

THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE AND  
RACIAL DYNAMICS: THE IMPORTANCE OF SNCC'S  
ARKANSAS PROJECT, 1962-1966

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In this thesis I look at the Arkansas Project and more specifically the racial dynamics within the project and the surrounding communities in Arkansas where SNCC engaged to assist the residents fight for their civil rights. In addition, I analyze how the differences in the urban and rural communities were affected by the racial dynamics of the project's leadership. The Arkansas project was led by William Hansen, a white man, which made him and the project unique from not only other SNCC projects, but other civil rights organizations. This distinction made the strategy that had to be implemented with the project staff internally and also externally in the Arkansas communities different because his race had to be taken into consideration for all purposes. Another aspect that came into play in Arkansas was the fact that some of their activities occurred in urban communities and others occurred in rural communities. These difference in communities affected not only how the local blacks received the SNCC volunteers, but also affected how local whites received the SNCC volunteers.

Although the fact that the Arkansas Project had a white field director made it unique and the racial dynamics worthy of scholarly investigation, Bill Hansen's racial identity was far from the only reason that the organization's work in Arkansas is historically significant. This thesis also looks at the important activities in which SNCC engaged and impacted because of their presence in Arkansas. Of those activities, SNCC impacted the creation of several local groups where local citizens helped to fight

for their civil rights, in fighting for their civil rights, those groups engaged in sit-ins, protests, and fighting legal battles in court where some of their cases made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court and impacted the civil rights movement in the south. Two important legal cases that had ramifications for the civil rights movement beyond the state that originated in Arkansas. The cases of *Lupper v. State of Arkansas* and *Raney v. Board of Education* made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court out of Arkansas. They helped shape the civil rights movement because *Lupper* helped clarify sit-in cases and the constitutionality of the arrests. The arrests were deemed unconstitutional because the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination in places of public accommodation and allowed peaceful attempts to be served like any other member of the public from punishable activities in spite of the fact the activities occurred prior to the date of its enactment. In addition, *Raney* helped define desegregation efforts in the south as many states attempted to avoid the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by implementing “freedom of choice plans.” Freedom of choice plans were state attempts to circumvent the *Brown* decision by making the students and their family choose which school they would attend. These cases helped shape the civil rights movement and dealt with sit ins and integrating schools. This thesis provides an important addition to the scholarship about SNCC and SNCC’s Arkansas Project.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	1
CHAPTER 2. THE ARKANSAS SIT-INS AND SNCC .....	16
CHAPTER 3. SNCC AND THE ARKANSAS DELTA.....	49
CHAPTER 4. THE CITY OF GOULD, ARKANSAS – A CASE STUDY.....	96
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION .....	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	118

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Map of Pulaski County, Arkansas, <a href="https://pulaskicounty.net/about-us/">https://pulaskicounty.net/about-us/</a> .....	17
Figure 2: Photo of Bill Hansen <a href="https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790">https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790</a> .....	24
Figure 3: Picture of student sit-in protest at Little Rock lunch counter. <a href="https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790">https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790</a> .....	40
Figure 4: Map of Jefferson County, Arkansas, <a href="https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-jefferson-county-6760/">https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-jefferson-county-6760/</a> .....	50
Figure 5: Map of Lincoln County, Arkansas, <a href="https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-lincoln-county-6765/">https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-lincoln-county-6765/</a> .....	58
Figure 6: Picture of <i>Pine Bluff Commercial</i> articles about sit-in movement, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972 (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982) .....	61
Figure 7: Map of Phillips County, Arkansas, <a href="https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-phillips-county-6779/">https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-phillips-county-6779/</a> .....	70
Figure 8: Map of St. Francis County, Arkansas, <a href="https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-st-francis-county-6793/">https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-st-francis-county-6793/</a> .....	77

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the spring of 1960, prior to The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) arrival in Arkansas, approximately fifty Philander Smith College students entered F.W. Woolworth's in downtown Little Rock and requested service. Spurred on by the sit-ins taking place throughout the South, these students had decided to engage in the move for civil rights. The Little Rock sit-ins took place mostly at the lunch counters located at Woolworth's, Walgreens, and Blass Department Stores. The first sit-in occurred at Woolworth's lunch counter where the students engaged in a sit-in after the manager refused them service and notified the police chief of the protest. When Eugene G. Smith, the Little Rock Police Chief, arrived and ordered the students to leave, all but a handful left the premises peacefully. Charles Parker, Frank James, Vernon Mott, Eldridge Davis, and Chester Briggs refused to leave and were arrested.<sup>1</sup> This event continued the civil rights sit-in movement in Arkansas.

In 1960, the young people who organized sit-ins in Little Rock could be galvanized by examples of successful protests staged elsewhere, but they also acted while remembering the extreme backlash of the white establishment during the Little Rock Crisis a few years prior. While the sit-in movement in Little Rock started out strong, the spark started to fade after a while. After the Philander Smith College students' 1960 protest fizzled during the summer because their leadership was missing,

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<sup>1</sup> William Hansen, "Field Report - October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962," (Arkansas 1962). John A. Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas: Little Rock, Lupper, and the Law," in *Arsnick : The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 30.



