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Freedom Summer of 1964 and Feminism(s)

By

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Introduction:

Miss Ella Baker created the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the spring of 1960. SNCC grew out of the sit-in movement in the South, and the widespread demonstrations employed to desegregate public spaces. After participating in the Freedom Rides of 1961, a series of political protests in which white and Black people rode buses together to challenge segregation laws across the South, SNCC expanded the freedom movement to include the millions of exploited and disenfranchised African Americans in the Black Belt section of the South, including Mississippi and Georgia. SNCC's grassroots approach was designed to build local, or in SNCC's parlance, indigenous, trained leadership on college and high school campuses and in local communities.[1] SNCC's structure was decentralized with no leadership; the official positions were mostly held by men but women were more visible and held more power than in other organizations.[2] As SNCC continued organizing after the summer of 1963, there were approximately 150 SNCC field secretaries performing dangerous work in the most difficult areas of the South: Mississippi, Central Alabama, Southwest Georgia, Eastern Arkansas, and Southern Virginia.[3] By October 24, 1963, there were 37 SNCC staff workers in Mississippi. The majority of the staff were Southern students, and some Northern students who traveled South to work for the movement. The average age of the staff was 22 and 80% were African American.[4]

This paper focuses on expanding the definition of feminism to include the experiences of African American women SNCC workers during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, a

[1] "SNCC Brochure, 1963." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, August 1963. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/sncc63-1.pdf; "SNCC You Can Help (Friends of SNCC guide), undated 1964."
[2] Belinda Robnett. *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 98-114.
[3] "The Movement Needs You, 1963? 1964?" Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, 1963 or 1964. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/sncc_needs.pdf
[4] "SNCC You Can Help (Friends of SNCC guide), undated 1964." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, 1964. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/640000_sncc_fos.pdf.

nonviolent effort to integrate Mississippi's segregated political system. Several hundred Northern college students, mostly white, traveled to Mississippi to volunteer for the Freedom Summer of 1964, working alongside Black and white women and male long-term staff members of SNCC in Mississippi.[5] During the summer of 1964 in Mississippi, the SNCC staff workers grew to approximately 84 members in order to manage the growing organization.[6] The goal for Freedom Summer was to implement a voter registration drive, Freedom Schools and establish a new political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).[7] This paper approaches the Freedom Summer through the lens of the SNCC staff women, building upon Black feminist scholarship and refuting white feminist scholarship that focuses on gender and racial tensions, rather than the positive relationships between white and Black women staff members and the empowerment gained from their experiences.

Although all of the women in SNCC came from different backgrounds, whether from the North or South, lower or middle class, Black or white, young or older, the women who participated in SNCC staff overcame fear, acquired skills, experienced personal growth, organized dangerous rural communities, registered voters, led mass meetings, and marched under the constant threat of arrests and beatings from white southerners. Most of the African American women took positions in the front lines, while many white women performed supportive tasks. African American women played pivotal roles in decision-making and promoting activities that changed the course and character of the civil rights struggle.[8] As this paper will demonstrate,

[5] "Overview of the 1964 Freedom Summer." Wisconsin Historical Society, April 2, 2013. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3707.
[6] King--Mississippi Summer Project, miscellaneous files (Mary E. King papers , 1962-1999; Z: Accessions, M82-445, Box 1, Folder 21), https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/24860/rec/5.
[7] Overview of the 1964 Freedom Summer." Wisconsin Historical Society, April 2, 2013. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3707.
[8] Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 1-6.

feminism and the ways in which the women viewed or experienced feminism during the Freedom Summer, meant something different for each woman in SNCC. Many of them did not call themselves feminists or refer to feminism during 1964, though some did so later on in their lives. I argue that analyzing the differing experiences of Black and white women in SNCC during Freedom Summer of 1964 and the following year, through an intersectional lens, reveals how the traditional definition of second-wave feminism can be expanded to include the experiences of African American female SNCC workers who established their voices by leading in a major civil rights organization.

There are many different narratives surrounding the events and relationships that took place during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. Major second-wave feminist scholars, such as Sara M. Evans in *Personal Politics* and Mary Aickin Rothschild in "White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers," focus primarily on the sexual tension and exploitation from the perspective of the white women and Black men during Freedom Summer. Evans and Rothschild also argue that white women felt that they were cast into traditional female roles and were disappointed by their lack of leadership opportunities, which along with their experiences in the New Left movement, sparked the women's liberation movement.[9] Overall, traditional second-wave feminist scholars, like Evans, focus on the experiences of white upper/middle class women during the 1960s and 1970s who were dissatisfied with being subjected to housewifery.[10] However, these were not the same problems that African American women were facing at the time, and therefore many of them tried to disassociate from the label of feminism.[11]

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[9] Sara M. Evans. *Personal Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979),160-170; Mary Aickin Rothschild. "White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change." *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (1979): 478-479.
[10] Evans, 3-23.
[11] Zillah Eisenstein. The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1978. http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html.

Current scholarship through a womanist/Black feminist perspective, like Belinda Robnett, critique the work of scholars like Evans and Rothschild. A womanist/black feminist perspective can be defined as the "logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face."[12] Kimberlé Krenshaw later coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect and overlap, resulting in different aspects of overlapping oppression affecting individuals in different ways.[13]

The sociohistorical analysis of Robnett in *How Long? How Long?*, contributes to the analysis of a holistic story of SNCC, through the perspective of the Black women in the civil rights movement. Robnett critiques the analysis of Evans and Rothschild, which frames Black women as the barriers between themselves and white women. This falls into stereotyping of white women as victims, Black men as sexually aggressive, and Black women as angry, specifically when discussing the Freedom Summer. She concludes that many previous studies focus on Freedom Summer volunteers, which does not account for the main group of SNCC participants, and results in a lack of understanding of the full spectrum of gendered relations within the movement. However, Robnett's work aims to show the positive relationships between Black men and women, influenced by their shared experiences in a racist society. She clarifies that the majority of relationships between Black and white participants were positive, but the experiences of Black and white women were not similar because of race, class, and culture.[14] In this thesis, I build off of Robnett's rejection of white-focused narratives of women in SNCC,

[12] Zillah Eisenstein. The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1978. http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html.
[13] Kimberle Crenshaw. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.
[14] Robnett, 4-5, 115-133.

focusing both on the voices and experiences of Black women and on the relationships they had with white women, revealing how those relationships and experiences helped to shape a variety of feminism(s) within the movement.

An important aspect of my analysis is how I utilize and define feminism. Feminism is a loaded term that many Black women in SNCC did not want to associate with because middle and upper-class white women often did not take into consideration the diverse grievances and priorities of other diverse groups of women.[15] For the purpose of my research, I define second-wave feminism as not a monolithic movement for white-middle class women, but rather "waves" of feminism that include the experiences of the empowered women in SNCC. My approach follows that of Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry, who write, "feminist activism among women of color and white working class women often took forms rather different from the white and middle-class projects that are usually identified as feminist."[16] Therefore, the authors set out to model a way of finding roots of feminism in other social movements like the labor movement and civil rights movement.[17]

Along similar lines, Benita Roth in *Separate Roads to Feminism,* emphasizes that throughout history, when Black women have fought for racial justice, like in the civil rights movement, they have always intertwined feminist components into their organizing. Since the 1830s, African American women have articulated feminist concerns within the antiracist struggle, and they continued to do so in the second-wave. I will employ Roth's conceptualization that when historians focus too much on the feminist label, which is often associated with white,

[15] Dorothy Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry. *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements*. First edition. (New York, N.Y.: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 93.
[16] Cobble --, et al., 96.
[17] Cobble --, et al., 70-110.

middle-class women, they often miss out on the actual Black feminist organizing in the second-wave.[18] I will also utilize feminism as "continuous" in my own analysis to demonstrate how even though second-wave feminism may not have officially began until the late 1960s/early 1970s, there were still women, especially in SNCC, portraying feminist characteristics, whether it was conscious or subconscious.[19] By viewing feminism through the multiple wave model, it reveals how feminism has taken roots in others social movements, like within SNCC, that involved African American women performing feminist actions. Therefore, I will use Roth's argument that feminism of the 1960s and 1970s needs to be understood as "feminisms" in the plural form, and for my research purposes can also be applied to individual and smaller scales not only through a broad scope like Roth.

