of course we were tapped [on the phone lines.] I remember once when I picked it [the phone] up and I overheard a conversation between a couple of rocket scientists [who were working] over in Marietta, Georgia in the missile [division.] They [the FBI] had been tapping them to making sure nobody was giving out state secrets and they were tapping us [at the same time.] They just crossed the things, so we heard their conversation. Sandy Leigh said he once was in the office and picked up the telephone and heard this really intelligent and interesting conversation, so much more than anything that you usually overhear. He realized that it was himself because they [the FBI] had inadvertently been playing back the tape over our telephone.^{47,48}

notable museums. His photographs are permanently represented in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Public Library, the Library of Congress, and various other repositories. In June of 1999, Herbert Randall returned to Hattiesburg, Mississippi to attend "Faces of Freedom Summer: The Photographs of Herbert Randall," an exhibit of selected images from Randall's Freedom Summer photographs. In 2001, The University of Alabama Press published a book entitled *Faces of Freedom Summer*, which features the photographs included in the exhibit." Herbert Randall Freedom Summer Photograph Collection (1964-2001), M351, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

⁴⁵ Raylawni Branch, archival oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 27, 2005, Hattiesburg, MS.

⁴⁶ A Wide Area Telephone Service (WATS) is a toll service offering for customer dial-type telecommunications between a given customer [user] station and stations within specified geographic rate areas employing a single access line between the customer [user] location and the serving central office. Each access line may be arranged for either outward (OUT-WATS) or inward (IN-WATS)/800 area code [not introduced by AT&T until 1967] service, or both. In other words, with "outward WATS" the calling party may make an unlimited number of long distance calls (toll calls), for a fixed price, within pre-determined time and distance constraints. With long distance costs at historic lows, this type of arrangement has become common, and instead of "outward WATS" it is known simply as a "flat-rate plan." Federal Standard 1037C, "Telecommunications: Glossary of Telecom Terms," in *General Services Administration: Federal Property and Administration Services Act of 1949*.

⁴⁷ Sheila Michaels, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 5, 2005 and April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO; "Mississippi Harassment—July 10," *The Student Voice* 5, No.16 (July 15, 1964), quoted in *The Student Voice, 1960-1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee*, ed. Clayborn Carson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).

Creating Alternative Communication Strategies

Dorsey described an important “alternative form of communication.”⁴⁹ She remembered that very few families had telephones and, prior to the students’ arrival that summer, those who did, established a mouth-to-mouth and telephone network. The system alerted people in the community about meetings and potential trouble spots within the state. With sympathetic contacts outside the state, which the students brought with them, the various law and civil rights groups who came to Mississippi that summer employed this “alternative” system of communication to quickly get information to the cooperative press, lawyers, committee offices, judges at their homes, and among each other. Although often tapped, use of these phones throughout the state helped safeguard the sources of these networks at the local level.

Shaw remembered using the local communication system to oversee the telephone check-in procedure designed to keep field workers safe and accounted.⁵⁰

Of course, we had this telephone system set up where you were always supposed to check in and know where people were. We also had this code system. There was a WATS line in Jackson, and to save on phone bills, each office had a code name. So we would call Jackson and say, "There's a collect call from John Henry," or whatever the code name was, say for

⁴⁸ See Appendix D (SNCC WATS Digest Bulletin: 2-5 July, 1964).

⁴⁹ For the purpose of this study, the term “alternative communication” refers to processes of communication that fall outside of standardized journalistic methods that might include interviews for newsletters or reports, press releases, journalistic columns, etc.

⁵⁰ Peter Orris, informational interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 26, 2005, Chicago, IL. Orris also explains how the telephone check-in system complemented the two-way radios that presented a particular problem in Mississippi: “I remember when you left a town you had to check out and say where you were going and a rough idea of when you were going to be getting there, the radios didn’t cover the whole state. We put up some nice antennas in base stations, but they didn’t cover the whole thing. So, you had to check in and check out when you reached your destination. The other problem with the radios in Mississippi was that technology was just too new. While we had these radios, so did a lot of the people in Mississippi. So, anything we said on the radio could be overheard. There was a lot of discussion and planning about not saying where you were going over the radio. It was all kinds of stuff created. Sometimes the radio communication wasn’t just between the cars, but was also between the base stations because these farmers’ houses didn’t have phones and this was the way to compensate for that. We were basically making it up as we went and really fortunate that not a lot of people got hurt” (ibid.). See Appendix E (SNCC Communication Check-in-Procedure and Security Handbook).

Hattiesburg. [Whomever answered the phone] would not accept the call, and then that office would call Hattiesburg back.⁵¹

She explained these nightly calls, particularly when a worker had been arrested or detained earlier that day, put local law enforcement “on notice” that others knew the police had a someone in their custody. If the activist “disappeared” or mysteriously died overnight, the officers understood that the news instantly would become public knowledge. “I mentioned [to a worker in the field office] that someone was in jail once, and I had to call the police every hour to say, “How is he. Is he all right?”⁵²

Additionally, Michaels and Shaw had the responsibility to take legal affidavits on the violent mistreatment of local blacks and sometimes visiting white students. They had to collect written documentation of events that later would stand up in court and then forward the information to SNCC’s state headquarters for inclusion in *The Student Voice*. This creative use of information exemplifies some of the alternative communication methods employed by women of Freedom Summer. Shaw said,

[As she quoted from her personal diary]: ‘Tuesday night, a fourteen-year-old boy reported that white men forced Negro into car at gunpoint. Police investigated and said, “just Negroes joking.”’ Oh, here’s another one, ‘At night, I worked on a case of boys picked up for trying to integrate the Bypass Inn, en masse. Roger Johnson, definite case of police brutality. Hope to look into it tomorrow.’ ‘Chris Cory from *Time*, and a more or less unenlightened southerner from the Cleveland [Mississippi] Press went to investigate the throwing of an empty jar. Then got lost in Palmer’s Crossing.’ Then, here’s July 12: ‘Friday and Saturday were two really hellish days. On Friday, two boys and a rabbi were beaten.’⁵³ The phones were jammed with press, etc. No food, no rest until quite late. Saturday I stayed in the office while others worked in Palmer’s Crossing.’⁵⁴

⁵¹ Terri Shaw, archival oral history interview by Stephanie Scull, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Appendix F (Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld).

⁵⁴ The rabbi Shaw referenced, suffered severe injuries that required overnight hospitalization. Herb Randall, a SNCC photographer took pictures of the rabbi and sold several to the national media;

Adams underscores the importance of these and other types of “alternative communication” methods and explains its connection to spreading the word about the Movement and keeping the workers safe.

I remember trying to buy [radio] time for my group over in Bolivar County from the radio stations in Cleveland [Mississippi.] You couldn't buy any time to say what was going on, to give your side of the story. [During] the voter registration drive, they weren't giving it to you. So, we had to use the churches, we had to use the organizations, we had to use the beauty shops, the barbershops, and all those [Black Press] newspapers, [because] the newspapers were distributed from the barbershop. They sold them on the side like making extra money, but it really was a mechanism to get nationwide news of African Americans. Through the *Chicago Defender*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Tennessee Tri-State*, that was how you got it [news] into the hands of the people.⁵⁵

Under the guidance of several women leaders, young teenagers also played an important role in the communication of the Movement. Another “alternative form of communication” came in the manner of walkie-talkies and radio technology, which often became the responsibility of teenage boys. While women did not develop the technical aspects of the radio networks, they did have an important influence on the way workers employed the new technology. Peter Orris, a 15-year old teenager from New York who falsified his age, went to southwest Mississippi that summer and not only became a part of civil rights history, but also aided in the technological innovation of short-wave radios as an alternative communication strategy for the project.

And what happened to me in the summer was that I, for a complex set of reasons, had some walkie-talkies leftover from back the 1963 March on Washington and I was one of the few volunteers that knew anything about that kind of communication. When SNCC got some money, Forman had

“Mississippi Harassment—July 8,” *The Student Voice* 5, No.16 (July 15, 1964), quoted in *The Student Voice, 1960-1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee*, ed. Clayborn Carson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990)

⁵⁵ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

us install shortwave radios in some farmer's houses that didn't have phones. We also had enough money to buy cars and put the radios in the SNCC cars for communication. As we set up this communication system, we (other young northern white boys) were all over the state and I put, I don't know, 6,000 miles on the car in about a month and half. We saw every part of the state and that's what we did for most of the summer before we went to Atlantic City.⁵⁶

Orris further explained one of the challenges of this new communication tool was that initially they did not really understand how well the walkie-talkies would work. In time, they learned that when women's voices broadcasted over the base stations, it had a higher pitch and could be more easily understood. As a result, women started working in the Freedom Movement as station operators from the field offices and local farmhouses and became integral part of the aforementioned check-in system.⁵⁷

A Woman's Worth in Communicating Voter Registration

For example, future *Washington Post* Columnist Terri Shaw spent the summer of 1964 as the communication director for the Hattiesburg, MS project and said:

...[her] job was to deal with the press, to deal with the police, to deal with the FBI, and the Justice Department. I do remember that Julian Bond was in charge of communications in Atlanta, and I can't remember who was in Jackson [Mary King]. I noticed in the archives that we also put out a little newsletter. There may have been only one issue. I was surprised to see it.

⁵⁶ Dr. Peter Orris, informational interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 26, 2005, Chicago, IL.

