

STRATEGY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE NEW LEFT

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In 1965, 28-year old Studies on the Left editor Norm Fruchter returned from a trip to Mississippi to herald profound changes in the civil rights movement. Black Mississippians and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists they worked with had “abandoned the goal of eventual integration into existing Mississippi society as both unrealistic and undesirable,” he wrote. Rejecting the “totemic demands” of the left—for federal housing and employment programs, national health insurance and the like—they were rather working to create counter-institutions and relationships “based on assumptions about identity, personality, work, meaning, and aspirations not accepted in the majority society.” And probably even more “disconcerting” to “orthodox left-wingers,” Fruchter speculated, they were challenging what counted as radical organization. “Primarily a movement...only incidentally an organization,” SNCC’s bureaucratic inefficiency was not to be condemned, since one of its chief purposes was “to raise the question of just how well all the organizations operating on bureaucratic assumptions within the majority society have served human freedom.”¹

Fruchter’s piece provoked an indignant response from old left stalwart Victor Rabinowitz. “For many of the young of our nation, including, of course, many in the Movement, freedom may mean the right to smoke pot, to drive a car while drunk and to goof off when the spirit so moves,” Rabinowitz observed. “To a Negro farmer in Mississippi, it means the opportunity to organize to achieve the right to vote, the right to be treated like a human being, the right to be integrated into the human brotherhood. These rights come along with the right to eat a square meal and to live in a house with flush toilets.” To gain those rights required political program and a “disciplined, efficient organization,” precisely what SNCC was attempting to style itself—with a coordinating committee, executive committee and secretariat, a policy

statement, and formal rules for personnel decisions. Such a “bureaucracy” would be anathema to Fruchter and his friends, but to suggest that program, organization, and “totemic” political demands were of no interest to Mississippi blacks was at best romantic, at worst “both condescending and insulting.”²

The debate is interesting for several reasons. It captures the tenor of the battle between old and new leftists for the helm of American radicalism, a battle that was often fought on the terrain of the black freedom struggle. As it had before and would again, the new left staked its claim to political authority on its capacity to celebrate and, not least, interpret, the purposes of its civil rights heroes. Challenges to the old left’s misplaced faith in bureaucracy, its myopic focus on securing federal programs that were no more realistic than a revolution from the bottom up, its obsequious allegiance to the Democratic party, its stodginess, would all be made in the name of the alternatives forwarded by activists in the Deep South.

The debate is interesting, second, for articulating two conceptions of movement organization that competed—and still compete— for leftists’ allegiance. One is bureaucratic, conventional, strategic; organization aimed at effecting institutional change, at gaining power. The other is collectivist, participatory democratic, “prefigurative;” its purpose to enact within the movement itself the desired society, to effect a cultural revolution rather than mere political reform. The new left’s genius, according to most chroniclers, was to join the two commitments. Inspired by SNCC’s version of the “beloved community,” in which a “band of brothers” transcended not only race but the impersonalism and alienation of modern American life, new leftists undertook a variety of similar experiments under the banner of “participatory democracy.” Yet the “dilemma inherited from SNCC,” chroniclers agree, was that building the better society demanded different skills than living it. The movement foundered, on most

accounts, because it was unwilling to create the kind of reformist, bureaucratic organization that might have endured but was antithetical to its anti-hierarchical values. Norm Fruchter was thus the voice of prefigurative politics, the “ultra-democratic mystique” that Students for a Democratic Society inherited from SNCC; Rabinowitz that of political convention.³

The Fruchter/Rabinowitz debate is interesting, finally, for what it missed. SNCC staffer Mike Miller wrote but did not publish another response to Fruchter’s piece. Both Fruchter’s and Rabinowitz’s renderings bore “so little resemblance to the day to day realities” of SNCC “as to be almost frightening,” Miller wrote. SNCC’s goal was not to develop new assumptions “about identity, personality, work, meaning, and aspirations not accepted in the majority society...” as Fruchter claimed, but to gain “power to break into the society and get a share of its resources.” “Believe it or not,” Miller went on, there was an administration in SNCC. “It has offices in Atlanta. Checks are made out there by an honest to goodness book-keeper, there are files, forms, duplicate copies, secretaries, machines and all the rest of the paraphernalia of bureaucracy.” But Rabinowitz was equally off the mark in reducing SNCC to its policy statements and organizational charts. SNCC workers were experimenting with “decentralized forms of administration.” But their purpose was practical: they sought organization “designed to effectively service the staff and field without controlling all activity at the local level.”⁴

SNCC’s day-to-day operations were driven above all, and this apparently eluded both commentators, by its staffers’ commitment to “being ‘an organizer’ and being in the field.” To Fruchter and Rabinowitz’s characterizations—SNCC as utopian community or SNCC as a “disciplined army”—Miller countered, “many of us in SNCC prefer a different formulation. We are a band of organizers seeking to open the tremendous potential of human resources that has been locked up in the racism of the South. That potential cannot be opened by anyone but the

Negro people who live in Southern bondage.” SNCC organizers eschewed neither political power nor the “totemic demands” of old leftists. “It is the additions to the old demands, not their dismissal, that is important. It is the new demands of participation, local control in decision making, leadership from below rather than from above that distinguish SNCC from the old left.”

Like Miller’s, the SNCC that I describe in this chapter is different from the one that figures in popular narratives of participatory democracy’s rise and fall. “I really don’t remember ever being at a meeting where somebody would say, ‘Well, now, the job at hand is to create the beloved community...’” Mississippi SNCC organizer Martha Norman recalls. The “band of brothers” was not the beloved community. It was self-consciously black; its members were dispatched places and delegated tasks on the orders of state, district, and project directors; and they saw freedom as gained more through political power than moral suasion. SNCC workers did operate on the basis of practices we would call participatory democratic, however—but for practical reasons more than “prefigurative” ones. Decentralized, participatory decisionmaking helped to sustain the commitment of overworked and underpaid organizers, provided them the flexibility they needed to respond to local conditions, and created mechanisms for keeping future political leaders responsible to their constituents. The fact that SNCC workers experienced themselves as a “band of brothers,” a tight knit group of friends operating in deadly conditions, also made for relations of mutual trust and deference that discouraged the challenges to informal leadership that prove so time-consuming in participatory democratic organizations. Betty Garman, who was a member of SDS before she became a SNCC staffer, remembers, “participatory democracy was more of a concept in SDS. It was a goal, an ideal. In SNCC it was very practical.” Her comment suggests that the supposedly fundamental tension between democracy and efficacy may not be so fundamental after all.⁵

But Garman's point raises a tricky question. If decentralized and participatory organizational forms were so effective, then why did SNCC abandon them in 1965, centralizing resources and fundraising, vesting more power in the executive secretary, and routing out of the organization "freedom high" proponents of loose structure? At the very time that SDS was decentralizing further under the banner of participatory democracy, eliminating national offices and programs, SNCC was moving in the other direction. In fact, the two were not unconnected. Collectivist modes of organization, initially appealing for their practical uses, came to be viewed in SNCC as inefficient and self-indulgent in part because of their association with white new leftists. As racial tensions sharpened, tensions that were difficult to express among an interracial group of friends, black SNCC workers found increasing fault with a mode of decisionmaking that had become fatally associated with its white proponents.