SNCC arrived in Little Rock to rejuvenate the protests. SNCC leaders remained in Little Rock to lead desegregation efforts, remaining active in the state until 1967. The racial environment in Arkansas prior to the arrival of William Hansen and SNCC was not as peaceful as it appeared to those viewing it from the outside, based on Arkansas's exclusion from the civil rights discussion other than the 1957 Little Rock Crisis. Prior to the Little Rock Crisis, Little Rock had a reputation as a "moderate Upper South city in a progressive Upper South State."<sup>2</sup> After the Little Rock Crisis, many Arkansans felt embarrassed by the national and international attention. Moderates often met civil rights activists in the middle in an effort to avoid another Little Rock Crisis and all the negative media attention that came with it. Extremists on the other hand did not even want to come to the negotiating table. They would do whatever they could to keep the status quo by legal or extralegal means. This is the backdrop with which the civil rights movement progressed in Arkansas, especially Little Rock.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the civil rights movement arrived in Arkansas, there were other incidents that preceded it that actually brought on the sit-in movement in Arkansas. On February 1, 1960, four black students from the historically black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College conducted a sit-in at the Woolworth store in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina, to challenge its whites-only lunch counter policy. Within the week, more than three hundred students engaged in sit-ins at downtown lunch counters throughout the South. The sit-ins began a movement of protests by black students and white

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<sup>2</sup> *Beyond Little Rock : The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 27; Iwan W. Morgan and Philip Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

supporters that would be vitally important for the success of the civil rights movement. The distinguishing feature of the civil rights movement emerging in the 1950s was the use of “direct action” techniques in cities throughout the South, which was a major focus of SNCC.<sup>4</sup>

The groundswell of sit-ins that followed the success of the Greensboro sit-ins only increased the self-confidence of student protesters. In a meeting led by stalwart civil rights organizer Ella Baker, student activists from all over the South came together on April 16-18, 1960, in Raleigh, North Carolina. This was the beginning of SNCC. Baker at the time was the executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). While SCLC helped to commence the coming together of the student activists, Baker understood that the student activists needed to remain separate of older adult control and other civil rights groups thereby maintaining their own autonomy. The creation of SNCC was a critical step in the change of a limited student movement to desegregate public lunch counters into a prolonged extensive movement to achieve broad social change.<sup>5</sup>

Baker decided to bring the student activists together in Raleigh because she realized that most of the student protesters were ill prepared to lead such a large undertaking. She hoped that in bringing the students together they would be able to learn from one another and gain a sufficient amount of knowledge and skills for the

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<sup>4</sup> *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*, 1. Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (1991): 462-64; *ibid.*, 464.

<sup>5</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 19.

movement to endure.<sup>6</sup> As historian Wesley Hogan observed, “to sustain nonviolent direct action—actively challenging the segregated system as opposed to choosing not to ride a bus—required a different array of internal resources[, and] the workshops provided space to develop these resources.”<sup>7</sup>

Baker did not want the meeting to be disruptive of the autonomy of local student protest groups already formed and operating. While Baker did not necessarily intend the formation of a permanent organization, her long history in social protest organizing persuaded her that a new type of protest organization was necessary to inspire real prolonged change through protests from blacks. Baker praised the group-centered leadership that the students used in their groups, which was different from the other black civil rights organizations which used a top down approach to leadership.<sup>8</sup>

This conference was the most successful gathering of the protest leaders that took place during the spring of 1960. One of the biggest delegations of students to attend the Raleigh conference was the group of students from Nashville. This group of students would play a prominent role in SNCC's development, providing the greatest number of leaders. The most notable of the students from the Nashville group were Marion Barry, Diane Nash, John Lewis, and James Lawson. The Nashville group kept in enough control of the protests to guarantee that they continued to be nonviolent. Their rules for maintaining nonviolent protests became the model rules for protests throughout

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart : Sncc's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 600.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 20.

the South.<sup>9</sup>

One major concern to the students attending the conference was that the creation of a coordinating committee would allow the student protest movement to be immersed into the other already existing civil rights organizations. With the support of Baker, the student delegates decided to create a temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee that would not be associated with any existing civil rights organizations but would collaborate with all of the existing civil rights organizations to attain their goals. SNCC was created on the premise that its permanent condition would be defined subsequently.<sup>10</sup> As historian Clayborne Carson observed, “SNCC’s founding was an important step in the transformation of a limited student movement to desegregate lunch counters into a broad and sustained movement to achieve major social reforms.” Later the Temporary Nonviolent Coordinating Committee became just the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee acknowledging that the road to civil rights would not be a temporary one. The formation of SNCC confirmed the emergence of a new group in the struggle for black civil rights in the South.<sup>11</sup> The increase of civil rights sit-ins by black students and their white sympathizers across the South took the entire country and the South by storm.<sup>12</sup>

On May 13-14, 1960, eleven students met for the first SNCC meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. Baker gave the students SNCC office space in a corner of the SCLC headquarters and also allowed SNCC to use the resources of the SCLC to help offset

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan and Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*, 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2.

some of the startup costs in addition. Baker recruited Jane Stembridge, a white activist, to run the SNCC office until someone more permanent could be located. Stembridge and other SNCC volunteers published the first issue of the *Student Voice*, SNCC's official newspaper. Some civil rights organizations wanted SNCC to grow into a permanent organization because SNCC allowed those other civil rights organizations to maintain easier contact with southern black activists.<sup>13</sup>