⁵⁷ Orris said he could never forget his role in establishing a communications network later that summer (1964) in Atlantic City at the Democratic National Convention. He recalls being the conduit for the speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, Victoria Gray Adams, and Unita Blackwell as they presented what became known as the "Mississippi Challenge" to the state's non-representation of blacks among its Democratic delegates: "My assignment was to create a communications network so that we looked like we were well organized. Since I was assigned to set it up, I gave myself what I considered to be the plum jobs, because I didn't want to miss anything. While Mrs. Hamer was speaking, [President] Johnson decided to preempt her, but we were there with the microphones and walkie-talkies and we were right there when they [the Mississippi Democratic Party] offered a compromise that the delegates rejected. That experience was another important lesson that taught me *if you're concerned about any situation, always control the communications structure* [sic.] If you have your guy on the walkie-talkie you're going to control things," Ibid.

But then when I saw it, I thought, "Oh, this is the kind of thing I would have done." But what I remember most of all is dealing with reporters.⁵⁸

Her reference to a "little newsletter" documents the existence of smaller unofficial publications that some of the field offices produced among themselves. Most of these publications appeared irregularly and reflected a regional microcosm of the larger *Student Voice*.⁵⁹

Although Mary King, the National Assistant Director of Communication, greatly contributed to the development of the organization's mass media agenda, Bond represented the "national face" of the youth movement's communication efforts.⁶⁰ In Atlanta and later in 1964 Mississippi, Mary King had the responsibility to obtain local data from SNCC field workers, which included "primarily information about police brutality, and get it out to the press."⁶¹

Also working under Bond in 1964, then 18-year-old African American Judy Richardson put her first year of college at Swarthmore on hold to become a SNCC office worker in Atlanta and eventually Greenwood, Mississippi. Richardson remembers,

I came in from Swarthmore College (Pennsylvania.) I'm typing 90 words-a-minute and took stenography, and so what Forman found out was that, "Oh, she could write a literate sentence and she could type 90 words-a-minute." [He said,] 'You're not going back to Cambridge, Maryland [her

⁵⁸ Terri Shaw, archival oral history interview by Stephanie Scull, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

⁵⁹ See Appendix C (The Freedom News—July 6, 1964).

⁶⁰ Mary King, like most other white women in Freedom Summer 1964, initially assumed the posture of an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist. She understood that the recreation of the public's image of blacks meant having a young African American male (Julian Bond) as the "face" of SNCC's communication efforts. Before long, however, issues of mistreatment based on gender, prompted her and others like her to make a public statement of discontent with the organization. Mary King, "Freedom Stories, Freedom Songs," *The Donella Meadows Archive: Voice of a Global Citizen*, Sustainability Institute, http://www.sustainer.org/dhm_archive/index.php?display_article=vn200freedomed (accessed October 11, 2005).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, http://www.sustainer.org/dhm_archive/search.

previous SNCC post], you're going to stay here as my secretary.'⁶²

Richardson said that she learned more about the power of the press and how to effectively employ it for the cause of the Movement. She remembered experiencing an internal awakening about the impact and importance of words and pictures to tell stories that otherwise go untold. She explained that involvement in the Movement trained her for what became her life's career. Recalling an incident when a mainstream reporter asked of her connection to the press, Richardson remembered:

I first learned how to write a press release from Julian [Bond] back at the Atlanta [SNCC] office. By the time I got to Greenwood [MS] and later the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice back in NY, I could do them so well, that once a news guy from Newsday thought I was professional reporter who had come down [to Mississippi] to help out during the summer project.

What he [the Newsday reporter] didn't know was that I had trained under Julian, I had trained under Jack Mennis; it was the Movement that trained me in journalism. I knew how to operate stuff because of SNCC; I learned how to become a communicator and how to manipulate it [information] to get out a message. That has helped me now as filmmaker, because that's what we did.⁶³

A moment of self-reflection points to her subsequent perspective as a Black Feminist when Richardson says that she not only acquired skills in the basics of journalism, but also learned to assert herself as a blossoming social activist.

I learned this from Julian Bond, our communications secretary. Somebody would call you at 2 o'clock in the morning and you had to wake up right away. You had to get all the information, and you had to do this, no matter how sleepy you were. And then, in a tone that would make the FBI guys listen to you, you had to call and say, "You *will* listen to me." And you

⁶² Judy Richardson, "Race: The Great American Divide," *National Issues Forum* (transcript, The Brookings Institute, January 11, 2000); Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO, BlackSides Productions, Washington University Archives, St. Louis, MO. <http://apps49.brookings.edu/comm/transcripts/20000111.htm> (accessed October 11, 2005)

⁶³ Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO, BlackSides Productions, Washington University Archives, St. Louis, MO.

had to learn that at 18-years old.⁶⁴

Michaels said she liked the idea that everyone in the office learned to write press releases and take depositions, but the opportunity seemed quite rare for black women, especially local black women.

Well, in Mississippi it was our practice to just give everybody responsibility, so if you had a high school kid, even if he wasn't doing very well or something like that, you started him writing releases. You started...doing stuff, just doing stuff. Any kind of responsible job, you gave to people, even if somebody else might not have thought that they were capable. They were capable and everybody did everything and that was one of the things [from the Civil Rights Movement that we used] when we started the Women's Movement.⁶⁵

Michaels worked under Shaw in the Hattiesburg field office and explains that although she (like Shaw) had professional experience as a public relations specialist in St. Louis and as a print ghost writer/freelancer in New York, her primary job included writing press releases and taking affidavits from victims of local violence.

You know, I did a lot of news releases, but that wasn't my job. That wasn't my niche. I could do filing, I could do news releases, I could take depositions and because I was good at it, I did a lot of depositions.⁶⁶

This chapter provided a layer of context to the contributions of the women of this study through an examination of their participation in and creation of journalism and communication activities during the Freedom Movement. It outlined the overall communication strategy of SNCC, which created the template for other civil rights

⁶⁴ Judy Richardson, "Race: The Great American Divide," *National Issues Forum* (transcript, The Brookings Institute, January 11, 2000), <http://apps49.brookings.edu/comm/transcripts/20000111.htm> (accessed October 11, 2005) Richardson, Judy. "Race: The Great American Divide: National Issues Forum Panel" Transcript. The Brookings Institute, January 11, 2000. <http://apps49.brookings.edu/comm/transcripts/20000111.htm>

⁶⁵ Sheila Michaels, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 5, 2005 and April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

groups that summer, and specifically examined alternative means of communication created primarily by the indigenous women of Mississippi and those under their charge. Most interestingly, however, this chapter further correlates the communication activities of these Freedom women with the gendered expectations of social activism and demonstrated the differences of press use between the two groups of women as discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, this chapter's section on the women's journalistic activities during Freedom Summer 1964 effectively sets up the discussion in the next section which takes their freedom summer work and links it to the development of their identity politics, particularly that of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism or Black Feminism, and choice of life profession.

CHAPTER 6

FREEDOM SUMMER WOMEN: ACTIVISTS OR COMMUNICATORS?

While the previous chapters of this paper effectively outlined the press usages of the women from this study, it also pointed to the development of their ideological identity, which shaped their perceived roles in the Movement and directly affected their future vocations as either social activists or professional communicators. This final chapter not only makes correlations with these women's perspectives and their social activism/professional careers, but also applies the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist concept that is so very relevant to some of the women in the Freedom Summer Civil Rights Movement of 1964. Lastly, this section concludes with a brief discussion of this study's limitations in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of both researcher and subject interaction and the self-reflective value and danger of using oral sources. To round out the conclusion, this study poses research questions to stimulate future investigation on this topic.

One could argue that the older women took on the perspective of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism because they existed in the mode of survival—survival for them and theirs. Many of these older women lived their entire lives in Mississippi and came from extremely impoverished backgrounds that had endured generations of oppression at the hands of slavery and the practice of Jim Crow. These Afro-Pragmatic Womanist had the view that leading, organizing, and sacrificing for the southern civil rights struggle meant a fight for the black man - her black man (father, husband, brother, uncle, or son) who could never stand erect and pursue his boldest American dreams.

So, my dream [like her husband's] was to...get me a good job and stay out of the hot sun, which turned you two to three shades blacker in the summer time. You had corns [calluses] on your hands from holding that hoe and jabbing, you had scars from picking cotton and burrs that tore your flesh. My husband and I always dreamed of being able get into something [a job] where you went home at a reasonable hour, like 3:00 PM in the afternoon, like school teachers did and you could wear nice clothes and come home smelling nice. You didn't have to go wash a layer of salt from your skin from being in the hot sun and sometimes temperatures that got as high as 105 degrees in the Mississippi Valley. And, you didn't have to walk barefoot 'cause we had to save our shoes. We walked barefoot sometimes in sand that was so hot it burned the bottom of your feet. Our dream was to get out of there and go to Chicago and work in a plant or in a factory or some kind of place where you didn't have to be in the hot sun. We wanted to make more than 25 or 30 cents an hour or 2 or 3 cents a pound for picking cotton.¹

For the older black women of this era, whom mainstream America socially and politically discounted and condemned to a life cycle of early marriages, many children, financial hardship, and an early death, this Civil Rights Movement proved the fight of their lives. Dorsey outlines the life Jim Crow Mississippi had planned for her (and other Afro-Pragmatic Womanists) and why she viewed participation in Freedom Summer as the only hope for herself and her children.