This paper uses as its primary source base, panel discussions from the following: a conference for SNCC veterans at Trinity College in 1988; SNCC's 40th anniversary conference in 2000; and 50th anniversary conference of SNCC's founding in 2010. Although not many documents from 1964 and 1965 focus specifically on the work that SNCC women were doing, analyzing the women's memories from the panel discussions, their memoirs and previously conducted interviews, allows for their stories to be told, which would otherwise have been overlooked without these oral histories. In addition, given time to reflect on their past experiences in SNCC, especially since the second-wave feminism movement did not officially start until the late 1960s and early 1970s, allows the women to view actions or events that seemed spontaneous or disparate in 1964 and 1965 through a feminist or intersectional lens.

[18] Benita Roth. *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge. UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79-80.
[19] Cobble --, et al., xiv.

I will demonstrate, based on the women's stories in their memoirs, the panel discussions, and in the interviews, that feminism reaches beyond white middle-class women, and can be studied outside the larger feminist movements. It is also significant that the women of SNCC came together at several conferences to discuss their identities and roles as women during the movement. The stories of Black women in SNCC and Freedom Summer are critical to understanding that they were respected and grew as leaders, and by viewing their experiences through the lens of feminism(s) we can elevate their voices. Although there are limitations to memoirs and interviews from the conferences and women reflecting on their memories, such as gaps in memories or being influenced by the current time they live in, there are also benefits of the women having time to reflect on their experiences and situating their experiences in regard to their role as women, since they were not all thinking in that way during the '60s.

Building upon previous scholarship, I will demonstrate how Southern culture, different skill sets, and long histories of labor and gender relations affected the ways in which different women turned to feminism. I will expand upon Robnett's rebuttal of white feminist narratives of SNCC and the Freedom Summer, as well as feminist scholarship and historiography about SNCC more generally, to demonstrate how the experiences of the African American SNCC women can be included into my definition of feminism.

History of Labor for Black and White Women

Angela Davis in *Women, Race & Class*, examines how the different histories of Black and white women may have led them to experiencing and understanding gender discrimination and oppression differently. According to Davis, "lessons can be gleaned from the slave era which will shed light upon Black women's and all women's current battle for emancipation."[20] She

[20] Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Race & Class*. 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 4.

argues that "proportionately, more Black women have always worked outside their homes than have their white sisters. The enormous space that work occupies in Black women's lives today follows a pattern established during the very earliest days of slavery. As slaves, compulsory labor overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence."[21] Davis further argues that most slave women "toiled under the lash for their masters, worked for and protected their families, fought against slavery, and who were beaten and raped, but never subdued. It was those women who passed on to their nominally free female descendants a legacy of hard work, perseverance and self-reliance, a legacy of tenacity, resistance and insistence on sexual equality -- in short, a legacy spelling out standards for a new womanhood."[22] Davis demonstrates that the 19th century ideology of women as nurturing mothers, companions and housekeepers for their husbands was not the case for Black women. Black women as workers were not treated as the weaker sex or as the housewife, because men, women and children were all "providers" for the slaveholding class; and women also worked alongside men in the fields.[23]

In regard to the history of white women and their connection with labor and family structure, the growth of industrialization created the public and private sphere ideology in which white women stayed in the home and white men went out into the public to work. Before industrialization, with the home economy, women contributed to the work and making of the homes for their families' survival. However, with industrialization white women were severed from the sphere of productive work and the role of mother and housewife was deemed inferior. The restrictions of Southern culture, coupled with different skill sets and the long histories of labor and gender relations, affected how different women turned to and experienced feminism.[24]

[21] Davis, 5.
[22] Davis, 29.
[23] Davis, 3-29.
[24] Davis, 3-29.

In Frances Beal's classic 1969 essay "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female," Beal depicts different histories and dynamics governing Black and white families and labor patterns. According to Beal, the founder of the Black Women's Liberation Committee within SNCC, a Black woman could "find work in a white man's kitchen" and end up becoming the sole breadwinner of the family. Beal argues that this led to many psychological problems for both the Black man and woman due to white gender norms and expectations that women were supposed to stay in the home, and men work outside the home. This sense of role reversal may have caused African American women to feel defeminized and African American men to feel castrated. In contrast, for the white family, the man is the breadwinner and the woman is tied to the home and her husband. She argues that "it is idle dreaming to think of Black women simply caring for their homes and children like the middle-class white model."[25]

Even though Beal discusses feminism after the time period I am focusing on, her argument is very important in understanding the history of the relationships between Black and white women as well as between women and men. In regard to labor, Black women did not have the same concerns as white women which is reflected in some of the work dynamics in SNCC during 1964. Thavolia Gylmph, in *Out of the House of Bondage,* further contributes to Beal's argument by asserting that African American women wanted to establish black homes separate from their former mistresses, and did everything they could to dismantle domestic ideals associated with white "mistresses" of slaveholding families that oppressed them under slavery.[26] This mindset may explain why some of the Black women in SNCC felt like they were not discriminated against by the Black men, and why they did not see shame or oppression in

[25] Frances M. Beal. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." *Meridians* 8, no. 2 (2008): 166-76. Accessed April 23, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40338758.
[26]Thavolia Glymph. *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-18.

holding positions like secretarial work, but instead were proud of their work.[27] Black women may have disassociated from the same gender complaints as white women because they did not believe they experienced the same types of gender discrimination. Furthermore, as Glymph emphasizes, white women held positions of power over Black women stemming back to slavery, resulting in Black and white women experiencing different types of oppression related to the patriarchy. This could be another reason why Black women did not understand the white women's complaints, demanding roles of greater responsibility, because white women historically have been in greater positions of power.

Leadership and Positions During the Freedom Summer of 1964

As SNCC grew, community bridge leaders took on more formal leadership positions, especially during the Freedom Summer of 1964, with the increase of mostly white volunteers coming to Mississippi.[28] Sociologist Belinda Robnett argues that this meant that they needed to increase their field workers to supervise the activities of the new volunteers, so women began to gain titled positions with greater responsibility. The increase in demands resulted in several other women becoming secondary formal bridge leaders, otherwise known as project directors in charge of their own project in specific towns or counties. Between 1964 and 1965, 12 of the 50 staff members in Mississippi were women. Of the 29 project directors in Mississippi, Southwest Georgia, and Alabama, seven of them were women. This included Muriel Tillinghast in Greenville, Mississippi; Mary Lane in Greenwood, Mississippi; Willie Ester Mcgee in Itta Bena,

[27] Judy Richardson, "SNCC: My Enduring 'Circle of Trust,'" in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*, ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 348-366.
[28] Robnett, 98-114

Mississippi; Mary Sue Gellatly in Shaw, Mississippi; Lois Rogers in Cleveland, Mississippi; Cynthia Washington, Bolivar County, Mississippi; and Gwen Robinson, Laurel, Mississippi.[29]