In July of 1960, Robert Moses joined Baker and Stembridge at SNCC. By the end of the summer, SNCC still had little influence on the student protest movement, but it was beginning to gain momentum. In fact, the momentum was picking up in Arkansas. The students at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas, began to engage in sit-ins in downtown Little Rock and started talking with SNCC about what they were doing in Arkansas. Frank James, the leader of this early student movement in Little Rock wrote to Marion Barry, the chairman of SNCC to tell him the current state of affairs in Little Rock and Arkansas as a whole. SNCC invited James to attend the August 5-7, 1960, meeting in Atlanta, Georgia and also keep SNCC informed of what was happening in Arkansas. In fact, not only did SNCC want James to attend the meeting but the President of Philander Smith believed it was a good idea that James attend the SNCC meeting. This support for the Philander Smith students by the school administration was different than what the students at Arkansas AM&N received from the school administration when the students engaged in civil disobedience to desegregate Pine Bluff, Arkansas. This was likely due to the fact that Philander Smith was a private college while Arkansas AM&N was public school and therefore in need of

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<sup>13</sup> Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*.

state funds for operations. In addition, it's possible that the location and thus the attitudes were different. Philander Smith was located in the more urban Little Rock while, Arkansas AM&N was located in the much more rural Pine Bluff. During a follow up conference in Atlanta on October 14-16, 1960, SNCC met to develop a permanent organizational structure. SNCC created a Coordinating Committee comprised of one delegate from each southern state and the District of Columbia. This conference marked a watershed moment in the progress of the student protest movement. It was at this time that SNCC removed the temporary status from its name and became a permanent civil rights organization.<sup>14</sup>

While SNCC continued to evolve, it questioned whether SNCC should continue to “be a medium of communication and coordination among protest groups” or instigator of “protest activities and civil right projects.” SNCC was hesitant to take a more aggressive role because most of the members of SNCC believed that local community groups should define their own course. In other words, SNCC believed that grass-roots protests were more effective because the local-residents were the masters of their own fate as they had more local historical knowledge. By focusing on the grass-roots level, scholars are able to illuminate black protests and also the important issue of “whether the freedom movement of the 1950s and the 1960s continued a previous protest tradition or started a new one.”<sup>15</sup>

The two most written about testing grounds for SNCC's grass-roots community

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<sup>14</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972* (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982), Reel 1; Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 26-29.

<sup>15</sup> *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 30. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," 464.

organizing were located in Southwest Georgia and Mississippi. Often left out of the conversation is SNCC's work in Arkansas, which is omitted from the scholarly history of SNCC or treated as an afterthought. In this thesis I look at the Arkansas Project and more specifically the racial dynamics within the project and the surrounding communities in Arkansas where SNCC engaged to assist the residents fight for their civil rights. In addition, I analyze how the differences in the urban and rural communities were affected by the racial dynamics of the project's leadership. The Arkansas project was led by William Hansen, a white man, which made him and the project unique from not only other SNCC projects, but other civil rights organizations. This distinction made the strategy that had to be implemented with the project staff internally and also externally in the Arkansas communities different because his race had to be taken into consideration for all purposes. For example, going into different towns to make first contact with the black residents, consideration had to be taken about whether to send in a white man to try to rally up the residents because blacks did not trust whites, especially when it was regarding stirring up "trouble" and pushing for civil rights. Another example of how this could play out was how to engage in a sit in because sometimes whites were treated worse than black sit-in protesters because whites saw white protesters as a sellout to their own race. Another aspect that came into play in Arkansas was the fact that some of their activities occurred in urban communities and others occurred in rural communities. These difference in communities affected not only how the local blacks received the SNCC volunteers, but also affected how local whites received the SNCC volunteers.

Although the fact that the Arkansas Project had a white field director made it

unique and the racial dynamics worthy of scholarly investigation, Bill Hansen's racial identity was far from the only reason that the organization's work in Arkansas is historically significant. This thesis also looks at the important activities in which SNCC engaged and impacted because of their presence in Arkansas. Of those activities, SNCC impacted the creation of several local groups where local citizens helped to fight for their civil rights, in fighting for their civil rights, those groups engaged in sit-ins, protests, and fighting legal battles in court where some of their cases made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court and impacted the civil rights movement in the south. That two important legal cases that had ramifications for the civil rights movement beyond the state that originated in Arkansas. The cases of *Lupper v. State of Arkansas*<sup>16</sup> and *Raney v. Board of Education*<sup>17</sup> made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court out of Arkansas. They helped shape the civil rights movement because *Lupper* helped clarify sit-in cases and the constitutionality of the arrests. The arrests were deemed unconstitutional because the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination in places of public accommodation and allowed peaceful attempts to be served like any other member of the public from punishable activities in spite of the fact the activities occurred prior to the date of its enactment. In addition, *Raney* helped define desegregation efforts in the south as many states attempted to avoid the *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>18</sup> decision by implementing "freedom of choice plans." Freedom of choice plans were state attempts to circumvent the *Brown* decision by making the

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<sup>16</sup> *Lupper v. Arkansas*, 379 U.S. 306 (1964).

<sup>17</sup> *Raney v. Board of Education of Gould*, 391 U.S. 443 (1968).