I dropped out, got married when I was in the 11th grade. Did not go to college, married someone from the plantation system who is the father of my six children and found myself mired in the same poverty as those before me. Of course, I started having children and found myself doing the same thing that my mothers and the women before my mother had been doing all these years. We spent our lives chopping and picking that cotton, for which you never had enough to get all the things you needed. Really, seeing my children possibly unable to leave the area as well, growing up in the same kind of environment that their father and I grew up in, led me [to the Movement].²

¹ L.C. Dorsey, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 14, 2005 and March 15, 2005, Jackson, MS.

² Ibid.

But perhaps most of all, this Movement became a fight on behalf of the youth. These older women hoped that overcoming the Freedom struggle would mean that the younger generation of Mississippians would become effective men and women who would forever represent a positive and reconciled image of Americans of African descent. This very point is a direct application of the Afro-Pragmatic principle that contends the older women viewed their stance (and sacrifice of notoriety) as an inroad to ground-breaking experiences for the next generation. This altruistic sentiment not only points to these women's willingness to sacrifice for their children and children's children, but it also helped more accurately paint a picture of the social climate that every African American lived during the Freedom era – it helped explain the very reason that Mississippi became the “hotbed” or proving ground of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. To underscore the significance of this point, Dorsey recalls that Freedom Summer was only a decade away from one of the most horrific social awakenings of the era,

That was also a time [1954] when I suspect that every 11 to 16-year-old kid was scared, because I certainly understood very clearly [black people's place] when we heard how viciously he [Emmett Till] had been killed. They had gone to Mr. Moses Wright's house in the middle of the night with two black men and a group of white men on the back of the truck and had taken Emmett out of that house. Mr. Moses couldn't do anything to stop them. Likewise, I understood very clearly that there was nothing [our] daddy could do to protect us, even though he had a gun and always kept shells in the house. He would have been killed; yes, he would have been killed and for the first time in my life I really realized how helpless our situation was. [By 1964, ten years later,] I think I was not alone and the people who were in their houses hoping and praying that this Movement would be successful [were also thinking] we would not be as helpless.³

³ Ibid.

Adams relates similar sentiments about the sense of vulnerability that especially existed for black youths in Mississippi.

I remember thinking when I heard that they came into the house and got the boy out of the house. I realized then that, dog, our parents can't take care of us; they can't protect us and you can't tell anybody this. I knew from that day on, our parents couldn't even protect us. And me and Emma [Adams' sister] used to talk. 'What do you think would have happened if Emmett would have been at our house? You know, if he had been our cousin or somebody visiting, what do you think would have happened?' We knew exactly what would have happened, because we saw it happen to that boy. They would have killed daddy [her paternal grandfather] who would have been defending his house.⁴

Also, Afro-Pragmatic Women showed a measure of sensitivity to the historical images of "mammy" and "sapphire" that depicted black women as outspoken, controlling, and ones who immasculinized their men and de-feminized themselves as a group. Adams explains how Hamer, Devine, Blackwell, and she employed the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist principle of cooperation in order to diffuse the image and reputation of black women as always being at strife with one another, emotionally charged, and lacking intellectual discernment.

The very interesting thing about us was how our personalities would just be four totally different people...The four of us never, ever, had time to indulge in those myths [women's inability to cooperate due to jealousy.] We were always so supportive and it was like we had our own system of ESP (Extra Sensory Perception) and you would never find us coming from different perspectives. We just tended to read each other, could agree with each other. That may have been a part of our influence, because nobody could find any cracks in our relationship. We were sisters; we were colleagues, partners, and counterparts.⁵

Even the professions of these women speak to an identity associated with Afro-Pragmatic Womanism in that they persisted throughout their lives in vocations of social

⁴ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 13, 2005 and March 14, 2005, Ruleville, MS and Jackson, MS.

⁵ Ibid.

activism. For example, Adams describes herself as a “spiritual social/political civil rights activist” who has lived a life of full-time engagement in resistance to all acts of repression.

The emergence/unfolding of the Movement of the ‘60's offered an opportunity to expand and structure that engagement. My engagement continues to the present and will continue throughout my life’s journey...I have been involved in sharing the experience of the ‘60's Movement all around the country, in college and university communities, in religious settings, and in my neighborhood and local community. Without a doubt, the ‘60's Movement impacted my life most profoundly and radicalized my understanding of what it means to "BE the Church" in the world...I have been and continue to be involved in and affiliated with many groups and organizations, but the experience of the ‘60's Movement is the plumb line by which all others are measured. The "Enfleshening" of the "Word" it was and continues to be.⁶

Although Blackwell actually moved from social activist to politician, she and other Afro-Pragmatic women of her time, saw politics as a means to facilitate her devotion to the social, economical, and political uplift of poor black southerners. All of the other women in this group spent their lives in social work that bespoke this same holistic approach.

The younger generation of women from this era, one may argue, could *afford* to focus on such matters as a gender struggle, because much of the groundwork for their unprecedented cultural, economic, and social opportunities had been facilitated by the older generation of women. Afro-Pragmatic women understood this and later in the Movement encouraged younger women in their pursuits of Feminism and Black Feminism.

⁶ Repaying Our Ancestors Respectfully Foundation Inc. (ROAR), “Adams, Victoria Gray,” *Repaying Our Ancestors Respectfully*, http://www.fannielouhamer.info/victoria_adams.html (accessed October 11, 2005).

Unlike the older women, the younger women of this study seemed to remember their roles in the Freedom Movement from the perspective of awakening their feminist “spirit.” For example, Judy Richardson, Sheila Michaels, Terri Shaw and Raylawni Branch initially approached the Movement from an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist perspective, but eventually exhibited a more feminist outlook as a *result* of their movement experiences.

All of the younger women from this study say they went on to become feminists for two reasons. First, the knowledge and skills they gained and honed during their tenure in Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Movement *qualified* them en masse to move into areas of journalism and communication never previously available to women. Their situation compared to that of the Black Press, who garnered many of their journalistic talents during the Movement, which enabled them to successfully secure positions in the mainstream press as never experienced by black journalists before them.

Second, among the youth of the summer project, these women also began to see themselves as professional equals to the young men in the Movement, which created a keener awareness of the in-house discrimination that sometimes increasingly divided them from their male counterparts. This burgeoning perspective also decreased the younger women’s willingness to tolerate genderized mistreatment for the sake of the Movement as demonstrated by the older women of this study. One could easily understand that the younger women of the era found the Afro-Pragmatic perspective problematic. They (rightly) imagined that history would not accurately record the contributions of both groups of women to the Movement. This has been the very lament

of contemporary Black Feminist scholars and thus provided the justification for this very study.

The younger group of women from this research took on the theories of Black Feminists bell hooks and Patricia Collins in that they spoke of a need to acknowledge and define their conscious struggle against male domination within the Freedom Movement and subsequently within society at large. They also talked about the development of their Feminist and Black Feminist perspectives (respectively) in terms of reflective and emancipatory democratic activism.⁷ While they clearly espoused the notion of community uplift, their primary focus of discussion and remembrance centered on their genderized struggle within the Freedom Movement - which many said eventually led them to participate as social activists in the Women's Liberation Movement of the next decade.⁸

Even their professional pursuits indicate a more Feminist outlook in that they all have excelled in work that once existed as the iconic reflection of male dominance. Richardson credits the Freedom Movement with actualizing her choice to become a journalist/film maker.⁹ Branch acknowledges that the life skills she learned in the Freedom Movement laid the foundation for her 20-year-career as an Air Force Colonel in Nursing and local political activist in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.¹⁰

Michaels and Shaw said the Movement provided an invaluable opportunity that

⁷Patricia Hill Collins, "Defining Black Feminist Thought," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 19-40.

⁸Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 234.

⁹Judy Richardson, oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, April 6, 2005, St. Louis, MO.

¹⁰Raylawni Branch, archival oral history interview by Brenda Edgerton-Webster, March 27, 2005, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M335, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

honed their journalistic skills and prepared them for a life centered on human rights. Shaw maintained that Freedom Summer changed her life and awakened her soul to a great many ideas. She said that she learned much about African American southern culture and the experience prompted her to provide a myriad of integrated opportunities for her children.

As a journalist I'm not supposed to participate in any kind of activism. I'm not supposed to take sides. We are not even allowed to sign petitions or join activist organizations because we are supposed to be dispassionate and separated. So, the only thing I have been able to do, is...I didn't want my kids to grow up not knowing African Americans, as I had. So, I live in a very well integrated neighborhood, they went to public schools, and we go to a church with many African American members...I just try not to live in sort of segregated situations.¹¹

Implications of this Study to Research and Theory

The oral histories of this study provided a voice often unheard in journalism history, Black Feminist thought, and civil rights history. The implications for these areas of study prove significant in that the canon of women's contributions to these fields should routinely include Victoria Gray Adams, Unita Blackwell, L.C. Dorsey, Judy Richardson, Raylawni Branch, Terri Shaw, Sheila Michaels, and Mary King.