Gwen Robinson (later Zoharah Simmons), an African American woman, became the project director in Laurel, Mississippi by chance, after the male project director had to step down.[30] This was also the case for Muriel Tillinghast, an African American woman in Greenville, Mississippi who became a project director after the male projector director stepped down.[31] This attests to Robnett's argument that women sometimes fell into leadership positions if the male project directors left that position.[32] Simmons emphasizes how she had to struggle around issues related to being a woman project director, having to fight for the resources, and to be taken seriously by the leadership, as well as by her male colleagues. She remembers how race played a role in her treatment as a leader, growing up in total segregation in Memphis, she did not interact or feel comfortable with white individuals until she met white professors that she looked up to at Spelman College. During her experience in Laurel, she had to learn how to stand up to young white men from the North who were her age or a few years older. The white Northern men came to Freedom Summer with their own preconceived notions of race and gender dynamics. According to Simmons, "there was class, there was race, and gender issues just swirling."[33]

A benefit of having these women engage with their memories is that Simmons was able to reflect on the type of leadership she instilled in her project which she now argues was a

[29] Robnett, 98-114; "SNCC Staff Directory, December 1964? January 1965?" Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, 1964 or 1965. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_sncc_staff_directory.pdf
[30] Simmons, "Little Memphis Girl," 9-32.
[31] Muriel Tillinghast, "Depending on Ourselves," in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC,* ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 250-257.
[32] Robnett, 98-114.
[33] Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Interviewee, Joseph Mosnier, and U.S Civil Rights History Project. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons oral history interview conducted by Joseph Mosnier in Gainesville, Florida. 2011. Pdf. https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669148/.

"feminist style" of leadership. She described that her leadership was extremely democratic with few top-down edicts from her as a director, while she focused on implementing structures against sexual harassment. Simmons highlights that some of the male co-directors in the other projects had more authoritarian types of leadership styles. Under her leadership, the Laurel Project "established a Freedom School, with a satellite freedom day-care center,[34] held successful mock voter registration campaigns in which we registered hundreds of black residents, and had a good turnout for the mock elections. We built a strong Laurel chapter of the MFDP and selected the delegates for the state convention."[35] Consequently, she was successful in the programs that she created and implemented in her project, demonstrating that she was successful in her leadership role, and that she did not take a backseat to other men.[36] Although she may not have identified her actions as feminist at the time, through my definition of feminism(s), her actions were feminist in nature because she stood up to the men, confronted any disparities between the resources her project received, and implemented her own democratic and "feminist" style of leadership.

Muriel Tillinghast, an African American woman originally from Washington D.C., travelled to Mississippi after she graduated from Howard University in June 1964. Tillinghast had prior organization experience in Maryland, Washington D.C. and Delaware. In particular, she was a youth organizer for the Maryland Synod Luther League during high school and the President of the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) on Howard's campus.[37] Tillinghast started

[34] Freedom Schools were created by SNCC as part of Freedom Summer in 1964 in order to educate young, Black Mississippian students about their personal experiences with racial discrimination and the broader context of segregation in Mississippi. "Freedom Schools." SNCC Digital Gateway, May 7, 2018. https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/culture-education/freedom-schools/.
[35] Simmons, "Little Memphis Girl," 9-32.
[36] Simmons, "Little Memphis Girl," 9-32.
[37] Muriel Tillinghast. Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. https://www.crmvet.org/vet/murielt.htm.

out as a volunteer for the Freedom Summer of 1964, but SNCC staff were looking for people to become potential leaders and they saw something in her.[38] Unita Blackwell, a local Mississippian who became a SNCC field secretary in 1964, and an elected member of the executive committee of the MFDP, described her relationship with Tillinghast:

> "She walked differently than we did. Wasn't no fear we could see. And she was lookin white people in the eyes -- you know, we didn't do that down here. And I'm thinking 'Lord, that child gonna get herself killed; get us all killed. We had never seen anybody this unafraid and yet she also recognized, now that I look back on it, the danger that she was in."[39]

Tillinghast spent a great deal of time in Blackwell's house. Tillinghast taught Blackwell about African American history, black leaders, and the contributions they made throughout American history. Tillinghast "was the teacher;" they would set up rooms in churches filled with people where Tillinghast would teach this type of history, but what she really taught them was to have pride in themselves "because black people had potential. Muriel Tillinghast truly gave [Blackwell] the education of [her] life."[40] Tillinghast also wore her hair "natural," and Blackwell tried to get her to straighten her hair because that is how the Black women, she knew wore their hair, but Tillinghast explained that "her hair was part of her identity as a black person" and she was not ashamed of it. By the next year, Blackwell started to wear her hair naturally. Blackwell recognized that Tillinghast's education and Northern roots changed how she viewed and experienced the world which made her "openly confident of her worth as a black person."[41] This is important because Tillinghast's experiences as an African American, educated Northerner

[38] "Muriel Tillinghast." SNCC Digital Gateway, May 1, 2018. https://snccdigital.org/people/muriel-tillinghast/.
[39] Charles E. Cobb, Jr. *On the Road to Freedom: A Guided Tour of the Civil Rights Trail* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008), 263.
[40] Unita Blackwell and JoAnne Prichard Morris. *Barefootin': Life Lessons From the Road to Freedom* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 79-81.
[41] Blackwell and Prichard Morris, 79-81.

shaped her experiences in Mississippi and the way in which local Mississippians viewed her as a strong, capable, and independent woman, and someone who did not have the same fears or understanding of Southern culture as the Black workers from the South. By embracing her worth as a person, accepting herself as she is, and spreading this notion to other women, Tillinghast provides a prime example of what 1960s feminism looked like at the time, and why we need to expand our definition of second-wave feminism in order to include these feminist actions performed by women like Tillinghast in 1964.

During the Freedom Summer, Tillinghast spent the first two weeks in the upstairs office of the Greenville project and "it dawned on [her] that [she] would never get anybody to register to vote staying in the office, so s-l-o-w-l-y [she] started coming downstairs and cautiously going out into the town."[42] The Greenville project answered to Stokely Carmichael, an African American male project director and part of the SNCC Executive Committee. However, her direct project head was Charles "Charlie" Cobb (project director), who informed her that he was leaving to do something else and said, "I'm going to leave you in charge. You look like you can handle it." In Greenville, she ran three counties: Washington, Issaquena, and Sharkey. From there on out, "the volunteers, both local and northern-bred, and [her] developed a routine of sorts and defined [their] work and roles. [Their] day started around 4:20 in the morning; we wanted to get to the cotton and day workers before daybreak so that we could talk to them without immediate fear of economic harm."[43] She described that she was pretty tough and ran a tight ship and that they did not lose anyone to racial violence, which is how she counted her successes. Although she may not have viewed herself as feminist at the time, through an intersectional lens, her experiences as a project director can be included in a feminist definition because she took on

[42] Tillinghast, "Depending on Ourselves," 251.
[43] Tillinghast, "Depending on Ourselves," 250-257.

a leadership position without any reservations, and developed her own leadership style that allowed her to successfully organize local Mississippians to vote. She canvassed, led meetings, and started a Freedom School and more all under her leadership, showing that women could perform the same tasks as men successfully, and that they were not inferior to them.[44]