<sup>18</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).



students and their family choose which school they would attend. Most of the time both black students remained in their old school, and all of the time white students remained in their old school, which delayed integration as was planned. These cases helped shape the civil rights movement and dealt with sit ins and integrating schools.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis provides an important addition to the scholarship about SNCC and SNCC's Arkansas Project. Initially, the scholarship of the civil rights movement focused on national movements and then continued away from the idea of protests lead by national organizers that impacted national civil rights laws and focused more awareness on grass-roots efforts. There have been several books written about the civil rights movement that spoke about SNCC's journey and about SNCC specifically. Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* spotlights the evolution of SNCC all the way to its promotion of Black Power and the expulsion of whites from SNCC under Stokely Carmichael.<sup>20</sup>

Clayborne Carson's book is the seminal book on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Carson took a top down approach, where he focused more on SNCC's leaders, major events, and projects rather than the volunteers at the grassroots level. Working at a grass roots level and staying in the community was one of the things that separated SNCC from the other civil rights organizations. Carson's central theme is the evolution of SNCC's radicalism. One of the weaknesses of *In Struggle* is that

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<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Dawson Burlage, "Truths of the Heart," in *Deep in Our Hearts : Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000). ("Many districts came up with freedom of choice plans, which in practice put the full burden on the shoulders of black parents, who exercised that choice and enrolled their children in previously all while schools. The black families who enrolled their children or even made their intention know they would enroll faced harassment, intimidation and violence over that decision.")

<sup>20</sup> Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," 457.

Carson fails to touch on SNCC's Arkansas Project in any meaningful way. Carson's failure to discuss the Arkansas Project while mentioning every other meaningful activity in which SNCC engaged suggests that SNCC's programs in the Arkansas were less than noteworthy. This failure is important because it encouraged subsequent SNCC scholars to fail to give the Arkansas Project its due. While Carson focuses on national issues, in *Refining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970*, John Kirk explores civil rights in Arkansas at a grassroots level.

John Kirk has provided an important and much needed study of civil rights activity in Arkansas for the thirty years after 1940. *Redefining the Color Line* fills a major hole in the historical record by focusing on the involvement of Little Rock's local black community in the fight for civil rights before, during and after the Little Rock crisis. Kirk is successful in portraying the everyday struggle by blacks in desegregating Little Rock. Somewhat similarly, Charles M. Payne explores local grassroots issues in one community in Mississippi in his groundbreaking book, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*.

Charles M. Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* examines the determination of SNCC to coordinate blacks in Greenwood, Mississippi during the early 1960s. While typically histories of the civil rights movement focus on a series of events such as boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and voter registration action, Payne's thesis and focus is on the fact that the Mississippi movement was a movement about the people. This is what makes *I've Got the Light of Freedom* different. Typically, books on the civil rights movement and SNCC focused on the leaders and not the local citizens who SNCC organized to make inroads when they arrived in town. A significant part of his main thesis was the argument that civil rights activists of the 1960s were not rare but were

based on the organizing tradition that started decades before and included those such as Ella Baker whose ideas had a lasting impact on the students of SNCC. This book has a more bottom up approach to viewing SNCC. Continuing to look at civil rights from a more grass-roots perspective was what Wesley C. Hogan did in *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America*, where Hogan examined SNCC's evolution from a national perspective and rather than focusing on the events, she also tackles issues of the workers looking at the national organization.

In this book, Hogan examines the evolution of SNCC from beginning to end. Hogan explored SNCC's decisions, strategies, struggles, and tactics to survey SNCC's intricate and compelling legacy. Her reflection of the impact of issues like race and gender on SNCC provides a significant impression of what it was like for the volunteers in SNCC. Hogan spent time focused not just on the leadership but also the everyday workers in SNCC's fight for civil rights in the 1960s. The book is a valuable complement to other institutional biographies such as Clayborne Carson's groundbreaking study, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Work about the grassroots level continued with first-hand accounts of volunteers and others that worked with the people that are recorded in *Arsnick: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*. The focus of this text is on first-hand accounts of SNCC in Arkansas instead of nationally or in Mississippi.

Editors Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk compiled a stunning series of first-hand accounts, scholarly articles, and historical documents of the struggle for civil rights in Arkansas. *Arsnick* provides accounts of different issues that historians have formerly omitted from the history of the struggle for civil rights in Arkansas. This

historical book focuses on the creation and progression of the grass-roots civil rights movement fight against Jim Crow in the Arkansas Delta. These first-hand accounts provide insight into the uniqueness and complications of desegregation efforts in the most overlooked program in SNCC's protest movement. Arkansas provides access into the part of SNCC's history that had been missing. These primary source materials focus on SNCC's desire to desegregate places of public accommodations in Arkansas, specifically the delta region. This thesis builds upon these stories and analyze how these experiences impacted SNCC's ability to desegregate Arkansas. The following year, *Hands on the Freedom Plow* brought together several women who had experiences with SNCC to tell their stories.

Editors Faith S. Holsaert, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, Judy Richardson, Betty Gorman Robinson, Jean Smith Young, and Dorothy M. Zellner compiled *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, which contains a collection of primary sources written by female members of SNCC. This book expands on the historiography of the civil rights movement by providing the experiences of women connected with SNCC. The statements of these fifty-two female activists collectively capture the recollections of women who were vital to SNCC's transformation of the civil rights movement between 1960 and 1969. *Hands on the Freedom Plow* is important because it focuses on local black communities that played major roles and fought for civil rights even before SNCC arrived on the scene. Many of the women credit local black residents and groups for providing the student workers food and living accommodations, and even protection from violence. However, *Hands on the Freedom Plow* exposes that local black residents were often fearful of SNCC members coming into their community because local blacks

viewed these strangers as members of the white power structure that were already discriminating against them. *Hands on the Freedom Plow* is a reminder that women played a vital role in the civil rights movement. Collectively, the contributors provide, as Wesley Hogan did, deeper consideration of the experiences and challenges that women faced during the civil rights movement.

This thesis takes this historiographical evolution further by exploring SNCC at the local and grassroots level with a focus on SNCC's Arkansas Project and examining the varying inclusion of races and leadership within the Arkansas Project that differed from other SNCC projects and civil rights organizations.