Their training in journalism prior to, during, and subsequent to Freedom Summer 1964 indicates the important role of women as communicators of the Civil Rights Movement. In some ways, this notion of women developing and perfecting professional skills of communication as part of their work in social movements helps revise the perceived role of women in journalism history. This concept moves their historical location from cooperative nurturers to educated (through practice or formal training)

¹¹ Terri Shaw, archival oral history interview by Stephanie Scull, Archives of the University of Southern Mississippi, M326, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, MS.

architects of communication routines. In many ways, the Afro-Pragmatic women of this study continued a legacy of women doing journalism for the sake of social movements and applied it to the Modern Civil Rights Movement. They passed this honored responsibility like a baton to the younger white and black Feminists who later positioned themselves to open numerous doors for a newer generation of women in journalism. This tradition of “pay forward” activism, has allowed several contemporary media women of celebrity to enter and excel in areas of journalism never experienced by pre-twentieth century women of color. Women such as Ethel Payne,¹² Frances Murphy,¹³ Charlayne Hunter-Gault,¹⁴ Carol Simpson,¹⁵ Cathy Hughes¹⁶ and Oprah Winfrey¹⁷ owe their

¹² Ethel Payne was the first African American female journalist to accompany and report on a sitting president—Lyndon B. Johnson. Washington Press Club Foundation, “Interviews with Ethel Payne,” *Women in Journalism*, <http://npc.press.org/wpforal/payn.htm> (accessed October 11, 2005).

¹³ Frances L. Murphy II is the chairwoman of the board of directors and current publisher of the historical Black Press *The Afro-American*. Washington Press Club Foundation, “Interviews with Frances L. Murphy II,” *Women in Journalism*, <http://npc.press.org/wpforal/murph.htm> (accessed October 11, 2005).

¹⁴ Hunter-Gault desegregated the University of Georgia in 1961 with Hamilton Holmes and went on to a stellar career in journalism that included stints at *The New Yorker*, *the New York Times* and *the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour/PBS*. Washington Press Club Foundation, “Charlayne Hunter-Gault Introduction,” *Women in Journalism*, <http://npc.press.org/wpforal/huntint.htm#top> (accessed October 11, 2005).

¹⁵ Carol Simpson, Anchor of ABC's *World News Sunday* and an Emmy Award-winning senior correspondent for ABC News. Simpson was the first African American woman to anchor a national television network-news show. Highlights from her career include her “role as the sole moderator for the 1992 presidential candidate ‘town hall’ debate between George Bush and Bill Clinton, reporting for the acclaimed documentary, *Black and White in America*, and anchoring of three hour-long ABC News Specials on “The Changing American Family,” “Public Schools in America,” and “Sex and Violence in the Media.” As a member of the *Nightline* team in South Africa, Simpson helped anchor ABC's live coverage of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the Persian Gulf War, the Tiananmen massacre, and the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings.” Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics, “Carol Simpson 2000,” *Mary Louise Smith Chair in Women and Politics*, <http://www.iastate.edu/~cccatt/c%20simpson.html> (accessed October 11, 2005).

¹⁶ Founder of *Radio One*, Cathy Hughes started her journalism and radio career in 1969 in Omaha, Nebraska. Howard University School of Communication hired her as a lecturer and Assistant Dean of Communication in the early 1970s and she became the general manager of the university's famed WHUR-FM radio station (notable for its origination of the “Quiet Storm Format” [mellow R&B]) and extensive African American community news/information radio programming featuring *The Daily Drum*. By the late 1970s, Hughes bought WOL-AM, another local Washington, D.C. station, and built it into the largest black-owned radio chain. *Radio One* owns over 65 stations in every national market and is the sister company to Hughes' 2004 venture *TV One*, a nationally syndicated cable station that targets [and has outpaced Black Entertainment Television (BET)] programming to the African American community. The History Makers, “Cathy Hughes,” *The History Makers—African American History Archive*,

contributions to journalism history to the supreme efforts of the former generations of Afro-Pragmatic women.

Early Afro-Pragmatic women (and others like them) also paved the way for black women's contemporary involvement in social activism and politics. For example, Coretta Scott King,¹⁸ Marian Wright Edelman,¹⁹ Shirley Chisholm,²⁰ and Dorothy Height demonstrated (at various times in their lives) an Afro-Pragmatic perspective in their practice of social activism.

Additionally, both the older and younger women of this study put a new face on *who* constituted the Black Press of the Modern Civil Rights era. They demonstrated that the historical "figure-heads" of the Black Press (like their mainstream counterpart) received the support of and often depended on journalistic tasks of women of the

<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/biography.asp?bioindex=857&category=mediaMakers> (accessed: October 11, 2005).

¹⁷ Oprah Winfrey is no doubt the most successful and influential journalist, male or female, in American journalism history. As a mega entrepreneur, Winfrey has a foothold in several mass media including television, magazines, books, the Internet, and satellite radio. Harpo Productions Inc., *Oprah.com*, <http://www.oprah.com> (accessed: October, 11, 2005). See also Lee Miller, Bonnie Brennen, and Brenda Edgerton-Webster, "The Construction of Readership in *Essence*, *Ebony*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*," *Media Report to Women* 33, No. 1 (Winter 2005).

¹⁸ Coretta Scott King, the late widow of slain civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and executive director for the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, had not only continued her husband's fight for human and civil rights, but also spent the rest of her life as an activist on many social fronts. The King Center — Atlanta, GA, "Mrs. Coretta Scott King: Human Rights Activist and Leader," *The King Center*, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/csk/bio.html> (accessed October 11, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this research, King's statements (in Walker's *In Our Mother's Garden*) illustrated her Afro-Pragmatic perspective toward women's roles in the Movement. It also pointed to and embraced the change in that perspective that was emerging during the latter half of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

¹⁹ Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the *Children's Defense Fund*, a national children's rights advocacy organization, began her career in the midst of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Civil Rights Movement. The first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar and a lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Jackson, Mississippi, Edelman made her life's vocation as an activist for social change. Children's Defense Fund, "Marian Wright Edelman," *The Children's Defense Fund: The Voice for All the Children in America*, http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/People_MWE (accessed October 11, 2005).

²⁰ Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Congress (D-NY) in 1968 and ran for the Democratic nomination for U.S. President in 1972. A staunch advocate for education and health-care rights, Chisholm also spearheaded a bill to give women domestics the right to minimum wages. Brownmiller, Susan. *Shirley Chisholm*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970; Chisholm, Shirley. *Unbought and Unbossed*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.

Movement. Like notable women journalists before them (Nellie Bly, Ida Tarbell, Ida B. Wells, Amy Jacques Garvey, and Daisy Bates), these women workers of Freedom Summer 1964 developed and used their talents as communicators to bring light to a contemporary social problem; often without public recognition then, nor in historic remembrance today.

Another implication of this study to journalism history is that it foreshadowed and underscored the necessity of “civic journalism”²¹ to a participatory Democracy. Like the ideals of “civic journalism,” this study showed a vital connection between Freedom Summer citizens and the press – it demonstrated an intentional synergy among impoverished Mississippians, non-indigenous student volunteers, and various facets of the American press for the purpose of representing and improving the lot of its citizens.

The notion of “civic journalism” became hugely popular in media circles during the early 1990’s.²² This study, however, demonstrates that not only did the women of Freedom Summer 1964 and the Modern Civil Rights era clearly understand the

²¹ “Civic journalism is about making connections between journalists and the communities they cover, and between journalism and citizenship. It is first of all a set of practices in which journalists attempted to reconnect with citizens, improve public discussion, and strengthen civic culture. Second, it is an ongoing conversation about the ultimate aims of journalism. Public journalists are people who believe that the press should take a far more assertive role in trying to make democracy work than they have in the past. Finally, it is a growing movement of working journalists—print and broadcast—some academics, philosophers, and a number of institutions who see civic journalism as central to the reconstruction of public life.” Lewis A. Friedland, Jay Rosen, and Lisa Austin, “Civic Journalism: A New Approach to Citizenship,” *CPN—Civic Renewal Movement—Topics: Civic Communication*, http://www.cpn.org/topics/communication/civicjourn_new.html (accessed October 11, 2005).

²² Ellen Hume, *Restoring the Bond: Connecting Campaign Coverage to Voters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Edward D. Miller, *The Charlotte Project: Helping Citizens Take Back Democracy*, no. 4 (St. Petersburg, FL: The Poynter Institute for Media Studies), 1994; Jay Rosen, “Public Journalism: A Progress Report,” *Project on Public Life and the Press Report*, Fall 1994, Department of Journalism, New York University; Jay Rosen, “Politics, Vision, and the Press: Toward a Public Agenda for Journalism,” in *The New News v. The Old News: The Press and Politics in the 1990s* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1992), 3-33; Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt Jr., *Public Journalism: Theory and Practice* (Dayton, Ohio: The Kettering Foundation, 1994); Tanni Haas, “Alternative Media, Public Journalism and the Pursuit of Democratization,” *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 1 (February 2004): 115-121.

connection between journalism/communication and civic or social responsibility, but they also viewed it as essential to the success of a movement that benefited all people. As had been the case throughout the history of the early Black Press and black social movements, a separation between journalist/communicator and social activist never fully existed; the two roles complement and often shaped the Black Public and Counter Public Spheres. These Freedom Summer women's early practice of what media scholars now term "civic journalism" also helps explain why social activism and/or politics became a life's vocation for the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist of the Modern Civil Rights era. The implication of this study to journalism history not only confirms previous research on the contribution of women, but also highlights the journalistic and communication efforts of such women as a key element in the success of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

This study contributes to civil rights history in that it gives "voice" to an essential segment of workers previously silenced – women communicators. It also helps revise the image of the Civil Rights Movement as male-led and hierarchical and shows the breadth of diverse perspectives that women (black and white) brought to the events of 1964 Freedom Summer. In doing so, this study broadens the body of scholarship and public recognition of civil rights women beyond notables like Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King.