Muriel Tillinghast's friend, Cynthia Washington, an African American woman also from Washington, D.C., grew up in a family that was part of the D.C. Black Bourgeois (DCBB), which was a middle-class group of Black individuals who strove to assimilate in hopes of achieving racial and social equality with white people.[45] Like Tillinghast, she was also active in the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and was remembered by other SNCC members as breaking free from "her prim and proper 'D.C.B.B.' upbringing and became a warrior for the people."[46] During 1964 and 1965, she stepped up into a high position as a project director in Bolivar County, Mississippi and described that many other black women directed their own projects. Upon reflection in 1977, she realized that having her own project made a big difference in how she was perceived and treated, but she did not see what she was doing as exceptional, revealing how she was not as concerned with her title or position in SNCC. Rather, she believed that the community women she worked with were respected and admired for their strength and endurance, risking their lives, families, and jobs in order to fight for their people.[47] Washington's background as a middle-class Northern Black woman is an example of how women came to SNCC with different intersectional identities, but united under the common goal of fighting

[44] Tillinghast, "Depending on Ourselves," 250-257.
[45] Joseph Scott. "THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE AND BLACK POWER." *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 4 (1973): 12-18. Accessed July 26, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41163616; "Cynthia Washington." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, 2014. https://www.crmvet.org/mem/cynthiaw.htm..
[46] "Cynthia Washington." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, 2014. https://www.crmvet.org/mem/cynthiaw.htm.
[47] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.

against racism. Even with her background, she still had the opportunity as a Black woman to step up into a more influential position.

Victoria Gray Adams, an African American woman, represents many of the local women who became staff members and were pivotal in bridging the young staff to local people. She began as support staff in SNCC, and then the young staff began inviting her to more things and eventually she started her own voter registration class. SNCC workers invited her to a meeting where she met Ella Baker. Gray Adams and Baker were two of the four older generation adults at the meeting, and they reacted in the same way, supporting and affirming the youth. Many of the Black community members were afraid of the SNCC members, because of the risks they brought to them, but Gray Adams was essential in encouraging the community to support the SNCC staff. She recruited women to come to the freedom house in Hattiesburg and cook for the SNCC workers; and the adults provided places to stay and work.[48]

Victoria Adams Gray, along with Fannie Lou Hamer and Annie Devine, played major roles in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenge, where the inclusive MFDP party decided to challenge the seating of the all-white Democratic party at the national party convention in Jackson, Mississippi in August, 1964.[49] When the party was only offered two seats as a compromise, Adams did not want to take it and settle. At first the three women did not speak at the meeting, because the male “big guns" talked most of the time, but then they asserted their opinion that they should decline the two seats, and everyone listened to them.[50] She describes that there were many women leaders of the MFDP because it was not as safe for men;

[48] Victoria Gray Adams, “They Didn’t Know the Power of Women,” in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC,* ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 230-240.
[49] “Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).” SNCC Digital Gateway, May 7, 2018. https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/alliances-relationships/mfdp/.
[50] Gray Adams, “They Didn’t Know the Power of Women,” 230-240.

her reasoning was that white people were not as afraid of Black women, but they did not realize the power of Black women.[51] Overall, Gray's experience shows first-hand the importance of the role of local women in SNCC, and the continued opportunities to gain leadership positions. She also demonstrates the importance of the women's voices in making decisions, and even if there were some gender restrictions in their positions, they learned to make their voices heard, loud and clear.

Jean Wheeler Smith, an African American woman from Detroit, Michigan, worked for the Southwest Georgia project in 1963 before joining SNCC's efforts in Mississippi in 1964. In the spring of 1964, she went to Hattiesburg, Mississippi as part of SNCC's effort to organize a Freedom Vote as part of the MFDP's Convention Challenge. During that spring she lived with Miss Woods, an older local woman who courageously housed many of the SNCC members, as many of the other women have described their deep admiration for the local women who risked their lives for the movement.[52]

At a voter registration meeting, Wheeler Smith's male co-worker, Paul, did not show up to lead the meeting. She was extremely nervous, and after he did not show up, she had to lead the meeting herself.[53]

> "I walked toward the front with the Freedom Democratic Party ballots. I took a deep breath and started talking. I forgot about my limited skills in comparison to Paul's magnificent oratory, and my words took wings...I had independently taken responsibility for my organizing assignment, and I didn't need some man to do it for me or with me. I had helped the Mississippi challenge to become an important part of history..."[54]

[51] Gray Adams, "They Didn't Know the Power of Women," 230-240.
[52] Jean Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC,* ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 240-250.
[53] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.
[54] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 244.

Soon after the precinct elections in May 1964, she attended the Freedom Summer Oxford, Ohio Orientation. Her takeaways from the orientation were that: "(1) Life is tough, and you can't depend on any man to take care of you; and (2) you are very much loved, but there'll be no pampering around here. Everyone must pull their own weight."[55] During an orientation session, it was announced that Andy Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney, two white and one Black SNCC worker, went missing in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Later in the summer, after it became clear that the three workers were dead, Wheeler Smith volunteered to be part of a team that set up a new organizing project in Philadelphia, Mississippi. She recalls that Bob Moses, an African American male member of the SNCC Executive Committee, and developer of the idea for the Freedom Summer of 1964, regretted withdrawing their project in McComb, Mississippi after Herbert Lee, a local person was killed because of his involvement with SNCC. Therefore, Wheeler Smith took the risk of entering Philadelphia where Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney went missing, and she and the other civil rights workers stayed close together in order to focus on "maintaining a presence in the face of organized violence."[56]

In this project, the SNCC and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) civil rights workers were all men except Wheeler Smith. During the days, they canvassed the countryside and town, making their presence known while at night they sat around in the Freedom House before Wheeler Smith would have to walk down the street to stay in the community. Since she was the only woman on the project, they had to respect community standards and she could not sleep in the freedom house with the men. Therefore, she spent her nights "terrified," and would wake up each morning grateful to be alive. After the three workers had been found dead, their main goal was to get people to register to vote and openly attend a memorial service for the three dead

[55] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 245.
[56] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.

workers. Wheeler Smith describes that "I think that in addition to the presence of the Justice Department and the FBI investigating the deaths of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner, the local whites really were surprised that we'd show our faces after what they'd done to our comrades that they had to stop and think about what to do next."[57]

Although, in the beginning Wheeler Smith was nervous and uncertain about leading a meeting on her own, stepping up into that role, in a spontaneous way, was a pivotal moment for her. After that, she became a field secretary, community organizer, and campus traveler for SNCC until 1967, risking her own life in a dangerous Mississippi town, alongside the men in that project.[58] Having to abide by Southern norms, and live separate from the men, she still put her nerves and fear aside to go out every day to actively integrate Philadelphia, Mississippi during Freedom Summer.

Several Black women wanted to work in the field because that is where they believed the most important work and action took place. Judy Richardson, an African American woman from Tarrytown, New York, left Swarthmore College her freshman year, to work for SNCC in 1963 as Jim Forman's Secretary in the Atlanta Office. When Richardson was in 7th grade, she was put on secretarial "track," where she learned how to type 90 words a minute. When Jim Forman, an African American male, and Executive Secretary of SNCC, found this out he told her she wasn't going back to school and should be his secretary.[59] Her roles as a secretary included: dealing with SNCC's project staff; learning their strengths and weaknesses; contacting the Friends of SNCC offices that were fundraising for them in the North; and working with the campus travelers who were organizing campus chapters of SNCC at Black colleges in the South and with

[57] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.
[58] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.
[59] Judy Richardson. "Oral History/Interview." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Judy Richardson, February 2007. https://www.crmvet.org/nars/judyrich.htm.

the many pro bono lawyers. Simultaneously, she also participated in integration demonstrations while working in the office.[60]