In chapter 2 I analyze what it was like in Little Rock prior to SNCC's arrival to assist in the push for equal rights for blacks. Chapter 2 also provides details of the movement once SNCC arrived, looking at how local blacks desegregated Little Rock with the help of SNCC. Chapter 2 explores what Little Rock was like politically after the Little Rock crisis and what led up to the first student sit-ins in 1960. This chapter also delves into what happened in Little Rock once SNCC arrived in 1962 to bring life back to the sit-in movement that had started to falter and how SNCC desegregated Little Rock along with the strategy and approaches that SNCC used once they arrived in Little Rock. This chapter examines who William Hansen was and the relationships that Hansen built with the student protesters that he worked with in achieving SNCC's goals.

Chapter 3 focuses on the years 1963-1965 and the desegregation work done by SNCC in the Arkansas Delta. During this time SNCC found out that the Delta region was a similar political and economic climate to the Mississippi Delta and not nearly as easy to desegregate as Little Rock. The residents of Little Rock, both black and white

had a different attitude and SNCC would have to rely on different tactics to overcome Jim Crow in the Arkansas Delta region of the state. Chapter 3 also analyzes the 1965 Arkansas Freedom Summer project, which was inspired by the much better-known Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, investigating how it helped desegregate Arkansas. Mississippi's Freedom Summer was the Mississippi Projects direct effort focused on several specific goals which included creating freedom schools, increasing the number of blacks that were registered to vote, and developing a challenge to unseat the all-white delegation attending the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. While the main interest of the summer project was desegregation, the summer project also focused on voter registration. The freedom summer included freedom schools, cultural programs. Freedom summer marked the high point of SNCC's work in Arkansas.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 4 uses the work that SNCC did in Gould, Arkansas, as a case study of the type of work that SNCC did throughout the Arkansas Delta. Using Gould as a case study shows the work that local black residents and SNCC put in to desegregate the schools, register blacks to vote, run blacks for public office, and create the court cases that they brought to accomplish some of these goals.

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<sup>21</sup> "SNCC Digital Gateway - Freedom Summer," <https://snccdigital.org/events/freedom-summer/>.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ARKANSAS SIT-INS AND SNCC

As previously stated, prior to SNCC's arrival, approximately fifty Philander Smith College students entered F.W. Woolworth's in downtown Little Rock and requested service. That event began the civil rights sit-in movement in Arkansas. Little Rock, Arkansas, site of the 1957 international headline-grabbing Little Rock Crisis was now one of the cities that had to deal with the student sit-in movement. This chapter traces the background of the civil rights movement in Little Rock all the way to SNCC's arrival to help desegregate the state. The chapter highlights Bill Hansen, the initial director of the Arkansas Project, analyzing his background and discussing what brought him ultimately to lead SNCC's project in the state of Arkansas, his strategy for desegregating Little Rock, which included sit-ins of local downtown businesses, and it ends with SNCC moving to the Arkansas Delta to begin desegregation efforts there. Hansen and SNCC's activism in Arkansas must be understood in the larger context of the southern freedom struggle as well as in the particular story of the civil rights movement in Arkansas. So, like any good story, the place to start is the beginning.

The Little Rock Crisis was an incident involving nine African American teenagers who helped desegregate the high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. These students were tasked with the responsibility to be the first African American students to enroll at Little Rock's Central High School implementing the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* that declared segregation unconstitutional. Instead of immediate complete desegregation, Governor Orval E. Faubus, agreed with and followed the plan of the school superintendent, Virgil Blossom,

who decided that gradual integration would start with the nine students.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 1: Map of Pulaski County, Arkansas, <https://pulaskicounty.net/about-us/>.**

When the nine students arrived on the first day of school on September 4, 1957, a mob of hundreds of white residents gathered outside of the school to protest the attempt to integrate the school. Prior to the arrival of the students, Governor Orval

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Fitzgerald, *The Little Rock Nine : Struggle for Integration, Snapshots in History* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2007); Mara Miller, *School Desegregation and the Story of the Little Rock Nine, From Many Cultures, One History* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2008); Carolyn Clark, *Little Rock Nine* (New York: Scholastic, 2002); Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis : An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999); Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son : Little Rock, the Crisis That Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Eileen Lucas and Mark Anthony, *Cracking the Wall : The Struggles of the Little Rock Nine, Carolrhoda on My Own Books* (Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1997); *Escorted by Federal Troops, "Little Rock Nine" Enter Front Door of Central High School, (1958), graphic, 1 photomechanical print : halftone*; David Aretha, *The Story of the Little Rock Nine and School Desegregation in Photographs, The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in Photographs* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2014).