In keeping with the tradition of researching civil rights history from a bottom-up and oral story-telling approach, this study bolsters the validity of these methodological techniques as appropriate and most effective to this kind of scholarship. It demonstrates that many more stories such as these exist and deserve the attention of academic research. It also reminds scholars that hearing these narratives directly from former civil rights'

workers brings a measure of certainty to its history - rivaled only by witnessing the era oneself. Perhaps most importantly, this study illustrates the critical import of journalism and communication to the success of the Civil Rights Movement; and that women (a comprehensive group of women) played a major role in providing this key component.

The implication of this study to Black Feminism introduces the new concept – Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, which highlights the unique intersectionality between Africana Womanism and Womanist theories as applied to describing the older women in the Freedom Movement. Without exception, the most significant contribution of this study to Feminist scholarship (from the perspective of African Diaspora women) supports the unification of the various factions of Black Feminism, which have grown at odds over the last two decades.²³

Making application of the traditional tenets of Black Feminism (whose agenda prioritizes women, race, and class), Womanism (women, class, and race) and Africana Womanism (race, class, and women), in the case of civil rights workers, help historians better understand the varied dynamics of women’s work in this particular social movement. The fact that these perspectives slightly differ does not tear down the image or accomplishments of an African American female collective, but rather demonstrates the diversity among black women that brings various strengths to the overriding goal of

²³ Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: the Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (October-December 1986): 14-32; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984); bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989); Clenora Hudson-Weems, Daphne Ntiri, and Zulu Sofola, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (New York: Bedford, 1993); Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women are White, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: Feminist Press), 1982; Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

community uplift. It also provides a paradigm that acknowledges and honors the many worldviews of African American women from the Modern Civil Rights era and beckons to the basic spirit of Third-Wave Feminism.²⁴

The foundational concept of Third-Wave Feminism espouses a platform of synergy among all branches of Feminist thought. One of the primary complaints among Third-Wave Feminists remains the amount of division among women who supposedly work together for the uplift of all women. They promote honoring and embracing the differences between men and women while cooperatively working to change the world's outlook to that end.²⁵ Third-Wave Black Feminists send out a call to unite various divisions within all forms of feminism in an effort to bring better treatment of black women –of all women – of all people. This newest cohort of Black Feminists, collectively address criminality motivated by gender and race, inequity of social policies, and a global approach to women's development.²⁶ Essentially, they hearken back to the holistic perspective of Afro-Pragmaticism, but make application of it to the entire world community. Both Third-Wave Feminists and Afro-Pragmatic Womanists have demonstrated better cooperative efforts with their white counterparts than those before them. As mentioned above, the most plausible explanation for this results from a more holistic and global appreciation of all of women's work in social movements.

²⁴ See the Third Wave Foundation created and directed by Rebecca Walker, daughter of Second-Wave Feminist theorist Alice Walker and goddaughter of the Women's Liberation Movement Gloria Steinem. *Third Wave Foundation*, <http://www.thirdwavefoundation.org> (accessed: October 11, 2005); Amber E. Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 124.

²⁵ Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the 3rd Wave," *Ms.*, Spring 2002.

²⁶ Springer, Kimberly, "Third Wave Black Feminism?" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27 no. 4 (2002): 1059–1082; *Third Wave Foundation*, <http://www.thirdwavefoundation.org> (accessed: October 11, 2005); Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

Are there Afro-Pragmatic women today? Most certainly! BET Co-founder Sheila Johnson,²⁷ Youth Activist and Journalist Sistah Souljah,²⁸ and Harvard Lawyer Michelle Obama²⁹ exemplify just a few. Like the Afro-Pragmatic Womanists before them, these women have the ability and the training to require recognition for their efforts in tandem with their male counterparts. They choose, however, to promote the image of black men's success; not at the expense of their own efforts, but rather on behalf of the total imagery of African American people at large – they are modern Afro-Pragmatic Womanists.

²⁷ Co-founder of television's first African American-oriented and owned broadcast station, Black Entertainment Television (BET), Sheila Johnson worked as a communication specialist nearly three decades behind the image of her husband and Former CEO of BET Robert (Bob) Johnson. An accomplished classically trained musician, Sheila Johnson had direct involvement with cable's first music television station and created one of its most popular shows, *Teen Summit*, which centered on issues of interest to black youth. Only recently (and due primarily to the disclosure of public divorce records) have Americans become aware of the contributions of this Afro-Pragmatic Womanist. Like those that came before her, Sheila Johnson understood and conceded to allowing the image of a black man represent such an important social and journalistic innovation. She used her talents to build a foundation for the "voices" of black youths and provided a springboard for their social activism (*Teen Summits'* AIDS Prevention campaign—"Rap it Up"). Lynn Norment, "Sheila Johnson: America's First Black Female Billionaire—Biography," *Ebony*, September 2003.

²⁸ A hip-hop generation journalist, author, rapper, film maker (*The Coldest Winter* taken from her second book and in collaboration with Jada Pinkett-Smith is due for release sometime in 2006) and social activist, Sistah Souljah (a.k.a. Lisa Williamson) has been initially touted as a Third-Wave Feminist activist, but upon closer examination she should be counted among the ranks of a modern Afro-Pragmatic Womanists. In her first book and autobiography *No Disrespect*, she chronicles the development of her feminist perspective through a narrative of her personal experiences as a female social activist in the early 1990s. She concludes her epistle to young African American women to support themselves as leaders of the future. Most importantly, Souljah encourages black women to take up the mantle of social activism (even if for only a year or two before becoming a doctor, lawyer, or banker) and make the eradication of the black man's plight in America, the social trappings that await African American youths, and the image of the emasculating woman of color foremost in their fight for equality and to uplift the entire black community. Sistah Souljah is an Afro-Pragmatic Womanist indeed. Sistah Souljah, *No Disrespect* (New York: Random House Inc. Vintage Books, 1995).

²⁹ Michelle Obama should be described as a contemporary Afro-Pragmatic Womanist based on what she said after her husband Barak won the Democratic nomination for his successful U.S. Senate Run (Illinois): "My role in this is supportive, but I feel that, you know, our family gets into politics, and you become a part of the process. I am a role model. My children will be symbols for people. This is an important thing for people." Michelle Obama, interview by Kathy Brock, "Candid Snapshot: Michelle Obama Speaks with ABC7," WLS-TV, Chicago, IL, March 18, 2004, <http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=News&id=1344254> (accessed October 11, 2005).

Reflections of the Study and Future Research Goals

As indicated in previous chapters, the developing concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism grew directly out of remarks from the eldest women of this study, the late Victoria Jackson Adams Gray and Unita Blackwell. After only a few days with these women did this researcher begin to reconcile previously held assumptions (that the women would cry foul in unison about their subjection to African American men in reality and in the historical memory of the American Modern Civil Rights Movement) and truly began to hear the narratives of these women's experiences. Likewise, the level of innovation among the indigenous women in their creation and implementation of alternative forms of communication also came as a pleasant surprise.

One might concede such disjuncture between this researcher and the women of this study as a limitation in the process of data collection. Through journaling, self-examination, and review of the women's narratives, however, this experience created the environment for unearthing the developing concept of Afro-Pragmatic Womanism. Recognition of certain assumptions by this researcher provided a point of comparison with the actual experiences and reflections of the women in this study. Had such reflexivity not taken place for the both the researcher and the subjects, perhaps much of the core of this study would have remained undiscovered.

Oral Historian Kim Lacy Rogers says, that in addition to the growing body of literature on the Modern Civil Rights Movement, activists also memorialize their participation with "three-day weekends and commemorative coins."³⁰ In the case of Freedom Summer 1964, this researcher learned that several anniversary conferences and

³⁰ Kim Lacy Rogers, "Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History*, 75, S 1988, 567.

symposiums have taken place with regularity and list-serves seem to form every year. Perhaps the most notable memorial to the summer project - the SNCC-LIST, provides a forum for former activist to publicly negotiate their memories. While much of the discussion verifies faulty memories on dates, time, places, and individuals involved, it also affords registered and confirmed former activists a place to discuss contemporary issues through the prism of civil and human rights.

This researcher gained access to the SNCC-LIST through a subject of this study with the understanding that the information would be used only for contextual background information and that no individual be quoted. Again, some might perceive this restricted access as a limitation to collecting data – data that is certainly collaboratively created and filtered intentionally or not; however, had this wonderfully unique opportunity not been granted to this researcher, much of the progress and interpretation of this study’s findings would have been thwarted. Several individuals on the list helped broaden contextual and factual information, provided a collective sense of the way activists saw themselves, and directed this researcher to interviewees instrumental to the success of this research. Perhaps one of the toughest tasks of this research was sifting through and finding information that proved most accurate of events and perspectives of Freedom Summer 1964.

Just as the former activists on the SNCC-LIST benefited from journaling and self-reflection, so too has this researcher. As mentioned above, journaling after each interview and comparing those journal entries with the transcribed interviews helped synthesize these women’s stories and juxtapose the role of the researcher to the researched. For example, this researcher’s status as insider/outsider played an intricate role in the access

to these women. Certainly, association with the fine reputation of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri provided a measure of credibility to this researchers' qualification to carry out such a study. Additionally, requests to video and audio record interactions with the subjects were substantiated by the school's international reputation for producing quality journalists.