During Freedom Summer, Richardson wanted to work in the field but Forman still needed her typing 90 words a minute in the office. Therefore, she moved to the national office in Greenwood, Mississippi for Freedom Summer and stayed in the homes of local African Americans who put their lives at risk. That summer she worked the Wide Area Telephone Service Line (WATs) which allowed SNCC workers in communities around the South to make low-cost long-distance calls to SNCC headquarters—a critical form of protection against the police and Ku Klux Klan, and also a way to report attacks, arrests, and crises.[61] On the WATs line during the Freedom Summer, she learned how to talk to powerful people and found her voice; she was able to step up during periods of crisis and handle the situation on the WATs line if her co-workers were in trouble on the streets of Mississippi.[62] As a Northerner and growing up in a small town in New York, not ever having been around many Black people and then coming to the South, she understood that this was "the most useful [she] could be to the organization."[63]

Muriel Tillinghast, Cynthia Washington and Judy Richardson were all African American women from the North, educated with prior organizing experience, but since Richardson had typing skills, Forman wanted her in the office during Freedom Summer. However, other Black women like Tillinghast and Washington had more of an opportunity to assert themselves into field positions, unlike white women who generally could not take field positions because of the

[60] Richardson, "SNCC: My Enduring 'Circle of Trust,'" 352.
[61] Judy Richardson. "Oral History/Interview." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Judy Richardson, February 2007. https://www.crmvet.org/nars/judyrich.htm.
[62] Judy Richardson. "Oral History/Interview." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Judy Richardson, February 2007. https://www.crmvet.org/nars/judyrich.htm.
[63] Judy Richardson. "Oral History/Interview." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Judy Richardson, February 2007. https://www.crmvet.org/nars/judyrich.htm.

danger it would bring to them and the African American workers. The reason white women could not go into the field was not to cast them into traditional gender roles, but rather because of Southern social taboos and norms. Southern racists were angered by the appearance of white women in the company of Black men, which created extreme danger and risk for the Black SNCC workers involved.[64]

Many white women during Freedom Summer and the year that followed were interpreting their positions in the office as sexism because they did not understand Southern history and culture, and that it was important to capitalize on Black leadership.[65] Therefore, some of the frustration of white women may have stemmed from not being able to assert themselves in the same way as Black women like Tillinghast and Washington. In addition, many of the white volunteers for Freedom Summer came from middle and upper-class families with levels of education beyond what most local Mississippi workers offered, so they were employed in the office, where they were most needed. Therefore, many of the white women and some middle-class Black women, particularly those from the North, were more often assigned to the national office as mainstream bridge leaders where their activism generally involved connections to white institutions and communities. This meant less access to the field, which resulted in different experiences for the Black and white women.[66]

Traditional second-wave feminist scholars argue that white women experienced gender discrimination during the Freedom Summer of 1964 and SNCC, but this ignores the experiences of African American women.[67] The African American women did not feel like they were experiencing covert acts of gender discrimination from men because they were leading, initiating

[64] Robnett, 137-139.
[65] Robnett, 137-139.
[66] Robnett, 135-139.
[67] Evans, 60-101.

successful programs and even performing office work that they were proud of doing in a major civil rights organization.[68] Therefore, it is important to analyze the Black women's experiences through the lens of feminism(s) to expand upon the traditional definition of second-wave feminism that focuses on the grievances of white middle class women in the late '60s and early '70s, who were angered that women were not equal to men in the household and workforce.[69] However, these were not the same issues or complaints that African American women were experiencing at the time, because they were trying to gain access to racially segregated institutions and did not want to alienate African American men from their fight for racial equality.[70] Even if the white women of SNCC felt like they were being discriminated against on the basis of gender, the perceptions of Black women were different because they were not as hyper-focused on gender, but rather felt like they had a platform to hold leadership positions and amplify their own voices as women.[71]

Overall, as a result of the Freedom Summer and the year that followed, African American women in specific were able to step into higher and more influential positions, and were given more responsibilities and opportunities to lead in their own individual ways. Each woman came to SNCC with different intersectional identities, and as a result, had different experiences regarding their roles and positions in SNCC. The open nature of SNCC during the Freedom Summer and year that followed allowed for SNCC staff to capitalize on each woman's strengths, and allowed the Black women to grow and establish their voices. For some women their backgrounds may have affected their roles in SNCC, but for others they stepped into

[68] Jack Chatfield --, et al. *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 127-152.
[69] Evans, 60-101.
[70] Beal, 166-176.
[71] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.

leadership positions in spontaneous ways. This demonstrates how feminism(s) can evolve on a very individual level, even if the Black women did not identify as feminist at the time.

The SNCC Position Papers: Women in the Movement (1964) and A Kind of Memo (1965)

Mary King, a white Southern SNCC mainstream bridge leader, worked under Julian Bond, an African American male Communications Director, since she was an English major in college. Jim Forman, an African American male Executive Secretary of SNCC in charge of coordinating projects, overseeing SNCC staff, raising money, and communicating with the media, felt like King would be the most useful in the Communications Department.[72] Casey Hayden, also a white Southern SNCC mainstream bridge leader, became the first Northern coordinator to work for Jim Forman in 1963. She was in charge of fundraising and with her guidance, she established several "Friends of SNCC" groups, building northern connections in which these groups publicized SNCC's voter registration work. When she began organizing for Freedom Summer, she was specifically charged with researching, training, and coordinating statewide the Convention Challenge. As a campus traveler, she also traveled to Black and white campuses in remote locations and recruited students to their integrated workshops.[73]

During the fall of 1964 at the Waveland Conference, Mary King and Casey Hayden anonymously presented a Position Paper titled Women in the Movement, which focused on what they saw as gender inequality in SNCC. At the conference for SNCC veterans at Trinity College in 1988, Mary King and Casey Hayden reflected on the intentions of their Position Paper in 1964. King remembers that at the Waveland, Mississippi conference they could prepare any

[72] Volume 22, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.). 50th Anniversary Conference (2010: Raleigh, N.C.), Natalie Bullock Brown, SNCC Legacy Project, Ascension Productions, and California Newsreel (Firm). Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 50th Anniversary, Shaw University, Raleigh NC: 1960-2010. [San Francisco, Calif.]: California Newsreel, 2011.

[73] Tapes 1 & 2, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.). 40th Anniversary Conference (2000: Raleigh, N.C.), David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

position paper on any topic and could challenge the staff to anything they wanted to because of the egalitarian structure. There were around 37 position papers presented at the Waveland meeting. Hayden and King started to talk to each other about themselves as women, and as the staff started to question the vision for SNCC, they decided to "raise some things that were bothering [them] about the subordinate status of women in some projects, about the reflexive use of male organizers as spokesmen, and a potpourri of other concerns." King claims that she talked to other Black and white women including Ruth Howard, Muriel Tillinghast, Jean Wheeler Smith, Dona Richards, Theresa Del Pizza, and Emmie Shrader, and started to gather examples from bulletin boards, staff meetings, and memos.[74]

For example, in the position paper itself, King and Hayden identified inequalities between men and women such as:

> "A woman in a field office wondered why she was held responsible for day-to-day decisions, only to find out later that she had been appointed project director but not told...A fall 1964 personnel and resources report on Mississippi projects lists the number of people on each project. The section on Laurel, however, lists not the number of persons, but 'three girls'...One of SNCC's main administrative officers apologizes for appointment of a woman as interim project director in a key Mississippi project area...A veteran of two years' work for SNCC in two states spends her day typing and doing clerical work for other people in her project...Any woman in SNCC, no matter what her position or experience, has been asked to take minutes in a meeting when she and other women are outnumbered by men...Capable, responsible, and experienced women who are in leadership positions can expect to have to defer to a man on their project for final decisionmaking."[75]

The project in Laurel would have been referring to Gwen Simmons and the female volunteers who stayed on the project with her. The position paper later states that:

[74] Chatfield --, et al., 127-152.
[75] "SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Women in the Movement, November 1964. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/snccfem.htm.