Faubus called in the National Guard to prevent the nine students from entering the school. Several days later, the students tried to enter the school again and were able to enter but were ultimately threatened so badly by the mob of parents and residents that they left the school for their own safety. On September 27, 1957, the governor's decision led President Dwight Eisenhower to send federal troops to Little Rock to guarantee the students entry into the school and protect them while they were there. The students were able to complete the school year at Central High. While it seemed to appear that desegregation was now under way, Arkansas was not finished fighting against integration. Racism in Little Rock was so virulent that right before the 1958-1959 school year Governor Faubus called a special session of the Arkansas legislature to pass several laws to try to prevent desegregation, one of which allowed the closure of any school that was threatened with racial integration. The 1958-1959 school year was known as "the lost year" because Governor Faubus used this new law to close the four Little Rock high schools in an effort to stifle desegregation of the Little Rock public schools.<sup>23</sup>

In 1960, the young people who organized sit-ins in Little Rock could be galvanized by examples of successful protests staged elsewhere, but they also acted while remembering the extreme backlash of the white establishment during the Little Rock Crisis a few years prior. While the sit-in movement in Little Rock started out strong, the spark started to fade after a while. After the Philander Smith College

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<sup>23</sup> Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 27-28; Fitzgerald, *The Little Rock Nine : Struggle for Integration*; Miller, *School Desegregation and the Story of the Little Rock Nine*; Clark, *Little Rock Nine*; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son : Little Rock, the Crisis That Shocked the Nation*; Lucas and Anthony, *Cracking the Wall : The Struggles of the Little Rock Nine*.

students' 1960 protest fizzled during the summer because their leadership was missing, SNCC arrived in Little Rock to rejuvenate the protests. SNCC leaders remained in Little Rock to lead desegregation efforts, remaining active in the state until 1967. The racial environment in Arkansas prior to the arrival of William Hansen and SNCC was not as peaceful as it appeared to those viewing it from the outside, based on Arkansas's exclusion from the civil rights discussion other than the 1957 Little Rock Crisis. Prior to the Little Rock Crisis, Little Rock had a reputation as a "moderate Upper South city in a progressive Upper South State." After the Little Rock Crisis, many Arkansans felt embarrassed by the national and international attention. Moderates often met civil rights activists in the middle in an effort to avoid another Little Rock Crisis and all the negative media attention that came with it. Extremists on the other hand did not even want to come to the negotiating table. They would do whatever they could to keep the status quo by legal or extralegal means. This is the backdrop with which the civil rights movement progressed in Arkansas, especially Little Rock.<sup>24</sup>

Historian John Kirk argued that Little Rock presented a complicated environment to civil rights leaders because unlike the situation in other southern states, Arkansas possessed a mixture of Deep South and Upper South attitudes. Little Rock was an Upper South city because its white citizens had a relatively moderate attitude about civil rights. But it was also like a Deep South city in that it was thoroughly segregated. For example, even though the schools were desegregated in 1957 up until 1962, the lunch

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<sup>24</sup> Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock : The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*, 5. "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 27; Morgan and Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*.

counters in downtown Little Rock were still very much segregated.<sup>25</sup>

The student sit-in movement spread rapidly throughout the South. Under pressure from the demonstrations and from the black community's economic boycott of businesses often accompanying them, several businesses—mainly in the Upper South and border states—either desegregated in accordance with locally negotiated settlements or did so voluntarily rather than face continued disruption during 1960. In the Deep South, however, greater resistance prevented success at an early stage of the sit-ins. Little Rock's response to the sit-ins was more like the Deep South rather than the Upper South.

During the spring of 1960, the Little Rock chapter of the NAACP reached out to the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce to begin discussions in hope of desegregating downtown lunch counters to stop the sit-ins; however, the Chamber of Commerce stalled the progress of the talks. White civic leaders in Little Rock were like other white civic leaders in the South in their hesitancy to negotiate with blacks who were engaging in civil rights protests. Because they were not getting the response they sought, the students at Philander Smith continued their sit-ins. Around April 13, 1960, a group of six students, entered Pfeifer's department store to protest. All but one student left when store management requested that they leave. In an unrelated incident, two other students entered Blass's lunch counter and requested service. Both men refused to leave when requested to do so by store management; the police arrested the two students.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock : The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 35-36. Those students were Eugene D. Smith, Melvin T. Jackson, McLoyd Buchanan, William Rogers, Sammy J. Baker, and Winston Jones *ibid.*, 40.

Students from the local high schools and colleges attempted to turn up the heat by picketing more downtown stores. Approximately twenty students picketed Blass's, Pfeifer's, and McLellan's in downtown Little Rock. However, when the summer of 1960 arrived, the picketing and sit-ins stopped because the Philander Smith students who were the leaders of the protest movement were out of school and no longer in Little Rock. While the high school students were still in Little Rock, because the Philander Smith students were the leaders of the protests, their absence left a void over the summer and thus halted the sit-ins until the fall. However, when the school year started back in the fall, Philander Smith students attempted to start the protests up again, but this time they did so under the name of Arkansas SNCC or "Arsnick" for short. When the group of students began protesting, they amusingly began referring to themselves as Arsnick, both as a tribute to SNCC and as a hope of the poisonous arsenic impact they desired to have upon white supremacy in Arkansas. Once SNCC arrived in Arkansas in 1962, field director, Bill Hansen liked it and used the Arsnick moniker to describe the Arkansas project.<sup>27</sup>

In November of 1960, the protest continued; thirteen students entered Woolworth's and requested service. Woolworth's refused and ordered them to leave, which they did without incident or arrests. The next day, seven students entered Woolworth's and again demanded service, this time when Woolworth's refused service to the protesters, they refused to leave, and the police arrested all seven. Ultimately, the sit-ins failed in their desired goal to desegregate Little Rock, but the protests got the attention of the white leaders of Little Rock. The white business owners and city leaders

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 41-44. Randy Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," *ibid.*, 8.