Although not a native Mississippian, the fact that this researcher is an African American woman facilitated not only access to the women of this study, but also certainly contributed to the depth of conversations and exposure to confidential materials in their possession. Ironically, almost every individual interviewed asked the age of this researcher and took much pleasure in the fact that this researcher's birth took place in 1964. This dynamic surprisingly seemed to create an instant bond with the subjects of this study as interviewees felt obliged to "inform" and "instruct" like an archived newspaper on the year of one's birth. Rightly so, Paul Thompson warned that the social presence of the interviewer often shapes interaction between the researcher and the researched.³¹

Also, allowing the subjects review of their stories, helped this researcher to not only process the experience of hearing "life stories," but also afforded opportunities to discover actual and perceived discrepancies in the women's stories. For example, after a post-interview discussion with Michaels about the progress of this research, she intimated that since she was born in 1939 (just a few years shy of Hamer, Devine, and Adams) she should be included with the "older women" of this study. This researcher explained that age was not the only criterion upon which this study categorized the women. Although

³¹ Paul Thompson, *Voices of the Past*, 139.

Michaels was nearly the same age as the “older women,’ she had never been married, had no children, and was an educated working woman. Her world experience and perspectives differed greatly from the likes of Adams, who was a married mother and grandmother, had a husband, and viewed her activism as a matter of life or death. The synthesis of the contextual and factual information and the notes from journaling helped provide a rationally sound response that proved acceptable to Michaels.

Oral historian Kim Lacy Rogers says, “Oral histories provide dramatic retrospective accounts of activists’ changing consciousness, sense of awakening possibility, and growing personal strength.”³² The women of this study also provided self-reflective stories of their personal philosophies. For example, interviews with the older women, Adams, Blackwell, and Dorsey, repeatedly cited their changed social perspective (from the accepted reality of Jim Crowism to activism for immediate change) as the only hope for the success of future generations. Also, the younger women like Terri Shaw, who attributed her awakening as a social activist tandem with her awakening as a feminist, and Judy Richardson, who attributed her awakening as a black activist relative to her awakening as a communication professional, provided narratives peppered with reflections on the significance of the Movement to their philosophical development.

Rogers rightly warned of the propensity of civil rights activists to “retain more vivid memories of dramatic events than of more mundane experiences.” In the case of this study, most of these women could easily recount the names of specific people, near dates, times and places about Freedom Summer 1964; but could rarely recall specifics about writing or reporting on events from that summer. On one occasion, this researcher

³² Kim Lacy Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of American History*, 75, S 1988,, 569.

asked Michaels about her remembrances of writing newsletters or press releases.

Although fairly sure that she did so, initially she couldn't recall any specific events. Upon viewing a few articles and local newsletters from that summer (provided by this researcher from archived materials,) she immediately began to recall the events and circumstances when she wrote them. In another example, Blackwell initially insisted that she was never "well-versed" enough to write any official news pieces; but rather thought of herself as a "reporter without words." When shown a bulleted outline she had written for a news release that contained only five additional words, she blushed with amazement and humility. The introduction of old pictures or news articles/releases, speeches, and posters often provided the needed trigger or "entry" into the memory for most all of the women of this study.

French historian Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,³³ says these "ports of entry" into the past may begin with actual events, political traditions, rituals, or even pastimes and bodies of literature, but are always mitigated by the will of individuals to replace constructed histories with "true" memory. Much of what this researcher read prior to hearing the oral "truths" of these women's memories were a part of such "constructed histories." But, do such narratives actually represent true experiences or negotiated memories?

Perhaps one of the most important lessons of this study touches on the fact that neither the older or younger women of this study (many whom were communication

³³ *Lieu de Mémoire* - a French term that signifies the relationship between history and memory - means 'dates, images, events, names, places,' and is the literal site or location of entry into memory used to order, concentrate, and secure notions of the past. Pierre Nora, "From *Lieux de Mémoire* to Realms of Memory," in: *Nora and Kritzman 1996: XV-XXIV* and Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Lieux de Mémoire*," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, eds. Fabre and O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 284-300.

professionals themselves) really thought deeply about the significance of their roles as communicators in the success of Freedom Summer. Yes, they recognized that communication/journalism performed a vital function to the success of the summer project; but they did not see themselves as being particularly instrumental to the role of communication/journalism itself.

Often the women from both generations seemed quite rehearsed in the remembrances of general Movement activities, ideologies, and experiences. Whenever, this researcher asked questions about their roles as communicators, however, most paused and then began with a moment of reflective contemplation and uniformly said, they had never been asked questions about that summer and their communication efforts, they had never synthesized the connection between their direct activism and the overall communication efforts of the Movement, and that making such a correlation proved profoundly essential to truly discussing their memories of the project. These women demonstrated a clear demarcation between negotiated memories (that were often thought-out and well rehearsed) and creating (on-the-spot) memories while in the process of recalling experience and integrating developed philosophies.

Taking a cue from the two aforementioned types of narratives of memory, this study suggests the critical importance of gaining a multiplicity of perspectives when conducting oral history research. For example, the earlier discussion of the younger women's differing perspectives on the significance of issues of sexuality among the younger student workers highlighted the responsibility of this researcher to seek out, document, and compare diverse and similar experiences. The accounts of Michaels and Shaw, non-African Americans, remembered the issue of inter-racial sexuality as a fact

that had little impact on the eventual discord among the students of that summer.

Richardson, an African American, had polar opposite memories of ‘black-on-white/white-on-black love’ from Freedom Summer of 1964. Ironically, the same proved true on the topic of women performing works of professional journalism.

As mentioned early, Michaels and Shaw remembered their work experiences tainted with unappreciative disregard of their professional journalism experience. Richardson’s memories, however, centered on the fact that the summer project afforded her a myriad of opportunities in journalism and eventually film making. The point here is not to determine which account is right or wrong, but rather to acknowledge that each perspective has merit in telling the overall experiences of these women.

Just as important, this researcher documented the harmonic testimonies of these women’s experiences. The accounts of Adams, Blackwell, and Dorsey uniformly discussed the congeniality among the older women, their earlier lives as cotton pickers and sharecrop dwellers, and their father’s insistence they attend school despite the edict of the plantation owner or Jim Crow mores. Agreement among their stories painted a very vivid and credible picture of their lives and helps further explain their reasoning for allowing the image of strong black males to emerge as the “face” of the Movement.

Although this study accomplished much, more research is needed on press uses of African American and other women during Freedom Summer and the overall Modern Civil Rights Movement. Future research on the indigenous women of Mississippi and other southern states (Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, North & South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee) during Freedom Summer will support the new concept of Afro-Pragmatic

Womanism and broaden the historical understanding of the contribution of these women to the fields of journalism history, civil rights history, and Black Feminist Theory.

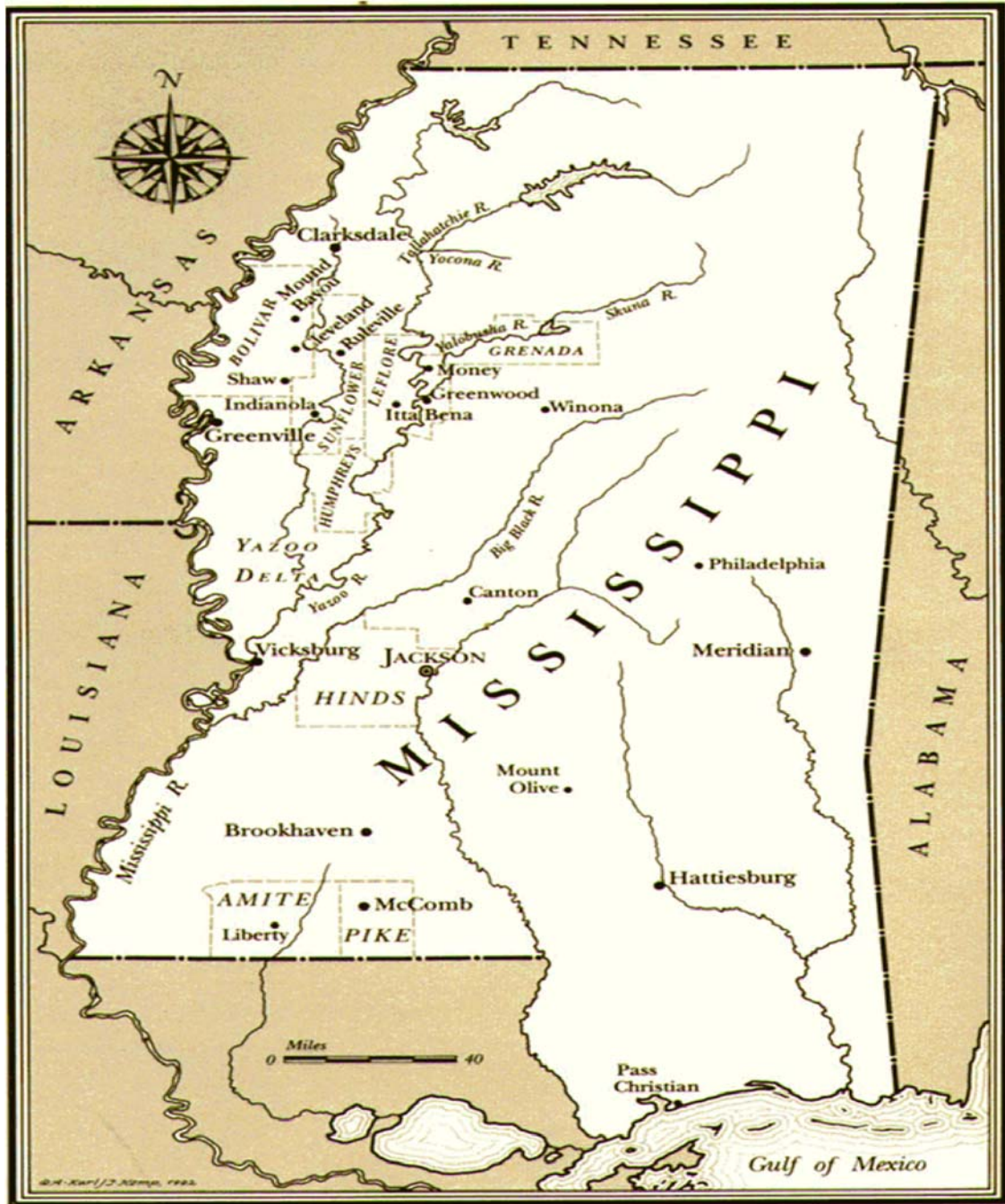
One important question future researchers should ask is whether the Afro-Pragmatic Womanist phenomena found among older women in Mississippi occurred in the same manner among other southern states of the Freedom Movement? If so, did the press uses of other southern women mirror those in Mississippi and did generational differences in ideological perspectives and life professions also mirror the women of this study? Future research should look for the correlation between southern women's activism and their roles as communicators during Freedom Summer 1964 and underscore the significance of memories that reframe historical "truths."