> "Undoubtedly this list will seem strange to some, petty to others, laughable to most. The list could continue as far as there are women in the movement. Except that most women don't talk about these kinds of incidents, because the whole subject is not discussable...Consider why it is in SNCC that women who are competent, qualified, and experienced, are automatically assigned to the "female" kinds of jobs such as typing, desk work, telephone work, filing, library work, cooking, and the assistant kind of administrative work but rarely the "executive" kind."[76]

King and Hayden argued at the time that women were not happy with their status and felt that women's talents and experiences were being wasted; they felt that "women keep the movement running on a day-to-day basis but not receiving equal say when it comes to day-to-day decision making." They further argued that many women were as unaware on the subject as men were, and hoped that both men and women would understand the discrimination and "understand that this is no more a man's world than it is a white world."[77]

Another highly debated moment at the Waveland Conference was the night Stokely Carmichael stated that the "position of women in SNCC is prone."[78] Some women could have been bothered by this comment because many white people in several states were angered by the gathering of white and black individuals for the Freedom Summer and claimed that white women were only going to Mississippi in order to engage in sexual relationships. Particularly, during the Ohio orientation for the Freedom Summer, headlines both in and out of the state proclaimed, "Black Men and White Women Engaged in Orgies at the Mississippi Freedom Summer Orientation."[79] Many of the women, including King who was there, took Carmichael's comment

[76] "SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Women in the Movement, November 1964. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/snccfem.htm.
[77] SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement." Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Women in the Movement, November 1964. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/snccfem.htm.
[78] Kristin Anderson-Bricker. "'Triple Jeopardy': Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975." In *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*, ed. by Kimberly Springer (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 49-52.
[79] Simmons, "Little Memphis Girl," 25.

in a joking and light-hearted manner, and many responded in laughter as he was poking fun at several different issues. Although it was widely reported as a serious comment and picked up by feminist literature, that was not how King viewed the comment.[80] Joyce Ladner believed that she would not have gotten mad at Carmichael's comment but rather called him out, laughed about it and then moved on.[81] However, Cynthia Washington recalls that when she heard Carmichael's comment, she and Muriel Tillinghast were not pleased, but since they were project directors, they felt that their relative autonomy was proof that his comment was not true.[82]

In November 1965, King and Hayden wrote a second paper, "A Kind of Memo," revealing their perspective on gender discrimination in SNCC, and mailed this letter to 40 women activists across the country. These events, along with Stokely Carmichael's often reported comment, "the position of women in SNCC is prone" are marked as the beginning of the development of white women's second-wave feminism.[83] In the second position paper, Hayden and King posed the same questions about the structure, calling for a return to the basic values of the sit-ins and the early vision of SNCC. "A Kind of Memo" was sent to African American SNCC women including Dorie Ladner, Judy Richardson, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Muriel Tillinghast, and Cynthia Washington, and white women including Theresea del Pozzo, Betty Garman, Penny Patch, Mary Varela and Emmie Shrader.[84] Upon reflecting at the SNCC

[80] Volume 22, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.). 50th Anniversary Conference (2010 : Raleigh, N.C.), Natalie Bullock Brown, SNCC Legacy Project, Ascension Productions, and California Newsreel (Firm). Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 50th Anniversary, Shaw University, Raleigh NC: 1960-2010. [San Francisco, Calif.]: California Newsreel, 2011.
[81] Chatfield --, et al., 127-152.
[82] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.
[83] Kristin Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy': Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975," 49-52.
[84] Casey Hayden, and Mary King. "A Kind of Memo." Civil Rights Movement documents: A Kind of Memo, November 18, 1965. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/kindof.htm.

conferences, King clarifies that they were talking about larger gender issues in society, not just in SNCC.[85]

"A Kind of Memo" draws on "parallels" between the treatment of African Americans and the treatment of women; women being placed in a common-law caste system that operates, placing them in positions of inequality to men in work and personal situations. In the document, King and Hayden declared that "within the movement, questions arise in situations ranging from relationships of women organizers to men in the community, to who cleans the freedom house, to who holds leadership positions and acts as spokesman for groups" and there are "problems with relationships between white women and black women."[86] The tensions between Black and white women may have stemmed from the changing structure that resulted in their relationships shifting and how Black women viewed white women.[87] King and Hayden note that some men were supportive and wanted to discuss these issues while others were not and were defensive.[88] They further argue:

> "We've talked in the movement about trying to build a society which would see basic human problems, (which are now seen as private troubles), as public problems and would try to shape institutions to meet human needs rather than shaping people to meet the needs of those with power. To raise questions like those above illustrates very directly that society can't deal with real human problems and open discussions of why that is so."[89]

This section calls for a movement that fights for several different discriminatory social issues. However, it is still problematic to compare women's issues to that of the African

[85] Chatfield --, et al., 127-152.
[86] Casey Hayden, and Mary King. "A Kind of Memo." Civil Rights Movement documents: A Kind of Memo, November 18, 1965. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/kindof.htm.
[87] Barbara Ransby --, et al. *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000, 134-170.
[88] Chatfield --, et al., 127-152.
[89] Casey Hayden, and Mary King. "A Kind of Memo." Civil Rights Movement documents: A Kind of Memo, November 18, 1965. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/kindof.htm.

American experience since white women did not experience the brutalities of slavery and the systemic aftermath of the institution. Although this document can be read as moving toward the inclusion of many discriminatory issues in the movement, it is still written through white women's perspective that ignores the problems and issues that Black women specifically experience. Many of the Black women were unable to connect with what the white women were saying in the position papers because they did not face the same experiences with gender discrimination as the white women.

These feminist manifestos demonstrate how Black and white women's different histories, and their understanding of segregation and Southern culture, resulted in different understandings of their experiences as women in SNCC and Freedom Summer. These differing voices reveal the need to expand our current view of second-wave feminism to include the diverse experiences of both Black and white women. This shows that second-wave feminism was not a monolithic movement for only white women, but rather, a movement with its roots in the civil rights movement, beginning on an earlier timeline (before the late '60s and early '70s).

This was a very different perception of the role of women in SNCC than the Black women remembered and reflected on later on their lives. Even King and Hayden reflected on their experiences differently at the SNCC conferences describing how they felt nurtured and respected in SNCC. Specifically, Hayden reflected at the 40th anniversary conference in 2000 that she appreciated SNCC's structure of the notion to raise up new leaders, to rotate leaders, and she looked up to Ella Baker because of the value that was assigned to women in SNCC.[90]

When Hayden and King reflected on the position papers later in their lives, they justified the statements by contextualizing why they felt the way they did because the structure of SNCC

[90] Tapes 1 & 2, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.). 40th Anniversary Conference (2000: Raleigh, N.C.), David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

was changing, and they wanted to know if there would be room to discuss other social issues, such as pursuing a women's agenda in the context of the civil rights movement. Hayden, upset about the changing structure, felt that after 1965 SNCC lost its ability to be "nurturing" which was what she considered to be "radically feminine" about the structure of SNCC.[91] Since King and Hayden wrote the position paper from the perspective of white women who came to SNCC with different experiences of race and gender than Black women, they could have been dissatisfied with performing more office-like tasks since white women during the '60s were starting to question stereotypically assigned gender roles that were associated with domestic labor.[92]

However, the Black women who reflected on their experiences at the SNCC conferences remembered feeling respected, proud of the roles they played in the movement, and believed that they did take part in decision-making. These differences may stem from the fact that many of the Black women were focused purely on racial injustice, and were not actively thinking about gender discrimination, and/or that they held higher and more influential positions so they could have felt that they were more "seen" by men.[93] In addition, the different long histories of labor in the U.S. may have affected how the women perceived their roles in the movement. Since these two documents were written in 1964 and 1965 and widely publicized, it is easier to analyze how the white women felt about their roles in SNCC at this time. In contrast, there are no easily accessible documents written by Black women in 1964 and 1965. However, it is important to analyze the Black women's reflections and memories, through an intersectional lens, in order to emphasize the important leadership and organizing by women in the second-wave.