What I present here is neither a history of participatory democracy, nor a full account of SNCC and SDS's mutation over the course of the sixties. And although I emphasize the practical purposes of decentralized and participatory decisionmaking, it is clear that some came to SNCC seeing its chief purpose as to model an alternative social form and were never swayed in that perception. In stressing the practical functions of participatory democracy, my aim rather is to challenge the supposedly intrinsic and unavoidable opposition between democracy and efficacy that has structured narratives of the new left. A second purpose of the paper is to identify different tensions at the heart of participatory democratic projects, namely the difficulties of basing democratic decisionmaking on friendship and of using it to negotiate divergent interests. Finally, historians have emphasized the new left's indebtedness to SNCC, but have largely reproduced SDS leaders' profession of admiration for their civil rights heroes without exploring its more ambivalent aspects. By focusing on SNCC and SDS's interaction and mutual influence

around the issue of internal democracy, the paper should make a small contribution to elucidating the broader relations between the white new left and the civil rights movement.

From the “Beloved Community” to the “Band of Brothers”

On February 1, 1960, four black students from Greensboro A&T sat down at a segregated lunch counter in a downtown Woolworth’s and refused to get up until the store closed. The next day students from surrounding colleges took up the sit-in, and in the following days, demonstrations spread to other establishments in Greensboro, then to other cities. By the end of the month, sit-ins began in thirty cities in seven states; by the end of March in fifty-four cities in nine states. In early April, Southern Christian Leadership Conference official Ella Baker invited student sit-in leaders to a coordinating conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Students were insistent that the organization they formed, SNCC, remain independent of the “adult” civil rights organizations—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the SCLC—and mandated it only to serve as an information-sharing body. The student movement’s decentralization was its strength, they believed.⁶

SNCC’s early leadership was dominated by Nashville students—John Lewis, Diane Nash, Marion Barry, Dion Diamond—who had studied Gandhian techniques of nonviolent direct action before launching sit-ins that were viewed by other students as especially well-organized. From their advisor, Fellowship of Reconciliation worker James Lawson, they absorbed a vision of racial reconciliation through morally suasive action. The “beloved community” was an animating ideal for Nashville students, describing both a future of racial harmony and the bonds of trust and love enacted within the movement itself. Decisions were made by consensus among

Nashville students—James Lawson saw it as “the true Gandhian way”—and they brought that style with them to SNCC.⁷

Within a year of its founding, however, SNCC was moving from lunch counter sit-ins to community organizing in the most repressive areas of the Mississippi Delta and from a campus coordinating body to a cadre of full-time organizers. Nashville students’ leadership had been eclipsed by a new group of personally religious but much more politically-oriented students for whom “power” was appealing rather than suspect, and for whom the beloved community had less resonance. While a formal governing structure of campus representatives was retained, decisions were increasingly made by SNCC staff headquartered in Atlanta and in various projects in Mississippi and Southwest Georgia.

SNCC organizing, staffer Mary King says now, was a very “intuitive” process. Faced with daily harassment and terrified local residents, SNCC organizers survived by combining movement ideals with a heavy dose of pragmatism. Albany, Georgia organizer Charles Sherrod urged his colleagues not to “let the project go to the dogs because you feel you must be democratic to the letter.” On the other hand, without resources or political connections, SNCC organizers felt that their only hope in gaining a foothold in black communities was to secure the support of community leaders. The challenge was to push leaders into more activist stances. Decisions—whether to hold a march in response to an arrest, how to convince the minister to allow a mass meeting in the church—simply had to be made with the community rather than for it. Field reports show organizers struggling to resolve local conflicts over turf, leadership, and strategy, without imposing their own agendas. After ministers in Albany charged that SNCC was trying to run the show there, organizers discussed the situation. “Miss Baker pointed out that it might have been better all around to have shifted the car pool to local handling as soon as

possible. That part of our strategy in each local community should be to shift as much of the responsibility as soon as possible to local handling.” Staffers agreed, while making mention of “the difficulty of doing this at the time when the pressures are upon you.”⁸

Although their first contacts were usually with black ministers and civic leaders, SNCC workers were also discovering that those most willing to bear the costs of repression for joining the movement— “strong” people, they called them—tended rather to be farmers, sharecroppers, and domestic workers. Poorly schooled, often illiterate; these were people deemed “unqualified” for political participation. Involving them in decisionmaking was a way to counter their acute sensitivity about their lack of political sophistication, to train them to do politics. “We were trying to give the people we were living and working with” “ownership” of the movement,” Mississippi project head Bob Moses explained later.

How are you going to, as early as possible, move in the direction of people taking ownership? One of the first areas is the meeting—that’s your tool for building. So how do people take ownership of meetings? And there you get into what has come to be called participatory democracy...in which the people who are meeting really get more and more of a feeling that this is [their] meeting.⁹

Organizers also began to see collective decisionmaking within local movements as essential to developing the mechanisms that would keep future black leaders directly responsible to their constituents. A movement politics that developed leaders—many leaders—was the way to prevent the co-optation to which all movements were vulnerable. “People had had experience with black machines,” says former staffer Mike Thelwell. “I mean who were the black politicians that we had any chance to see in those days? The ones that had national office—Diggs,

Dawson—were from the Democratic machine.” For that reason, “accountability was very important to us.” By actively remaking conventions and criteria of leadership, participatory deliberative practices would ensure that a future black politics remained truly collective, responsive to its most disenfranchised participants.¹⁰

Among SNCC field secretaries, too, group decisionmaking was the norm. “The dangers that we all faced were too great to risk the possibility of someone not implementing a decision made by the group because he personally disagreed with it,” Executive Secretary James Forman later explained. “We had to talk things out until we all agreed on all decisions.” “People were making a decision about how they were going to use their lives,” staffer Muriel Tillinghast adds. “And that’s not something that you could vote on. That was something that everybody was going to have to grope for. So these meetings would go on, you could not believe how long these meetings went on.” In addition, many project staff were young and inexperienced. SNCC workers knew they were training activists on staff as much as they were in the community. Hollis Watkins was a Mississippi native just out of high school when he joined SNCC. “To me, understanding was the most important part. Through the participatory process, all of the things that we were dealing with would be brought out, explained and talked about.”¹¹

SNCC workers’ respect for “being ‘an organizer’ and being in the field,” as Mike Miller put it in the letter I quoted earlier, meant that organizers’ individual initiative was rewarded and their autonomy protected. Direction from SNCC’s Atlanta headquarters was minimal and, staffers agreed, “a basic principal in decisionmaking is that people who do the work make the decisions.” To be sure, former staffers say without hesitation that Forman “ran the organization.” They refer also to the disproportionate authority of Moses. Yet, by all accounts, both men were careful to combine unilateral exercises of leadership with efforts to involve others in the process.

When both Moses and Forman were jailed in Greenwood, Mississippi in April 1963, and the project there left leaderless, the two men nixed the person elected as acting director—then urged instead that the project form a decisionmaking committee. Former SNCC staffers remember that Forman was the one who cleaned the bathrooms, and that he often sent less experienced staffers to high level meetings for a crash course in political negotiation.¹²

What I have briefly described might be characterized as a “tutelary” rationale for democratic procedure. Involving novices in decision making, establishing a norm of participation, rotating leadership tasks; all these helped to develop movement leaders. From veteran activists like Ella Baker, Myles Horton, Bernice Robinson, and Septima Clark, SNCC workers learned an organizing strategy that emphasized the development of local leadership. Firm in their dislike of utopian communities, activists like Baker and Horton treated group decisionmaking as prime ground for radical education. Continuing in that tradition, SNCC workers saw decentralized and participatory practices not as odds with effective political action but as essential preparation for it.¹³