As noted by the author below, the discovery of such truths casts differing lights on the accepted stories that have become history; but with a shifting of lights or prisms, in this case – communication and Afro-Pragmatic Womanism, these accepted histories become enhanced with new truths.

The truth changes color depending on the light. And tomorrow can be clearer than yesterday. Memory is the selection of images, some elusive, others printed indelibly on the brain. Each image is like a thread, each thread woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture. And the tapestry tells a story and the story is our past. - *Kasi Lemmons, Eve's Bayou*

This study has set in motion the loom of research that will weave the intricate tapestry of women's role in the communication/journalism of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. With this foundation, this researcher "casts off" this study for other scholars to put their hand to the creation of more scholarship that help tell the story of women's activism during Freedom Summer 1964.

APPENDIX A



State Map of Mississippi—1964
Introduction, p. 17, Footnote 37
Robert Moses Archive
<http://www.learntoquestion.com>

CANDIDATES TO RUN ON JUNE 2---



Mrs. Victoria Gray James M. Houston Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer Rev. John Cameron

THE STUDENT VOICE

VOL. 5 NO. 13 STUDENT VOICE, INC. 6 Raymond Street, N. W. Atlanta, Georgia 30314 JUNE 2, 1964

NEGROES RUN IN MISS.

FOUR RUN ON FREEDOM SLATE

JACKSON, MISS. - Mississippi's voters - over 95% of them white - may not elect any of the four Negro candidates running in

the June 2 primary but each is determined to go to Washington to represent the state in Jan. 1965.

The four - Mrs. Victoria Gray, and the Rev. John Earle Cameron, both of Hattiesburg; Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, and James M. Houston of Vicksburg - asked the state's

voters to make a choice they've never been asked to make before - to choose between the white, segregationist regular Democrats and four civil-rights conscious Negroes running under the banner of the Freedom Democratic Party.

None of the Negro candidates expects to win Tuesday's elec-

tion, but all hope to be seated in the House and Senate in Jan. 1965.

Although Negroes are more than 40% of the state's population, only some 20,000 Negroes are registered voters. Registered whites make up 95% of the electorate.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Beating Marks Freedom Day

CANTON, MISS. - A Negro youth was beaten unconscious by eight city police here during a May 29 "Freedom Day," and close to 50 persons were arrested when they attempted participation in the concentrated voter registration drive.

SNCC workers at the Jackson office of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), said Negroes who assembled at the Mount Zion Baptist Church and proceeded to the county courthouse were either turned back by police or arrested.

Despite mounting pressure from local law enforcement during the Freedom Day, about 60 persons stood on line waiting to try to register to vote.

"Eight police with clubs beat 24-year-old McKinley Hamblein unconscious in front of many witnesses," assistant COFO pro-



Mrs. Victoria Gray, Senate candidate, speaks at an outdoor rally in Canton.

COURT NIXES PEACE BOND REQUIREMENTS

SELMA, ALA. - The Alabama Court of Appeals has denied local law enforcement of one of its most effective legal weapons used here last fall to restrain SNCC vote workers.

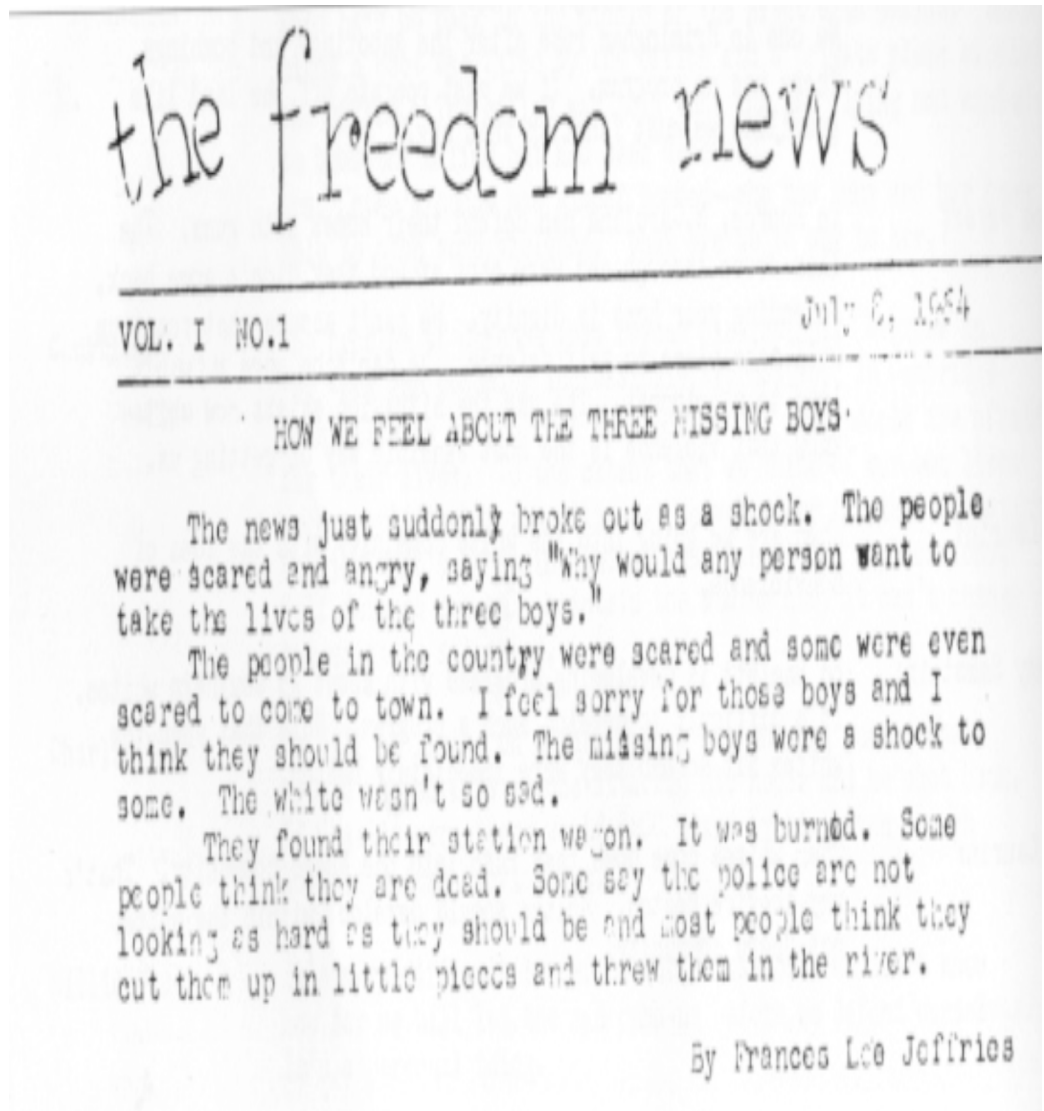
The appellate court reversed on May 26 a Dallas County Circuit Court decision which required six Negro rights workers, including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, to put up security for \$1,000 peace bonds before they could be released from jail or contest their conviction.

Peace bonds have also been used in Savannah, Ga. and Farmville, Va., to deter civil rights advocates from engaging in further activity. Posting such a bond is tantamount to promising to stop all present activity, since it is immediately revocable if another charge is added. Traditionally used in domestic and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

The Student Voice, June 2, 1964—Front Page
 Chapter 5, p. 138, Footnote 16
 Tougaloo College Archives—90.22
 Edward King Collection, Box 14, Folder 752

APPENDIX C



Freedom News

Local newsletter similar to *The Student Voice* as referenced by Sheila Michaels

Chapter 5, p. 153, Footnote 59

Sheila Michaels' Personal Collection

APPENDIX D

BULLETIN -- July 2-5

Page 2

July 3 -

Jackson: Lots of phone harassment by those who tap our lines. On Thursday both WATS lines went dead and then started RINGING, which is supposed to be impossible.

Columbus: Cops have impounded a car which Joe Harrison signed over to Bernard Wasow and John Buffington, saying the car is stolen because the transfer was not notarized.