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[91] Chatfield --, et al., 127-152.
[92] Evans, 60-101.
[93] Holsaert --, et al., 9-32, 240-250, 250-257 & 348-366; Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.

At the conference for SNCC veterans at Trinity College in 1988; SNCC's 40th anniversary conference in 2000; and 50th anniversary conference of SNCC's founding in 2010, both Black and white women reflected on the issue regarding the role of women in SNCC, realizing the distinction between the contribution of women before and after 1965. As a result of the Freedom Summer in 1964 and the influx of mostly white volunteers, SNCC transitioned to a centralized power structure. A centralized power structure resulted in women losing a great degree of their power since the men of the group moved to a gender hierarchy in regard to leadership positions, and whites were pushed out of the group. The period in which feminist experiences, variously defined for Black and white women, ended as a result of centralization after 1965. This is why it is important to analyze the feminist actions performed by SNCC women before 1965, and particularly during the Freedom Summer.

This change undercut the sense of community and identity among activists and centralization and hierarchy eliminated the aspect of SNCC that was so powerful, which was to leave a community with strong indigenous leadership.[94] The rise of Black Power in SNCC began to alienate the founders, and many did not want to be pushed out by new leaders so they withdrew.[95] Some of the African American women felt lost and felt like what was most special about SNCC was gone, which was the beloved community, so they ultimately left the organization.[96] More white women than Black women were affected by the disintegration because African American SNCC workers decided to push whites out explicitly.[97]

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[94] Robnett, 115-139.
[95] Payne, 338-340.
[96] Judy Richardson, "SNCC: My Enduring 'Circle of Trust,'" in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*, ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 348-366.
[97] Mary King, "Getting Out the News," in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*, ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 332-344; Casey Hayden, "In The Attics of My Mind," in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*, ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 381-388.

However, other women like Gwen Patton supported Black Power, and felt that whites should form their own organizations to fight against racism, because they did not understand the pain of Black individuals and families, and felt that a revolution of free Black people was on the horizon.[98] Upon reflection, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan argues against the negative perspective that Black nationalism grew out of disappointment and anger due to the loss of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) Challenge and the "white takeover," but rather advocates for reflecting on the positive achievements that came as a result of Black pride.[99]

However, Judy Richardson remembers that after the Waveland, Mississippi retreat in 1964, and after they lost the MFDP challenge, she felt really lost as the meeting was composed of a majority of white people, and they felt like strangers. The student volunteers were unlike the white SNCC staffers who they forged bonds with over the years. Waveland was the beginning of the end for her, and she did not consider herself part of the nationalist strain in SNCC. Since the structure of SNCC became centralized and dominated by movement men during the late 1960s, it is important to shed light on the opportunities that Black women had to find their voices in SNCC before the movement changed in 1965.[100]

Black Women's Reactions to the Position of Women in SNCC

Cynthia Washington, a project director in SNCC, reflected on a conversation she had with Casey Hayden in the fall of 1964, in which she complained that the women's roles in SNCC were limited to typing and office work. She believed that Hayden and the other white women wanted an opportunity to prove that they could do something other than office work, and she

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[98] Gwen Patton, "Born Freedom Fighter," in *Hands On the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*, ed. Faith S. Holsaert --, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 572-587.

[99] Volume 22, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.). 50th Anniversary Conference (2010 : Raleigh, N.C.), Natalie Bullock Brown, SNCC Legacy Project, Ascension Productions, and California Newsreel (Firm). Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 50th Anniversary, Shaw University, Raleigh NC: 1960-2010. [San Francisco, Calif.]: California Newsreel, 2011.

[100] Richardson, "SNCC: My Enduring 'Circle of Trust," 348-366.

assumed that if they could do something else, they would. She did not understand at the time why they were complaining because being a "project director" was not much fun.[101]

In accordance with Beal, Glymph, and Davis's analysis of the difference between Black and white women, Washington claims that Black women were "raised to function independently," and it was necessary for black women to learn how to do "all the things required to survive" because "the notion of retiring to housewifery" was "not a reasonable fantasy" for them. Washington highlights how "it seemed to many of [them], on the other hand, that white women were demanding a chance to be independent while [they] needed help and assistance which was not always forthcoming…."[102] This supports the understanding that white and Black women came to the movement with different histories of labor and this affected how they turned to their roles in the movement. Washington further describes:

> "I remember discussions with various women about our treatment as one of the boys and its impact on us as women. We did the same work as men -- organizing around voter registration and community issues in rural areas -- usually with men. But when we finally got back to some town where we could relax and go out, the men went out with other women. Our skills and abilities were recognized and respected, but that seemed to place us in some category other than female. Some years later, I was told by a male SNCC worker that some of the project women had made him feel superfluous. I wish he had told me that at the time because the differences in the way women were treated certainly did add to the tension between black and white women."[103]

Like many of the other Black women, Washington also felt like her skills were recognized and respected, but she felt like she was placed in a category other than female, meaning they were respected on a work level but this may have affected their personal and intimate relationships with the SNCC men. Since the female project directors were performing

[101] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.
[102] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.
[103] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.

equal tasks to men as leaders, the men may have been intimidated by them and questioned their femininity, in the traditional sense of the word. However, this did not affect how African Americans wanted to lead and be a part of creating change in the civil rights movement. When she reflected on her memories in 1977, she recalled that she was more involved with women, discussing the impact of race, class, and culture and her "involvement in the women's movement [was] still unfolding."[104] For Washington, she started to bridge more of an intersectional approach, after her involvement in SNCC, as both Black and white feminist concepts became more prevalent in the 1970s. Instead of just focusing solely on achieving racial equality, she started to bridge an understanding that all aspects of oppression intertwine, and that in order for Black individuals to be liberated, women and other diverse identities need to be included in that analysis.[105] Therefore, this is why it is so important to go back and view the Freedom Summer through an intersectional lens in order to determine how women's identities affected their experiences.

Washington was "certain that [their] single-minded focus on the issues of racial discrimination and the black struggle for equality blinded [them] to other issues…"[106] Washington's perception supports Hayden and King's point that many women were unaware of the subject of gender discrimination. However, Hayden and King's depiction seems more negative than Washington's experience, because of the time and circumstances in which Black women were focusing on race in a movement dedicated to race. It seems that several of the African American women in SNCC were solely dedicated to race, and were not questioning issues of gender at that point. However, Black women were still performing feminist actions with

[104] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.
[105] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.
[106] Cynthia Washington. "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum." Southern Exposure, 4:4 (1977), 14.

their organizing and leadership, even in the context of the civil rights movement. These differences in experiences may have resulted in tensions between Black and white women in SNCC, mostly after Freedom Summer, because they did not understand each other's perspectives at the time.