Of course, the same practices are often embraced for a variety of reasons. Where former seminarian and SNCC’s first administrative secretary Jane Stenbridge always viewed SNCC’s strength as its commitment to being a community and not an organization, James Forman, veteran of left political battles and a firm believer in clear lines of authority and chains of command, was more enthusiastic about the solidarity-building functions of participation and was much more willing to sacrifice democracy for organizational efficiency. All SNCC workers were proud of the supportive and intellectually exciting community they had created. But it was the product of friendships forged in a context of grueling and dangerous activism rather than a

deliberate attempt to model an alternative mode of governance. “Danger is a good solidarity builder,” Mississippi staffer Martha Prescod Norman explains simply.¹⁴

SDS and Participatory Democracy

If SNCC’s deliberative style was based more on friendship and practicality than principle, is it just as wrong to see SDS’s version of participatory democracy as prefigurative in intent? Or was SNCC’s influence on SDS actually less than commentators have supposed? Casey Hayden—SNCC staffer, SDS member and, in the early 1960s, Tom Hayden’s wife—emphasizes the differences between the two groups. The drive to create accountable leaders which animated SNCC’s participatory decisionmaking was “a different existential situation than the alienation and relationship to elite government which spawned participatory democracy as a call to arms for the white new left,” she says. For SDS members, participatory democracy “spoke to people’s sense of what happened in community to us...It had a lot to do with being a non-alienated person. So that we experienced that non-alienated community in our work with each other.”¹⁵

The picture is more complicated, though. For the Port Huron statement’s framers, “participatory democracy” referred not to a mode of decisionmaking but to a macropolitical vision of institutions governed by their constituents. “Participatory democracy did not mean abandoning organizational structures of the usual sort, like elected officers and parliamentary procedure,” early SDS leader Dick Flacks insists. “We were thinking of participatory democracy at that time as a concept of social change, not as a set of principles for guiding the internal organizational life of SDS.” Bob Ross writes that although “the phrase was interpreted, by some mass media and even friendly observers, to imply ‘consensus in group decision-making’ [t]o this

author's knowledge, that meaning was not used at all at the Port Huron meeting in 1962, and rarely until 1965-66." For several years after its founding, SDS relied on deliberative structures similar to those of the college student councils and national student organizations with which its members were familiar: formal offices of President, Vice President, and National Secretary; a paid full-time staff; and decisions between conventions made by a National Council (made up of National Executive Committee members and chapter representatives).¹⁶

Yet the confusion of "participatory democracy" with consensus-based decisionmaking is understandable. The students at Port Huron experienced a powerful sense of community both as personally satisfying and as limning new political possibilities. They saw the trust, respect, and affection informing their decisionmaking as a radical break with the wrangling and position-staking of the Old Left and as embodying the values of personal commitment and caring that they wanted on a grand scale. Moreover, within a year of Port Huron, SDS leaders were discouraging each other from holding the same offices twice; by 1964, in SDS's urban organizing projects, group process had become "more important than any other issue," as one organizer put it. So if it did not begin as a description of internal decisionmaking, "participatory democracy" had by 1965 become that. What was SNCC's role in this evolution?¹⁷

SDS's fortunes were intertwined with SNCC's from its inception. Robert Alan Haber, a graduate student at the University of Michigan, took over the moribund campus chapter of the Student League for Industrial Democracy, and began to recruit members just as northern students were launching demonstrations and pickets in support of the southern sit-ins. A fortuitously timed conference on civil rights, planned before the sit-ins erupted, became a high-profile encounter between northern white students and sit-in representatives. SDS leaders attended SNCC's inaugural conference and pledged their assistance in fundraising and political lobbying.

Campus SDS chapters began to spring up around the country after Tom Hayden was dispatched to cover the southern movement as SDS's first field secretary. His accounts of SNCC organizing in Southwest Georgia and Mississippi were riveting. For National Student Association representative, Betty Garman, like others, they were "the reason I went into SDS." "Revolution permeates discussion like never before," Hayden wrote about SNCC workers in the fall of 1961. "In our future dealings we should be aware that they have changed down there, and we should speak their revolutionary language without mocking it...the Southern movement has turned itself into that revolution we hoped for, and we didn't have much to do with its turning at all...We had better be there."¹⁸

Hayden's reproach was directed to his fellow SDS members who had, like himself, earlier criticized the southern student movement for being "moralistic" and "non-political." Yet Hayden's ambivalence persisted. Several months later, as he began taking notes for what would become the Port Huron Statement, he again cautioned that the southern movement's "moral clarity has not always been accompanied by precise political vision, and sometimes not even by a real political consciousness." SDS would supply the larger ideological picture, he promised, would show how, in a phrase popular among the group, the issues were related.¹⁹

In statements like these, SDS historian James Miller argues, "Hayden was complaining that the civil rights movement lacked an adequate understanding of participatory democracy." Indeed, Miller goes on, "Hayden's almost patronizing call for a 'precise political vision' to guide the civil rights movement should help lay to rest the misconception that the idea of participatory democracy was a product of this movement." The term itself came from Hayden's philosophy professor, Arnold Kaufman. Following Kaufman, Hayden in his draft notes conceptualized participatory institutions as distinct from but complementary to representative ones, providing

citizens the education to participate wisely. But drawing on C. Wright Mills, Hayden went on to define the key political task as piercing the state of robotic, “acquiescent dread” that made Americans’ participation rote and meaningless.²⁰

Participatory democracy’s origins were, as Miller suggests, “bookish.” But by his own account, in mining the literature, Hayden was searching for a theoretical framework in which to place his experiences as a student and in Mississippi. In SNCC projects in McComb and Albany, Hayden later recounted, he had experienced the core components of what would become participatory democracy. A Camus-flavored willingness to lay one’s body on the line for justice, to act: this was the existential commitment to action that as, Miller points out, was joined somewhat uneasily with a Rousseauian vision of civic republicanism. But Hayden’s experience of black Southerners sacrificing jobs, homes, and their own safety to secure rights of political participation that whites took for granted was also influential. Participatory democracy lay in the gap between the grassroots activism that Hayden observed in Mississippi and the sterility of mainstream politics. It voiced the possibility that mainstream political institutions could be made deserving of constituents’ allegiance.²¹

The southern movement influenced not only the substance of new leftists’ commitment but its style—a style that would early on be confused with participatory democracy in its original sense. “Much care was expended to encourage reticent members to express their views,” Barbara Haber wrote later of the discussions at Port Huron. “Ideas and questions were responded to without condescension or acrimony. Good-naturedness, tolerance, and curiosity characterized our discussions. In plenaries, though there were hot and heavy debates (mostly participated in by men), trust, affection, and the desire to make it work seemed to predominate.” “We were in love with each other,” Dick Flacks says simply. In a political wilderness of flag-waving conformity

and student apathy, SDSers were “drawn into the circle and kept there by powerful personal bonds—bonds that were more important than political analyses or positions,” says Todd Gitlin. “Participatory democracy just “came naturally,” says former SDS National Secretary, Jim Monsonis. But early SDS members also felt they were reproducing an ethos they had encountered in the southern civil rights movement, whether directly or second-hand. Dick Flacks remembers that in the SDS meetings before Port Huron, Casey Hayden, with authority as a civil rights leader, would call a halt to discussions that were becoming competitive or pedantic. For those who had worked in the south, Barbara Haber wrote later, “the black struggle, and the vibrant communities that sprang up within it was a harsh mirror in which we saw reflected the banalities and complacency of white, middle-class life.”²²

If SDS leaders, like later chroniclers, tended to see the SNCC community as more deliberate and self-conscious than it was, more of a political project in itself, what is striking is that in both organizations, a participatory style of decisionmaking coexisted so easily with conventional organizational forms. Formal offices and elections, chains of command and Robert’s Rules of Order—SNCC and SDS had these. Participatory democracy in the procedural sense was rather an ethos, a set of informal understandings more than formal procedures. It worked because it responded to organizers’ needs for independence and flexibility, in the case of SNCC and, in both organizations, because it was based on bonds of friendship. Friends’ mutual knowledge familiarizes them with each other’s preferences and idiosyncrasies; their mutual affection gives each a stake in issues the other thinks important; their mutual respect and trust makes it easy to defer to the other’s expertise. Friends tend to view exercises of unilateral decisionmaking as a function of an issue’s complexity or trivial character rather than an illegitimate exercise of power. Together, these make for—and in early SDS and SNCC made

for—collective decisions with a minimum of background information, challenge, and negotiation.