Itta Bena: Sheriff questioned Willie McGee and John Paul about some thefts in the area where they had been canvassing, saying they were the only ones who had been in that area. They were not charged. Rumors of bombing the mass meeting.

Meridian: Walter Hackman arrested for going through a red light (he didn't), after being involved in minor accident in which Ben Chaney, James Chaney's younger brother, got a broken arm. Later, a reckless driving charge was added: total bond, \$122.

Greenwood: Two cars driving around the office without tags.

Memphis: Volunteer John Robin Greer, an English national, was attacked by three Negroes near the SNCC orientation office. The motive was clearly robbery, according to Greer. He was hospitalized over-night.

Tifton, Ga.: A local Negro who managed to get served at a drive-in was then beaten up by a white motorcyclist. In another part of Tifton, a group of several hundred whites gathered when a Negro ordered food at a white restaurant.

Clarksdale: The NAACP sent a letter to the Chamber of Commerce lifting the boycott on white businesses and announcing that they will test the stores and restaurants on Monday.

Mr. Bernstein, the manager of the Rose Seed Co., called the workers together and told them they would automatically lose their jobs if they went down to the courthouse. He said, "I have a large contract with the head of the Citizens Council and I'm not going to lose thousands of dollars for one of you."

Holly Springs: Local students have decided not to test the CR Bill. The Sheriff asked some of the volunteers for names and addresses. They refused to give them.

Announcement from Legal Department: Send details on all Negro teachers who have been fired (or not re-hired) because of voter registration activities at once to R. Hunter Morey, COFO, 1017 Lynch Street, Jackson, Miss. National Council of Churches wants to pressure the Justice Department to act and to inform the teachers "as to the legal rights which they have to recover damages in a breach of contract action."

SNCC WATS Digest Bulletin (2-5 July, 1964)/ Zoya Zeman Freedom Summer Collection

Chapter 5, p. 149, Footnote 48

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M320, Box 1, Folder 3, p.2.

APPENDIX E [1]

SECURITY HANDBOOK

1. Communications personnel will act as security officers.

2. Travel

a. When persons leave their project, they must call their project person to person for themselves on arrival at destination point. Should they be missing, project personnel will notify the Jackson office. WATS line operators will call each project every day at dinnertime or thereabouts, and should be notified of changes in personnel, transfers, etc. (If trips are planned in advance, this information can go to Jackson by mail. Phone should be used only where there is no time. Care should be taken at all times to avoid, if possible, full names of persons travelling.) Checklists should be used in local projects for personnel to check in and out.

b. Doors of cars should be locked at all times. At night, windows should be rolled up as much as possible. Gas tanks must have locks and be kept locked. Hoods should ~~also~~ be locked.

c. No one should go anywhere alone, but certainly not in an automobile, and certainly not at night.

d. Travel at night should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

e. Remove all unnecessary objects from your car which could be construed as weapons. (Hammers, files, iron rules, etc.) Absolutely no liquor bottles, beer cans, etc. should be inside your car. Do not travel with names and addresses of local contacts.

f. Know all roads in and out of town. Study the county map.

g. Know locations of sanctuaries and safe homes in the county.

h. When getting out of a car at night, make sure the car's inside light is out.

i. Be conscious of cars which circle offices or Freedom Houses. Take license numbers of all suspicious cars. Note make, model and year. Cars without license plates should immediately be reported to the project office.

Living at Home or in Freedom Houses

a. If it can be avoided, try not to sleep near open windows. Try to sleep at the back of the house, i.e., the part farthest from a road or street.

b. Do not stand in doorways at night with the light at your back.

c. At night, people should not sit in their rooms without drawn shades.

d. Do not congregate in front of the house at night.

SNCC Communication Phone Check-in-Procedure and Security Handbook/Zoya Zeman

Freedom Summer Collection

Chapter 5, p.149, Footnote 50

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M320, Box 1, Folder 8, p.1.

APPENDIX E [2]

Security - 2

e. Make sure doors to Freedom Houses have locks, and are locked.

f. Keep records of suspicious events, i.e., the same car circling around the house or office several times during the day or week. Take license numbers, makes, years and models of cars. Keep records of the times these cars appear.

g. If an "incident" occurs, or is about to occur, call the project, and then notify local FBI and police.

h. Depending on project needs and circumstances, it may be advisable for new personnel to make deliberate attempts to introduce themselves immediately to local police and tell them their reason for being in the area.

i. A phone should be installed in each Freedom House, if there isn't one already. If a private phone is used, please put a lock on it. Otherwise, install a pay phone; this will avoid immediate pick-ups on suspicion.

Personal Actions

a. Carry identification at all times. Men should carry identification.

b. All drivers should have in their possession drivers licenses, registration papers, and bills of sale. The information should also be on record with the project director. If you are carrying supplies, it might be well to have a letter authorizing the supplies from a particular individual to avoid charges of carrying stolen goods.

c. Mississippi is a dry state and though liquor is ostensibly outlawed, it is available everywhere. You must not drink in offices, or Freedom Houses. This is especially important for persons under 21.

d. Try to avoid bizarre or provocative clothing, and beards. Be neat.

e. Make sure that prescribed medicines are clearly marked, with your name, the doctor's name, etc.

f. In Relations with the Press

a. Refer questions about SNCC's perspective or policies to the Project Director.

b. Do not argue with the press. Do not exaggerate. Give the facts only.

c. The Project Director and communications person will ask for credentials of press. If you do not know the reporter, check with one of them or ask to see the reporter's credentials.

d. Try to relate your activities to the lives of the local residents. This will not be hard to do, or unnatural, if you remember your role in the state.

SNCC Communication Phone Check-in-Procedure and Security Handbook/Zoya Zeman
Freedom Summer Collection
Chapter 5, p.149, Footnote 50
Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M320, Box 1, Folder 8, p.2.

APPENDIX E [3]

Security - 3

Information to Police

Under no circumstances should you give the address of the local person with whom you are living, his or her name, or the names of any local persons who are associated with you. When police ask where you live, give your local project or Freedom House address, or if necessary, your out of state address.

Relations with Visitors

Find out who strangers are. If persons come into project offices to "look around" try to discover who they are and what exactly they want to know. All offers of assistance should be cleared through the project director.

Records

1. Any written record of importance should have at least four copies. Keep original, send copies to Jackson, Greenwood and Atlanta. Bear in mind that the office might be raided at any time.
2. Keep a record of interference with phone lines and of notifications of FBI. This information will go to Jackson via the communications person.

Policy

1. People who do not adhere to disciplinary requirements will be asked to leave the project.
2. Security precautions are a matter of group responsibility. Each individual should take an interest in every other person's safety, well-being, and discipline.
3. At all times you should be aware of the danger to local residents. White volunteers must be especially careful.

SNCC Communication Phone Check-in-Procedure and Security Handbook/Zoya Zeman

Freedom Summer Collection

Chapter 5, p.149, Footnote 50

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M320, Box 1, Folder 8, p.3.

APPENDIX F



Photo by Herbert Randall

Herb Randall Picture of Severely Beaten Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld

Chapter 5, p. 150, Footnote 53

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M351, Sub-Series 3, No. 175

APPENDIX G



Victoria Gray Adams U.S. Senate Poster
Chapter 4, p. 107, Footnote 14
<http://www.crmvet.org/images/imgfs.htm>

APPENDIX H



Photo by Herbert Randall

(Left to Right: Terri Shaw, Joyce Brown, Zoya Zemen, and Sheila Michaels)

Women Communicators in Freedom Summer
COFO Office, Hattiesburg, MS, 1964
Chapter 4, p. 118, Footnote 39
Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives, M351, No. 382.

APPENDIX I



Route Map of 1961 Freedom Rides

[New York]: Associated Press News Feature

Printed Map and Text, ca. 1962

Chapter 5, p. 133, Footnote 1

Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division (84.6)

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr071.html>

APPENDIX J



Victoria Jackson Gray Adams
Chapter 4, p.105, Footnote 11
<http://www.sisters-shoulders.org/heroines1.html>
http://obits.eons.com/images/cms/3858_image_file_1.jpg

APPENDIX K



Unita Blackwell
Chapter 4, p. 108, Footnote 17
<http://www.usc.edu>
<http://www.jacksonfreepress.com>

APPENDIX L



Dr. L.C. Dorsey
Chapter 4, p. 113, Footnote 26
<http://www.sisters-shoulders.org/gif/h-lcdy.gif>

APPENDIX M



Judy Richardson

Chapter 4, p. 119, Footnote 40

<http://www.thelavinagency.com/college/judyrichardson.html>

APPENDIX N



(center)

Sheila Michaels

Chapter 4, p.122, Footnote 51
Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives,
M351-119, Box 1, Folder 12

APPENDIX O



Terri Shaw (front) in 1964.
Photo © Herbert Randall

Terri Shaw

Chapter 4, p. 126, Footnote 56

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives,
Special Collections Digital Labs, Freedom, Shaw Freedom Summer Collection
M326, Folder 1

APPENDIX P



Raylawni Branch

Chapter 5, p. 147, Footnote 43

Southern Mississippi University Digital Archives
M351-686, Box 5, Folder 9

APPENDIX Q



Map of Middle Passage Slave Trade Routes

Chapter 1, p. 24, Footnote 5

The BBC World Service: The Story of Africa/Slavery

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter4.shtml>

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