did not respond in a violent manner, probably because of the Little Rock crisis which was still fresh in the minds of many whites and they did not want a repeat of the international negative press that was received during the crisis. The sit-ins failed for more than one reason, but the main reasons were a lack of true leadership among the students, and lack of backing from the unified leadership in the black community because there was no real direction and support upon which the protesters could rely. However, the sit-ins did spur the black residents of Little Rock to take notice and act based on their growing unrest at the city's lack of response. However, when the students were unable to agree on a strategy by which to proceed, the protest subsequently fell apart. The student sit in movement would lay mainly dormant for almost two years following this stalling.<sup>28</sup>

The condition of the civil rights movement in Little Rock improved very little in 1961; then it progressed to engaging in freedom rides through Little Rock. The Freedom Rides began when the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) wanted to test a Supreme Court decision by engaging in a journey through the upper south on integrated buses. When a white mob in Alabama attacked these buses and riders, CORE stopped the Freedom Rides. SNCC picked up the torch and announced they would continue the freedom rides. In July 1961, the freedom rides came to Little Rock. The police arrested the riders as soon as they arrived. The riders were arrested for breach of the peace for sitting in the white-only section of the bus terminal waiting room. In Little Rock, the city had integrated the bus stations, city buses, and the schools in name only. While the bus

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<sup>28</sup> Those students were Charles Parker, Lonnie McIntosh, Ted Hines, Billy Bowles, Edward Green, Henry Daniels, and Myrabel Callaway. Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962." Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 45.

stations, buses, and schools were not legally segregated, they remained segregated in custom and anyone who challenged this was dealt with severely even if it meant violating the law.<sup>29</sup>

Real change would only come about through a two-pronged approach. The first prong of a successful change would have to be direct action protests, and the second prong would be the support of a community network to help sustain the protests.<sup>30</sup> The student activists alone did not have the skills or abilities to pull off major change at this time. Therefore, the first step in attaining successful change began when the Arkansas Commission of Human Relations (ACHR) contacted SNCC and requested that SNCC assist the students in reviving the Little Rock Protests. Ruth Arnold from the ACHR requested that SNCC send some help to Little Rock because SNCC was so focused on Mississippi and Alabama and Little Rock was regarded as a “peaceful neighborhood.”<sup>31</sup>

In response to the request from ACHR, SNCC sent help to Little Rock in the person of William “Bill” Hansen (Figure 2). Hansen was not the person that SNCC was going to send to Arkansas initially. At first, SNCC intended to send Bob Zellner, a white man from Alabama who was a major agitator, before the end of September, but Zellner was delayed for about a month in Talladega, Alabama, for a criminal trial in which he was involved. Hansen suspected that the ACHR wanted to use him as a “guinea pig.”

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<sup>29</sup> Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962." *Boynton v. Virginia*, 364 S. Ct. 454 (1960). CORE was founded in 1942 to combat discrimination in a nonviolent fashion. For more information on CORE see <http://www.core-online.org/History/history.htm>. *Morgan v. Virginia*, 328 U.S. 373 (1946). In *Morgan*, the United States Supreme Court ruled Virginia's law allowing segregation on interstate buses violated the Constitution. Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 51-53.

<sup>30</sup> "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 57.

<sup>31</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 6. Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 57.



**Figure 2: Photo of Bill Hansen** <https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790>

ACHR intended to portray Hansen as a “crazy SNCC radical” to threaten the businesses that still resisted desegregation. White Little Rock residents feared the outbreak of another civil rights crisis resembling the internationally known Little Rock Crisis.<sup>32</sup> However, the intention of ACHR was that Hansen would head back to Atlanta

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<sup>32</sup> The most vulnerable point in Little Rock’s armor seemed to be its image. Prior to 1957 five new businesses moved into Little Rock every year. However, subsequent to 1957 until 1961 no new businesses moved into Little Rock area. Since 1957 Little Rock had been working hard to rebuild its damaged image which suggested that they might consider submitting to demands of the black civil rights

after scaring the locals. The first thing Hansen did when he arrived in Little Rock on October 24 was meet with ACHR leaders at their offices. Hansen also met with Worth Long, Ben Grinage, and Bert Jones – three Philander Smith students.<sup>33</sup> At the time Hansen arrived in Little Rock, he was a twenty-three-year-old veteran of the civil rights movement, and he was only the second white person to serve as a SNCC field organizer.<sup>34</sup> Hansen was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a white, working-class, Catholic family.<sup>35</sup> His neighborhood and parochial schools attended were similar to his family. In 1957, Hansen attended the private Xavier University in Cincinnati. When he arrived on campus in the fall of 1957, there were very few African Americans students enrolled; one, Bill Mason, became Hansen's lifelong friend. During his first two years at Xavier, Hansen's social network changed from predominantly white to predominantly black. By nineteen, Hansen moved out of his parent's home because his mother demanded he stop socializing with his new "community" of friends.<sup>36</sup> Hansen was one of the first Catholics participating in the civil rights movement before 1963. The reason for this was church leadership forbade most priests and nuns from supporting the push for equal rights for blacks. When Catholics participated in the fight for civil rights, they

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protesters rather than suffer through another episode like the Little Rock crisis. Overall, Arkansas was in bad shape. They lost two members of Congress in the 1960 census and the Census Bureau predicted that they would lose two more in the 1970 census. Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962."

<sup>33</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 6.. William Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," in *Arsnick: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 255-56.

<sup>34</sup> Brent Riffel, "In the Storm: William Hansen and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas, 1962-1967," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2004): 404. See also, Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 248.

<sup>35</sup> "Arkansas Daze," 85-86.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



avoided bringing attention to their faith. Historians mostly ignored these Catholics - with the notable exception of Bill Hansen.<sup>37</sup> While Hansen had not been completely ignored, his work in Arkansas has been largely neglected by historians.