Neither the friendship context nor the organizing context was without problems, however. “Letting the people decide” works when the organizer’s aspirations match those of the people she is organizing, and when the people she is organizing are unified in their aspirations. That is often not the case. The danger of confusing democracy with friendship, meanwhile, is that friendship’s exclusiveness makes it difficult to expand the group beyond the original circle and its determined informality makes it difficult to implement more formal mechanisms for ensuring equality and accountability. SNCC and SDS confronted both these problems; I treat them only briefly here.

SNCC After Atlantic City

In the fall of 1964, SNCC was a very different organization than it had been just six months before. From a tight-knit cadre organizing without fanfare in the rural areas of the deep South, it had become a geographically dispersed and nationally known organization whose spokesmen attracted the kind of media attention reserved for film stars and Martin Luther King, Jr. SNCC’s sponsorship of the Mississippi Summer Project was in large part responsible for the group’s suddenly high profile. Eight hundred mainly white volunteers were recruited to help register voters and run freedom schools and community centers, bringing national attention to the violence and harassment that civil rights workers had endured for years. In August, the SNCC-organized Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenged the seating of the segregationist Mississippi regulars at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. Though unsuccessful, with the MFDP refusing a compromise of two non-voting seats, the

Challenge demonstrated SNCC's ability to mobilize national support. SNCC's future as one of the "Big Five" civil rights organizations seemed secure.²³

Instead of capitalizing on its new stature, however, the group was plunged into series of rancorous debates about organizational structure and decisionmaking. Meetings convened to map out new programs dissolved into battles pitting proponents of individual autonomy and participatory democracy against defenders of centralized structure and top down decisionmaking. The latter, self-dubbed "hardliners," charged those they called "freedom highs" with over-intellectualizing instead of organizing, leaving hard-won bases to "float" around the country on a whim, pushing to excess an antipathy to organization and regimentation, and squandering resources as they pursued their own liberation. SNCC's anti-elitism and individualism had once been sources of political creativity, Executive Secretary James Forman wrote later, but the opposition to all authority now surfacing was debilitating. By the time hardliners won the battle in the spring of 1965, and began replacing SNCC's decentralized and consensus-based decisionmaking structure with a more centralized administration and majority voting, the debates had taken their toll. SNCC's Mississippi staff had shrunk by two-thirds in the fall of 1965, and SNCC had foregone its place on the cutting edge of the state's black politics.²⁴

Chroniclers have tended to see the battles over structure as reflecting the opposition between prefigurative and strategic orientations, or between principle and pragmatism, that had been there from SNCC's beginning. Participatory democracy was simply too unwieldy for a group grown in size and pressed to respond quickly to new national opportunities. SNCC workers who resisted the trend to tighter structure were closer to the group's earlier utopian aspirations, but simply out of touch with the demands of organizational effectiveness.²⁵

What these explanations miss, however, is the fact that initially, proponents of more democracy, like those against it, argued in terms of strategy. Loose structure advocates, counting SNCC veterans among their numbers, worried that further centralization would undermine SNCC's Mississippi projects and that more bureaucracy would only multiply the roadblocks that kept resources from reaching the field. Rather than a battle between democratic absolutists and pragmatists, or between commitments to personal self-transformation and political reform, former participants and records of discussions suggest that programmatic confusion and racial tensions within the group were responsible for the crisis over decision making.

Although the Convention challenge garnered SNCC kudos for its political novelty, its defeat was profoundly dispiriting—and confusing. “We were kind of at loose ends,” communications director Julian Bond remembers. “There was no plan, no operational plan, absent any kind of theory or anything, there was just no plan to go beyond that. It was sort of what do we do now? What comes next?” Should black Southerners continue to seek access to the Democratic party or abandon it altogether? Should SNCC concentrate on voter registration or move into economic programs? SNCC workers determined to return to the grassroots local organizing that had been their forte before the Challenge. They would not impose their agendas on the people they organized; they would not reproduce the manipulation they had witnessed in Atlantic City. They would “let the people decide.” But in many counties, they soon discovered that “letting the people decide” was not generating the radical programs it was supposed to. “So far I’ve been using the SNCC technique of prying and prodding with questions until the idea comes out,” said one, “—but it is slow...people really have no ideas for programs.” The author of a field report from Monroe County, Mississippi noted, “there has been a stopping of all projects, with an attempt to let the local people say what they want,” but confessed that “the programs

have been very slow. In fact I can't think of one program that is progressing." A staffer in Meridian: "What we've had so far is discussion and workshops, but no programs." "You talk about we gotta have a program," one worker satirized SNCC workers' attitude. "Baby, just talking to people is a program."²⁶

In some communities, the success of the Challenge in securing national attention spurred the activism of previously quiescent black leaders who were now bidding for the helm of the movement. Organizers confronted competing leaderships, agendas, and constituencies within black communities. When organizers were able to get programs off the ground, they faced criticism from other SNCC staff that community centers, freedom schools, welfare initiatives were not truly radical. "Too damn many nursery schools, and milk programs," an organizer phrased a not infrequent complaint. "Maybe I don't see the connection between the type of center program we have and the long range community organization clearly enough, but I do feel too much of our time and people are taken up in this." "Many of us do not see the relationship between community centers, sewing classes and political and economic freedom." Complaints like these revealed, but did not resolve, the conflict between SNCC workers' commitments to "letting the people decide" and to making suitably radical change.²⁷

Project workers found little guidance in SNCC's regional and national meetings. Efforts to thrash out agendas dissolved into debates about decisionmaking and chains of command. A position paper prepared for a staff retreat in November 1964 argued, "It is admirable to talk of democracy and giving the staff full participation but at the moment this is not what needs full attention...We as an organization have never sat down and decided what needed to be done as a long term drive, why it needed to be done, whether or not we were going to do it and if we were, how were we going to do it." But the paper was left undiscussed as staffers battled over

structure. Indeed, minutes of meetings during this period show that when issues of agenda were introduced, the discussion often shifted, sometimes rather abruptly, to issues of organizational structure. “What was happening was that we didn’t have a unified goal, a program,” Casey Hayden observes. “We didn’t know what to do. It was not a question of how to go about doing it. That was the debate, but that was not the problem.”²⁸

The voter registration campaign anchoring SNCC’s early organizing efforts had attached radical potential to moderate goals, uniting young activists who saw themselves on the cutting edge of protest with older local residents and established civil rights organizations. Now that the Challenge experience had thrown into question the wisdom of Democratic Party alliances, and the prospect of voting legislation undermined the radicalism of voter registration, there were no obvious strategies capable of uniting such disparate groups. One of the problems of participatory decisionmaking as a means of radical education and leadership training is that it depends on a commonality of aspiration between an organizer and those being organized. Of course, many organizers see their task precisely as deferring to local people’s objectives. But local people’s objectives are usually local and do not build naturally into an agenda for radical change.