After Joyce Ladner, a Black SNCC woman, met people like Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and Miss Ella Baker, she reflected that "none of these women [she] began to meet knew they were oppressed because of their gender; no one had ever told them that." She also felt like it was important to meet other local Mississippians who had grown up feeling "stifled."[107]

> "They were like my mother...they had grown up in a culture where they had had the opportunity to use all of their skills and all of their talents to fight racial and class oppression, more racial than anything else. They took their sexuality for granted, for it was not as problematic to them as their race and their poverty. And perhaps they didn't know they were oppressed because of their gender, they were so busy trying to survive and fight day to day. It would have been a luxury for my mother to focus on gender concerns. It would never have occurred to her; neither would it have occurred to me at that time because it was not a problem, it was never problematic."[108]

Similar to Washington's experience, Ladner also believed that because they were so focused on fighting for racial equality, gender discrimination was not even on their minds.[109] This further demonstrates that since the Black women were not explicitly discussing gender discrimination during the '60s, their feminist actions could go unnoticed, if not viewed through an intersectional lens.

[107] Chatfield --, et al, 127-152.
[108] Chatfield --, et al, 142.
[109] Chatfield --, et al, 127-152.

Although women never officially chaired SNCC, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson dominated SNCC. At the time, there was a running joke whether Jim Forman or Ruby Doris Smith Robinson ran the SNCC office. Because of its anti-authoritarian nature, no one was bothered about the chairman position and if someone began to emerge, they'd bring them right back down.[110] Ladner reflected that:

> "....for many of us, SNCC gave us the first structured opportunity to really use our potential, to use our abilities, and to express our views on the world, the state of the world. We assumed we were equal. We were treated that way."[111]

For instance, Ladner remembers that when the men were driving, they would push the women down to the floor when they saw danger approaching. Ladner never wanted to sit in the front of the car because she understood that for Black Southern people, the men were protecting them as a brother would protect his sister. Ladner presented with a different set of experiences as an outsider from the North and recalled that "you might have perceived that to have been discrimination or whatever. Maybe you would have wanted to drive."[112] Ladner recognized that depending on the context and perspective a woman brought to SNCC, the same event could have different meanings for different women. According to Ladner, scholars have been wrong, that:

> "Feminism emerged because of dissension within the ranks. Rather, feminism is an outgrowth; it emerged because SNCC served as a model, a prototype of what could become a better kind of society. It gave rise to not only a feminist consciousness but other groups like gay people, the elderly, students, a whole range of people within the society who had also been oppressed. They began to use the SNCC model to pattern their own movement."[113]

[110] Chatfield --, et al, 140-143.
[111] Chatfield --, et al, 140-145.
[112] Chatfield --, et al, 145.
[113] Chatfield --, et al, 145.

Joyce Ladner does not define herself alongside the traditional white-feminist scholarship and critiques the work of Sara Evan's as revisionist. She believes that she could do anything a man could do and was not limited by her gender because everyone was united under the same "common foe" of a hostile racist society.[114] Therefore, this also emphasizes the importance of why we cannot just analyze the white women's perspectives like Hayden and King's because that leaves out the important leadership and organizing in the second-wave being conducted by African American women.

At the SNCC conference in 1988, Wheeler Smith described that, "I did anything I was big enough to do and I got help from everybody around me for any project that I wanted to pursue."[115] When she volunteered to travel to Philadelphia, Mississippi where the three workers were killed, no one told her "You're a girl, you can't go." She felt supported by the decisions she made; Bob Moses asked if she wanted to go to the Convention Challenge, and she declined because she felt like there was more work to be done in Philadelphia. She further highlights that with the structure of SNCC, at least before 1965, they were such an egalitarian group that there was not much room for "limitation imposed by structure." As many others, she believed that even though people had titles, they did not matter with the work they did.[116] Her sense was that:

> "....although admittedly the administrative structure of paper was men, the women had access to whatever resources and decision making that they needed to have or wanted to have, and I don't remember being impeded in this."[117]

Although Wheeler Smith's perception of allocation of resources for women is different from that of Gwendolyn Simmons, their differing accounts are important because they were all

[114] Chatfield --, et al, 127-152.
[115] Chatfield --, et al, 127-152.
[116] Chatfield --, et al, 127-152.
[117] Chatfield --, et al, 138.

individual women experiencing the movement in different ways and coming to terms with what it meant to be a woman in SNCC in 1964 and 1965.[118] Wheeler Smith reflects:

> "I was thinking about what could be the reason for why this difference in opinion has developed. I don't claim to know much about the women's movement, so this is speculation, but I think one reason is it's convenient difference…Maybe also there were some differences between the way the black women in the organization experienced their situation and the way the white women experienced it...Casey and I seem to have had about the same experience, but it may be that that changed in later times and that after about 1965 people didn't feel as much a part of the organization and how things were being run."[119]

When addressing the controversy over the role of women in SNCC, Wheeler Smith exclaims, "I felt and experienced just the opposite. SNCC was a liberating experience for me as a woman. The staff, including Stokely Carmichael, always treated me as an esteemed member of the team and always encouraged me to stretch my wings and fly. In the SNCC that I knew the message was 'Do whatever you are big enough to do.'"[120]After reflecting on their experiences at the reunion conferences, the African American women did not feel like there was any gender discrimination that they could not confront. Even if the white and Black women's perceptions of their memoires changed later on in their lives, it is still important to evaluate the reflections of their experiences in order to include African American women into the second-wave feminist narrative through an intersectional lens. Overall, the African American women's reactions to the position papers shows how their experiences in SNCC, and particularly during Freedom Summer, allowed them to grow and lead in a major civil rights organization alongside the men, which may have been a different experience from that of the white women. This supports the

[118] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.
[119] Chatfield --, et al, 139.
[120] Smith Young, "Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do," 240-250.

need to expand the definition of feminism to feminism(s) in order to include more diverse narratives of Freedom Summer and the year that followed.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, the different backgrounds, skill sets, and histories of labor and gender relationships that Black and white women brought to SNCC affected their experiences and how they felt they were treated during the movement. After the Freedom Summer of 1964, Black women were able to step into higher and more influential positions and they felt empowered by their experiences and ability to contribute to a major civil rights organization. Even though white women generally held more supportive roles while the Black women led, the decentralized, group-oriented structure of SNCC, provided for different experiences and roles for each individual woman in the movement.

That is why it is important to study the women themselves and their distinct, individual experiences. This highlights how feminism can be analyzed in the plural form of feminism(s), because feminism is more diverse than is traditionally studied, and is not limited to white women. Even though during 1964 and 1965, King and Hayden felt like they were restricted by their gender, as the women later reflected on their experiences in SNCC at the SNCC reunion conferences, they recognized that the nurturing nature of SNCC contributed greatly to their future lives as women. By expanding on both feminist and SNCC scholarship, I have shown that second-wave feminism is not a monolithic movement for just white women, but rather can be viewed as a continuous movement that took roots in the civil rights movement with the SNCC Black women who led and established their voices during the Freedom Summer of 1964, and the year that followed.

By analyzing the Freedom Summer of 1964 through an intersectional lens, and comparing the experiences of the African American and white women in SNCC, we can better

understand the differences in Black and white feminist scholarship focused on this time-period. Through an intersectional lens, I shed light on the stories of the Black SNCC women, who have traditionally been left out of white focused narratives. The oral histories of the African American SNCC women reflecting on their memories at the SNCC reunion conferences, in their memoirs and in previously conducted interviews, provide another perspective which allows us to expand traditional white second-wave feminist scholarship to include the African American women's experiences. Finally, through an intersectional approach like my own, historical events can be re-read in order to elevate African American voices and tell their stories that have often been suppressed in U.S. history.

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