SNCC staffer Ed Brown describes one response: “We were beginning to really force our various points of view on the community...’Let the people decide,’ became a very popular argument...(but only) when local people were deciding in accordance with what the staff thought; and when local people deviated, then they were to be ostracized; they were sell outs; this SNCC group didn’t want to deal with them any more.” Few SNCC workers were so judgmental or, given the general confusion about what options were available, so assured. The more common response was to turn to reforming the decisionmaking process, attacking each other for “manipulating” the people, and attacking the organization for giving insufficient autonomy to

organizers. “Sometimes it’s more comfortable to talk about structure, because it’s so concrete,” Judy Richardson explains. “And goals were so much more difficult to talk about.”²⁹

Debates over styles, structures, and criteria of decisionmaking substituted for and, just as important, foreclosed debates over goals. But in that context, proposals for tightening up organizationally began to gain support. Departing from SNCC’s old freewheeling, decentralized and participatory structure was becoming appealing as an escape from the group’s programmatic impasse. To be sure, the alternative—a tight structure and what was perceived a clear-eyed instrumentalism—could not on its own supply the programs that were desperately needed. The association of a self-consciously strategic logic and bureaucratic structure with programmatic certainty was more hope than claim.

In a curious way, bureaucracy also promised to return the far-flung organization to its earlier incarnation as a “band of brothers.” It was curious because bureaucratic structure would seem precisely the opposite of a small community of friends. But by the spring of 1965, “tight structure” had come to be seen as a bulwark against the dominance of whites. Early SNCC had been a black organization, with a few whites as trusted members, and many staffers had opposed the influx of volunteers in the summer of 1964 not only on the grounds that well-educated whites would unintentionally reproduce patterns of racial deference, but that their movement would be irreversibly changed. When almost a hundred volunteers were added to the staff in September, they were angry about a decision made with little consultation. Less-easily articulated but evident in many discussions in the fall of 1964 was also anxiety that the tight-knit cadre was being undermined. “It used to be a band of brothers, a circle of trust, but that’s not true anymore.” “The movement talks a lot of the ‘good old days,’” white staffer Elaine Baker wrote in her diary in December 1964. “The kids worked together, went to jail together, suffered together, at times

starved together. They were, for the most part, black.” “When I see the old staff stick together, when I feel the resistance on their part to accept the new people who have been around now for five and six months, I feel sad now, not angry,” she continued. “The anger I feel is rather directed at these people. I’m angry at them for in a sense fucking up the movement and fucking up the staff.”³⁰

Newcomers were easy targets. On local projects, they came into conflict with black project directors they perceived as uncommunicative and sometimes downright resentful of their presence. They were asking for guidance as much as democracy. But they used a lexicon that was intellectual, individualistic, and increasingly associated with the white new leftists tramping south to experience—and interpret to the world—SNCC’s brand of participatory democracy. “We should all have some say...COFO [Council of Federated Organizations, the Mississippi civil rights umbrella group] has degenerated into a clique of people who have been here,” one new project worker declared. “Authority lies in some vague place, decisions come from some mysterious oligarch. Maybe we should define big brother.” “I was told by a person of some authority that the role of the project director is left totally vague to keep new people in check,” another complained. “This sounds pretty undemocratic.”³¹

What accounted for the increasingly hostile and paralyzingly slow character of SNCC deliberations in the fall of 1964 was not only the size of the organization, but the rifts emerging among its oldest members. The repeated betrayals of white liberal allies, the media’s fascination with white volunteers, and the volunteers’ often inadvertent breaches of the complex etiquette of movement race relations could not but carry over into racial tensions within the group. In addition, black staffers were becoming interested in issues of racial identity and consciousness and some wondered whether these issues could truly be addressed in integrated gatherings. But

repudiating the determined interracialism of the group of friends was difficult, say former staffers. Racial antagonisms were expressed in subtle ways, among them, disputes over decisionmaking. After a long debate in a project meeting about the nature of legitimate authority—just the kind of discussion that drove hardliners mad—one participant, an older minister, remarked, “the thing that bothers me is that there really is a black-white problem here which you don’t say but which is at the bottom of a lot of what you’re saying. Why don’t you deal with your black-white problem?” But the “black-white” problem was tough for an interracial group to confront, let alone resolve. Instead, positions in the debate over organizational structure were viewed in terms of their racial associations. The loose structure argument came to be seen as ideological rather than instrumental, and as white.³²

In fact, many of the proponents of loose structure were black, and some of the hardliners were white. Today, black SNCC staffers see the freedom high/hardliner debate as having class and regional dimensions, pitting Atlanta staff against Mississippi field organizers, and Northern student sophisticates (black and white) against less well educated native Mississippians. But by early 1965, freedom highs were seen as white. “The ‘freedom highs’ are essentially white intellectuals, hung up in various ways,” a staffer wrote at the time. Staffer Elizabeth Martinez:

I remember a long discussion, there must have three hundred people there, and after a whole day, no agreement on the program could be reached. And I remember some people attributing it to the fact that with the influx of white people had come an influx of ideas about participatory democracy that required consensus before you could agree on anything. How could you have three hundred people reaching consensus on a program in all its details? And [people felt] that it was a Northern white import, from SDS...Now it wasn’t as though the

white people were the only people arguing for consensus at this meeting. But a lot of people felt that the black people who were arguing for it had been influenced by these ideas through white participation.³³

Forman likewise attributed the organization's antiauthoritarian "neurosis" to "the middle class-element and especially...those who had been strongly influenced by ideas about participatory democracy coming out of Students for a Democratic Society." A number of white SNCC staff did have close ties to SDS and were comfortable with that group's more abstract intellectual style. Some did see loose structure as an ideological commitment with radical implications, but others continued to argue for decentralized and participatory decisionmaking on strategic grounds. Such arguments now held little water, however. Whites and "their" anti-organizational animus were coming to be seen as responsible for the organization's paralysis. A white staffer described a rumor of a "conspiracy" circulating among hardliners: "it sounds something like this: 'All the people...who don't want structure are white, intellectuals, and not doing any specific job, they claim to speak for the people who don't talk-up; but do they?'"³⁴

Those promoting centralized and more hierarchical structure were not an organizational faction bent on ridding the organization of whites by adopting a new structure. The appeal of bureaucracy lay rather in its relationship to inchoate preferences and problems. Tightening up organizationally was a bid to recuperate the sense of purpose and solidarity that had characterized the earlier group. The irony, of course, was that at the same time as bids for more radical democracy in SDS had prestige by their association with SNCC, in SNCC, such practices were tainted by their association with the white new left.

Old guard and prairie people

SDS was obviously a very different organization than SNCC. Although it began SNCC-style community organizing in 1963, SDS had always seen itself operating on multiple fronts: campus activism, electoral campaigns, and direct action. Its deliberative style was never guided solely by the imperatives of community organizing. And although SDS was founded and led by a small group of committed friends, its chapter organization made for very different relations between leaders and members. But SDS still experienced some of the same problems in trying to sustain decentralized participatory decisionmaking. And just as an allegedly fundamental and avoidable tension between prefigurative and strategic aims does not fully account for the crisis over decisionmaking that rent SNCC, it does not explain similar debates in SDS.

Participatory democracy—in its procedural version—“became an article of faith” in SDS as it shifted to urban organizing efforts directly modeled on SNCC’s. In the spring of 1964, as part of its Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), SDS began sending student activists to Chicago, Cleveland, Newark, Trenton, and other cities; their object to build “an interracial movement of the poor.” Activists in many local projects experimented with rigorously democratic procedures. In the Cleveland project, making decisions by consensus and refusing all hierarchies among the staff was a self-conscious effort to model new relationships. In Cleveland and elsewhere, however, staffers also sought to involve local people in decisionmaking as a practical way to build their leadership capacities.³⁵

For all ERAPers’ populist fervor, however, the drive to fully democratize SDS’s national structure came not from ERAP but from members new to the organization. After an SDS-sponsored anti-Vietnam war march in April 1965 drew twenty thousand participants, SDS was thrust into the media spotlight. Chapters mushroomed. New members differed from the SDS “old

guard,” as they were now being called. They were predominately middle-western and western, non-Jewish, less intellectual, and not from radical families. They used drugs casually. They held little truck with the careful intellectual analyses that had been the old SDS style, and were uninterested in maintaining the sympathies of liberal allies; they wanted action now. The term “prairie people” captured their western origins and outlaw image.³⁶

Veterans interpreted newcomers’ challenge to national SDS’s structure in terms of their determined antiauthoritarianism. Of course, veterans too were hostile to centralized, top-down organizations. But at SDS’s national convention in Kewadin in June 1965, they seemed powerless before an animus to organization that was immune to considerations of organizational survival. Workshops were unchaired. Chairs for the plenary sessions, often with more than 250 participants, were selected at random and votes were not counted. References were frequent to elitism and alienation (bad) and “gutting with the people” and “non projects” (good). Radical democrats called for abolishing SDS’s national office; they settled for not hiring a new national secretary and requiring referendums on all-important decisions. “Structural democracy is an obvious fraud; out with it! Representative government doesn’t really represent anyone; out with it!” veteran SDSer Steve Max characterized the discussion shortly afterward.³⁷

In the fall, new guard members began a collectivist experiment in the national office that threw it into chaos—just at the point when SDS was being flooded with requests for membership and for public positions on the war. The trend toward democracy at all costs seemed unstoppable, however, and SDS eagerly surrendered any claim to be the chief coordinating organization of an antiwar movement. Within a year, old guard members were voted out of national offices and SDS embraced decentralized, regional organization.³⁸

Closer examination of new members' complaints and veteran members' response reveals a situation more complicated than one simply of newcomers' extreme antiauthoritarianism. Newcomers' ideological commitments were, in fact, diverse; their antiauthoritarianism was neither uniform nor very ideologically coherent. In the Austin SDS, wrote Jeff (Shero) Nightbyrd in 1964, "we have Leninists, Humanists, social democrats, liberal democrats, and a couple of beatniks." The wider stream of newcomers similarly espoused everything "from counterculture utopianism to a budding Marxism," says early SDSer Bob Ross. Newcomers banded not around a shared ideological commitment as much as a shared sense of powerlessness. Excluded from the clique who ran SDS, they called on it to practice the democracy it preached.³⁹

The problem was not entirely new. Already in December 1962, Barbara Jacobs warned of an "arrogant resistance to the 'new people' ...I think that incest is beginning to lead to inbreeding." In their brief for the ERAP projects in 1964, Tom Hayden and Carl Wittman, anticipating an influx of staffers, worried about how to "keep that general sense of openness and fraternity needed around the organization as a basis of freely-shared discussion." It had been easier to integrate newcomers when veterans knew them, though. Friends brought friends into the group. They were likely to tap people who were like themselves—an obstacle to diversity but a way to sustain the integrity of preexisting friendships. Now, however, there were hundreds of new people. "The friendship group just reached the saturation point," Hayden recalls.⁴⁰

Newcomers' sense of being out of the loop is evident in the letters sent by chapter members to the national office before the June 1965 meeting. They referred repeatedly and enviously to the founding generation of SDS as a group of "friends." "Many people do feel isolated," one wrote. "There is little exchange, for example, between people who have been in the movement for years and people who have recently found the faith. In the absence of such

talk, rumours, doubts, unfounded hostilities arise.” “The main problem seems to be to reach new people,” Assistant National Secretary Helen Garvy wrote to a chapter member who complained of being shut out of “the mysterious inner workings of SDS.” “You weren’t alone in feeling lost at the convention.” She wrote to another chapter member, “I’m really concerned with the lack of communication between chapters and the national organization,” and proposed “to have more retreats...where people can just go off and talk for a few days—both old and new people, local and national SDS.” To SDS’s leadership, she wondered, “How do we permeate an informal leadership that grew from the days when SDS was a small group of friends?”⁴¹

Consider the problem in more general terms. If friendship supplies the trust, mutual affection, and respect that facilitate fast and fair decisions, it also makes it difficult to expand the deliberative group beyond the original circle. Newcomers lack an understanding of the history of the issues at stake as well as the idiosyncratic practices of *this* organization. Veterans may fail not only to inform but also to consult them. And newcomers may be excluded not only from the exchange of information among old-timers but also from their affective bonds. Newcomers threaten existing friendships and for that reason alone, they may find it difficult to secure the trust, respect, and solicitude that veterans enjoy. If veterans do not outright exclude newcomers, they may tend to recruit people who are like them, thus compromising the diversity of input into decisionmaking. The problem goes both ways: even if the veterans try actively to integrate newcomers, the fact that they seem to have more of a place at the deliberative table than newcomers may create resentment that is entirely unperceived by veterans. They may only realize that they have been exclusive—or perceived that way—when newcomers attack them for their insufficient commitment to participatory democracy.⁴²

New SDS members got, they said, a clear message that they were unwanted. Old-timers did not solicit their advice, seek their company, or credit their opinion. This was not deliberate. SDS leaders were highly conscious of the need to give newcomers a sense of belonging and generous in their desire to turn over the reins of power. But they also enjoyed an easy camaraderie with each other and shorthand knowledge of complex issues. Veterans sat in informally on the National Council meetings They probably spoke more than newcomers. People in formal positions called their friends for advice and they gravitated to each other at meetings. “We weren’t saints,” Bob Ross says now. “Maybe at a conference we’d be having a conversation and wouldn’t be as welcoming to a new person as we should have been. But we were really very conscious of trying to integrate them.” But something as innocuous as not being welcoming at a meeting may have been enough to confirm newcomers’ anxieties.⁴³

Ignored by the old guard, newcomers responded by challenging them on the hypocrisy of an elitist clique of participatory democrats. When they called for dismantling the group’s national structure, says Robert Pardun, who was seen as a leader of the prairie challenge, they were expressing their frustration with officers’ lack of accountability. “If you were friends with the National Secretary, then you could have an influence, but not if you weren’t.” But Pardun also admits that those who challenged the existing structure had not worked out much of an alternative. Garvy agrees. “I thought it didn’t make any sense, and it wasn’t articulated very well. The solution got argued about, not the problem”—the problem, she says, was newcomers’ continuing sense of exclusion.⁴⁴

The eclipse of SDS’s old guard certainly cannot be held responsible for the eventual collapse of the organization in 1968 and 1969. On the other hand, the *way* the leadership succession took place in 1965 set a precedent for complete turnovers in office almost every year,

with little contact between old and new guards, and little continuity in agendas. Even as the organization was exploding in size, the national office became increasingly remote from the chapters. What suffered was not its ability to offer direction—few chapters would have accepted that—but its ability to provide information, advice, and a sense of programmatic coherence.

Although, as in the case of SNCC, the conflict between old and new guard can be seen in ideological terms, with democratic absolutists confronting pragmatists, such a view would miss the fact that newcomers came in to the organization without a worked-out ideology; and that the leaders among the old guard were themselves committed to decentralized, participatory organization. The stakes of the conflict were less ideological than a place in the group of friends.

Conclusion

This too brief history of participatory democracy in SNCC and SDS lends itself to some rather sweeping conclusions. It suggests, first, that more democracy does not necessarily mean less efficacy. But participatory democracy has other risks. Involving novices in decisionmaking can be terrifically effective in training people to confront and change oppressive institutions. However, it is less effective in negotiating differences of aspiration between organizer and community, as well as differences within the community. Collective deliberations can indeed serve as a means of forging aspirations, discovering interests and negotiating common agendas. However, ritual injunctions to “let people speak,” and attacks on participants for “manipulating” others are insufficient mechanisms for doing those things.⁴⁵

Movement groups before SNCC and SDS had experimented with radical democracy. Quakers, pacifists, populists, and some old leftists had at various times attempted to abolish internal hierarchies, relying variously on rotating offices, consensus-based decisionmaking, and

decentralized decisions. There were models for participatory democracy but they were less available to student activists than we tend to imagine. Pacifists and Quakers were more influential in training students in nonviolent direct action than in collectivist decisionmaking. This does not mean, however, that student activists lacked entirely for guidance on how to frame issues, lodge complaints, defuse tensions, and resolve disputes—the complex interactional norms that make any deliberative system possible. SNCC workers built participatory decisionmaking into an older strand of community organizing in which the relationship between organizer and resident was a tutelary one. And in their staff decisionmaking, SNCC like SDS relied on the bonds of trust, respect, and affection that joined a group of friends.⁴⁶

Decisionmaking based on friendship is in some ways “naturally” participatory, egalitarian, and efficient. But its exclusivity makes it difficult to expand the group beyond a core group of founders. And its determined informality discourages the use of formal mechanisms for guaranteeing participation and accountability when the group does expand. In both SNCC and SDS, the same thing that made participatory democracy initially easy to practice made it difficult to sustain.

¹ Norm Fruchter, “Mississippi: Notes on SNCC,” Studies on the Left 5(1), 1965, 74-80.

² Victor Rabinowitz, “An Exchange on SNCC,” Studies on the Left 5(2), 1965, 83-91.

³Wini Breines describes SNCC and the new left as inspired by a “prefigurative” commitment, and notes the “dilemma inherited from SNCC” in her Community and Organization in the New Left (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Barbara Epstein, Political Protest and Cultural Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), describes such movements as aimed at “cultural reform” On the new left’s prefigurative/strategic or expressive/instrumental

tension, see Peter Clecak, “The Movement and Its Legacy,” Social Research 48(3), 1981, 521-556; Emily Stoper, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1989); Richard King, Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom (New York: Oxford University, 1992); Edward Morgen, The 60’s Experience: Hard Lessons About Modern America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Paul Starr, “The Phantom Community,” in Co-Ops, Communes, and Collectives, edited by John Case and Rosemary C.R. Taylor (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 245-273. For a critique of analyses centered on these alleged tensions, see Maurice Isserman, “The Not-So-Dark and Blood Ground: New Works on the 1960s,” American Historical Review 94(4), 1989: 990-1010. Richard Rothstein refers to SNCC’s “ultra-democratic mystique” in his “Representative Democracy in SDS,” Liberation, Feb. 1972: 15.

⁴ “To the Editors...” by Mike Miller. August 20, 1965, in author’s collection.

⁵ Transcript of Martha Prescod Norman oral history, Columbia University Oral History Collection; author’s interview with Betty Garman Robinson, 29 June 1996.

⁶ Baker was supportive. Long frustrated by the SCLC’s charismatic leadership style and its failure—one shared with the NAACP—to nurture grassroots organization, she saw in the student movement the potential for mass mobilization anchored in local movements. On SNCC’s founding, see Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), and for Baker’s role in it, see Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); David Garrow, Bearing the Cross (New York: William Morrow, 1986); and Joanne Grant, Ella Baker: Freedom Bound (New York: John Wiley, 1998).

⁷ See David Halberstam, The Children (New York: Random House, 1998), 141; and Aldon Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement (New York: The Free Press, 1984); also transcripts of Martha Prescod Norman and John O’Neal oral histories, Columbia University Oral History Collection. Bob Moses and Mike Thelwell described the “beloved community” as an animating ideal for SNCC’s early, Nashville-based leadership. Author’s interviews with Bob Moses, 9 Dec. 1992; Mike Thelwell, 28 June 1995.

⁸ Author’s interview with Mary King, 1 July 1992; Sherrod quoted in Fred Powledge, Free at last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 343; SNCC staff meeting, 6 March 1962, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers Microfilm, 1959-1972 (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1982), Reel 3 #0798-800.

⁹ Moses interview.

¹⁰ Thelwell interview

¹¹ James Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries (Seattle: Open Hand, 1985), 419; author’s interview with Muriel Tillinghast, 5 June 1996; author’s interview with Hollis Watkins, 22 November 1996.

¹² Staff Meeting Minutes, 9-11 June, 1964, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 3 #975-992. On Moses and Forman’s authority, author’s interviews with Judy Richardson, 10 Sept. 1992; Martha Prescod Norman, 6 March 1992; Julian Bond, 23 March 1992; Dorothy Zellner, 4 March 1992; Charles Cobb, 7 Feb. 1992; and Zoharah Simmons, 16 July 1992. On Moses and Forman’s handling of the Greenwood project, see “Chronology of events following the shooting of James Travis in Leflore County, Miss on February 28, 1963,” Southern Regional Council Papers Microfilm (Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms, 1984), Reel 175: 1843-1852; on Forman’s willingness to send novices

to high-level meetings, see transcript of John O’Neal oral history, Columbia University Oral History Collection.

¹³ Of course, participatory democracy as tutelage for citizenship has long been an important theme in political argument. Where the project I’m describing differs is in its application to oppositional movements. The point is not merely to train people to be better citizens but to be activist ones; in other words, to confront and challenge existing institutional politics. I develop this at greater length in my Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in Social Movements from Pacifism to the Present. On Horton, Baker, and Clark’s roles see Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom; John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); John M. Glen, Highlander: No Ordinary School, 2nd edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Grant, Ella Baker. On Baker’s view of utopian communities, see transcript of interview with Baker with Sue Thrasher and Casey Hayden, 1977, Casey Hayden Papers, Tucson, Arizona; author’s interview with Joanne Grant, 28 Jan. 1999.

¹⁴ Norman interview.

¹⁵ Author’s interview with Casey Hayden, 22 May 1995.

¹⁶ Dick Flacks quoted in James Miller, Democracy Is In the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 43; Robert J. Ross, “Generational Change and Primary Groups in a Social Movement” in Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies, edited by Jo Freeman (New York: Longman, 1983), 184.

¹⁷ Quoted in Miller, Democracy Is In the Streets, 206.

¹⁸ On SDS’s early support for SNCC, see Haber to Charles Jones, Charles McDew et. al, 14 October 1961, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 4 #1150; “Southern Report #2 To Campus Contacts By

Al Haber gleaned from Tom Hayden...UPI dispatches, Tom Gaither and Connie Curry” October 7, 1961, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 44, # 0890; Garman Robinson interview; “To: Haber, From: Hayden,” SNCC Microfilm, Reel 4 #1138-1140.

¹⁹ Robert A. Haber, “From Protest to Radicalism: An Appraisal of the Student Movement.” Venture, Fall 1960, reprinted in The New Student Left, edited by Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 40; see also “For Dixie with Love and Squalor” by Robb Burlage, ND (1962), SNCC Microfilm, Reel 9 #1144. “To SDS, From Hayden Re: Race and Politics Conference,” ND [1962], SNCC Microfilm, Reel 9 #1142.

²⁰ Miller, Democracy Is In the Streets, 102-3.

²¹ Tom Hayden, Reunion: A Memoir (New York: Collier, 1988).

²² Barbara Haber, “A Manifesto of Hope,” Socialist Review 93/94 (1987): 162; author’s interview with Richard Flacks, 11 August 1999; Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 106; author’s interview with James Monsonis, 14 March 1999; B. Haber, “A Manifesto of Hope”: 160. SDS founders were impressed also by southern activists’ receptiveness to anyone who was willing to court the same dangers that they were. The contrast with the closed ranks of old leftists was, for SDSers who were familiar with them, striking. Indeed, those responsible for the Port Huron Statement’s anti-anti-communist plank were not red-diaper babies like Flacks and Steve Max but Al Haber and Tom Hayden, both indignant at old leftists’ dismissal of southern protest leaders as authoritarian and “Stalinist.” “I cannot explain to you how exasperating this became to people who were full of life and itching to get going,” Hayden recalled. Quoted in Miller, Democracy Is in the Streets, 121; see also Flacks, “Port Huron: Twenty-Five Years After,” Socialist Review 93/94 (1987): 145; Flacks interview.

²³ Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries; see also Carson, In Struggle; Dittmer, Local People; Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer (New York: Oxford, 1988); Gitlin, The Sixties.

²⁴ Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries. On Mississippi, see Carson, In Struggle.

²⁵ Carson, In Struggle; Stoper, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; King, Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom.

²⁶ Author's interview with Julian Bond, 23 March 1992; on programmatic confusion, see Nancy and Gene Turvitz to Dear Friends, 10-14 July 1965, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 61 #1071-2; "Report for Monroe County" 3 March 1965, SNCC Microfilm, Reel XX #976; Mary Brumder report, [Fall 1964], SNCC Microfilm, Reel 66 #1265; Liz Fusco, "To Blur the Focus of What You Came Here to Know," [1966], SNCC Microfilm, Reel 20 #46-54. Organizers in some counties were able to move smoothly into new initiatives. In Panola County, for example, organizers combined voter registration with a challenge to the local agricultural board elections. Author's interview with Penny Patch, 9-10 Aug 1996.

²⁷ On the new cleavages in Mississippi communities see, John Dittmer, Local People; Carson, In Struggle; "Hattiesburg Report from Barbara Schwartzbaum," [Nov. 1964], SNCC Papers, Reel 66 #1270; "November 28, 1964—Dick Kelley" [field report], Walker papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW).

²⁸ "Introduction: Semi-Introspective," Anonymous, [Nov. 1964], SNCC Microfilm, Reel 3 #440-443. For examples of failed attempts to discuss programs, see Executive Committee Meeting, 12-14 April, 1965, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 3 #410-426; Meeting fragment [February 1965], Mary E. King papers, SHSW. Even drawing attention to the group's avoidance of the topic didn't seem to remedy it. In a staff meeting in early 1965, Courtland Cox charged, "a lot of people got up and began to discuss their [programmatic] needs...and we cut them off to talk of structure." In spite

of Cox's intervention, the discussion remained fixed on structure Executive Committee. Meeting minutes, 12-14 April 1965, SNCC Microfilm, Reel 3 #410-426. Author's interview with Casey Hayden, 10 March 1996.

²⁹ Transcript of Ed Brown interview, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; Richardson interview.

³⁰ Bond and Garman Robinson interviews; transcript of Fred Mangrum interview, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center; Minutes of Staff Meeting in Hattiesburg, 22 Dec. 1964, Elaine DeLott Baker Papers; Elayne DeLott Baker, "Reflection, probably written in December 1964," Baker Papers.

³¹ Check Ooiman Robinson minutes.

³² Cleveland Sellers and Robert Terrell, The River of No Return (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990); Moses interview; minister quoted in Notes for 5th District Meeting (Mississippi), 25 Nov. 1964, author's collection.

³³ Author's interview with Elizabeth Martinez, 29 June 1995.

³⁴ Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries, 419; staffer quoted in Mary King, Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 485.

³⁵ "Can the methods of SNCC be applied to the North?" Hayden asked fellow SDSers in the March/April 1963 SDS Bulletin, quoted in Sale, SDS (New York: Random House, 1973), 97. On ERAP, see Miller, Democracy Is In the Streets; Breines, Community and Organization in the New Left; Richard Rothstein, "Evolution of the ERAP Organizers," in Priscilla Long, ed., The New Left (F. Porter Sargent, 1969).

³⁶See Todd Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980) 25ff, on the effects of the March on Washington on SDS's membership. On the "prairie people," see Sale, SDS; also Paul Buhle, Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left (London: Verso, 1987); Gitlin, The Sixties; Ross, "Generational Change."

³⁷ Steve Max, "The 1965 Convention: From Port Huron to Maplehurst," Summer 1965, Students for a Democratic Society Papers Microfilm, 1958-1970 (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1977), Series 3 no. 3; on Kewadin, see also Sale, SDS; and Gitlin, The Sixties.

³⁸ Sale, SDS, 207.

³⁹Jeffrey Shero, "SDS, Organization and the South," 1964, SDS Microfilm, Series 2a, No. 130; Doug Rossinow, The Politics of Authenticity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Ross, "Generational Change," 185

⁴⁰ Barbara Jacobs quoted in Sale, SDS, 81; Hayden and Wittman, "An Interracial Movement of the Poor?"; author's interview with Tom Hayden, 21 Sept. 2000.

⁴¹ Paul Cowan, "An Open Letter to Tom Hayden," ND [May-June 1965], SDS Microfilm, Series 2a, no. 16; H[elen Garvy] to Barry Goldstein, October 20, 1964, SDS Microfilm, Series 2a, no. 79; [Helen Garvy] to Mary Ellen Chisholm, [Emmanuel chapter], September 13, 1964; To Worklist and friends from Helen Garvy, National Office, National Council Meeting, April 18-20, 1965, SDS Microfilm, Series 2a, no. 13.

⁴² I summarize the social psychological findings on friendship and its relationship to small group organization and decisionmaking in Freedom Is an Endless Meeting.

⁴³ Ross interview. SDS, like SNCC, did plan programs designed to integrate newcomers and, in SDS's case, to ease out veterans. However, in the press of other matter, none of these got off the ground. See my Freedom Is an Endless Meeting.

⁴⁴ Author's interview with Robert Pardun, 3 Nov. 2000; author's interview with Helen Garvy, 25 Oct. 2000.

⁴⁵ Readers of Jane Mansbridge's, Beyond Adversary Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) will find this argument familiar. However her argument that unitary democratic procedures require unified interests gives inadequate attention to the role of the decisionmaking process itself in reconfiguring people's "interests."

⁴⁶Some SDSers had had exposure to Quaker decisionmaking through their contacts with the American Friends Service Committee, CORE, and Women Strike for Peace. SDS's Swarthmore contingent brought a respect for Quaker decisionmaking. Dick Flacks was an eager reader of A.J. Muste's Liberation and has since described his admiration for Muste's belief in decentralized and participatory organizations. SDS in Ann Arbor shared office space with long-time Quaker Kenneth Boulding. But before SDS took on anti-Vietnam war organizing, its members knew pacifists mainly from afar. The main organizational templates for students who had had experience in political organizations—many students, like 17-year old Ross, had had none—was a bureaucratic one. The same was true for SNCC workers. I discuss both in Freedom Is an Endless Meeting. On SDS's organizational models, see also Richard Rothstein, "Representative Democracy in SDS;" Flacks, "A.J. Muste," Social Policy 30 (1999): 7-12; and personal communication, August 28, 2000; author's interview with Todd Gitlin, 10 April 2000; Miller, Democracy Is in the Streets; Hayden interview.