Hansen became involved in the civil rights movement in 1957 when he helped co-found the Xavier Interracial Council. However, this was not the full extent of his activism, while he was a college student.<sup>38</sup> He also joined the local branch of the NAACP, where Hansen and Mason worked hard and became board members. With others, Hansen helped start a local chapter of CORE where he became vice chair.<sup>39</sup>

Hansen put his education on hold in 1960 in order to spend more time picketing Woolworth's and stores to support the sit-in movement in the South. Hansen found it difficult to remain on the sidelines while so many blacks were being treated like second class citizens. Therefore, Hansen decided to give up his life of comfort to spend more time helping desegregate the South and fight Jim Crow. He first arrived in the South during the summer of 1961 to participate in the Mississippi Freedom Rides. Hansen briefly returned to Cincinnati to resume his education; however, after exposure to the excitement of the civil rights movement in the South, he dropped out of school again to volunteer with CORE in New York. While working with CORE, Hansen met civil rights

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<sup>37</sup> William and Ruthie Hansen, interview by Bob Grabriner, August 7, 1966. Paul T. Murray, "Bill Hansen: A Catholic Activist in the Civil Rights Movement," *American Catholic Studies* 128, no. 3 (2017); William and Ruthie Hanesn, interview by Bob Grabriner, August 7, 1966.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Riva, "Desegregating Downtown Little Rock: The Field Reports of Sncc's Bill Hansen, October 23 to December 3, 1962," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2012): 266; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."

<sup>39</sup> Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 250; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."

activists who would have an impact on him and the movement.<sup>40</sup>

As a field secretary for SNCC, Reggie Robinson,<sup>41</sup> a prominent member of SNCC, recruited Hansen to begin organizing in Cambridge, Maryland. Hansen left Cambridge in the spring of 1962 and became the SNCC campus traveler, delivering the SNCC message to black and white universities. After arriving in Atlanta at the SNCC national office in late in the spring of 1962, Hansen was immediately sent to Albany, Georgia, to begin work on the SNCC Southwest Georgia Project, headed by Charles Melvin Sherrod, a prominent leader of SNCC.<sup>42</sup> During the summer of 1962, the police arrested Hansen for engaging in civil rights demonstrations several times, and he spent time in and out of jail.<sup>43</sup>

During one of his arrests, the police moved Hansen from the Albany City Jail to the white section of the Daugherty County Jail. While sitting in front of his new cell, Hansen found himself the victim of an unprovoked sneak attack. Hansen described it as “the left side of his face exploded... The next thing I knew I was on the floor being stomped amid shouts of ‘You motherfuckin’ niggerlovin’ sonofabitch.’”<sup>44</sup> Hansen managed to extricate himself from the situation by somehow dragging himself into his cell away from the beating before he completely passed out. Hansen suffered a broken jaw, broken teeth, and broken ribs that the doctors did not discover for several weeks

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<sup>40</sup> Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 250; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." Hansen met Stokely Carmichael, Ed Brown, Bill Mahoney, Peggy Dammond, Reggie Robinson, Kathy Conwell, and many others.

<sup>41</sup> "SNCC Digital Gateway - Reggie Robinson Biography," <https://snccdigital.org/people/reggie-robinson/>.

<sup>42</sup> "SNCC Digital Gateway - Charles Sherrod Brography," <https://snccdigital.org/people/charles-sherrod/>

<sup>43</sup> Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 252.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

from the beating that he took. Hansen spent two months in New York City, resting and recovering from his attack with his jaw wired shut.<sup>45</sup>

About a week after having the wires removed from his mouth, Hansen was back in SNCC's Atlanta office. While Hansen was recovering in New York, Ozell Sutton, the Associate Director of ACHR, bombarded SNCC with requests to send organizers to Arkansas to refresh the student sit-in movement to desegregate Little Rock. Because SNCC was heavily involved with their projects in Mississippi and Georgia in the fall of 1962, James Forman – SNCC executive secretary - was uninclined to prioritize their resources to a location that SNCC did not consider a major location for civil rights violations. Finally, after Forman received another letter from Sutton, he decided to send Hansen for a “few weeks” to see what was happening in Little Rock and possibly help them engage in protests. Foreman did not think Hansen was going to be in Arkansas very long. However, after helping with the sit-ins, he elected to stay, becoming the founder of the Arkansas Project.<sup>46</sup>

SNCC's Arkansas Project engaged individuals to assist with voter registration (including fighting against voter fraud), desegregating places of public accommodation, running for public office, and increasing educational opportunities for African Americans throughout the state of Arkansas.<sup>47</sup> SNCC set up Freedom Houses for people to gather

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "We Became Radicalized by What We Experienced: Excerpts from an Interview with William (Bill) Hansen, Director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's Arkansas Project " *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 104. William Hansen, interview by Jennifer Jensen, July 22, 1997.

and Freedom Schools in many locations.<sup>48</sup> Hansen organized sit-ins in Little Rock and later in the Delta region.<sup>49</sup> Overall SNCC concentrated mostly on voter registration and political organization as opposed to direct action protests, such as sit-ins.<sup>50</sup>

Hansen stated that voter registration was a lot easier to accomplish in Arkansas than in other southern states.<sup>51</sup> One reason was that Arkansas did not have a literacy law clause that made passing a test overseen by a white registrar a prerequisite for voting. Literacy tests were one way that whites used to prevent blacks from registering to vote and participating in democracy in this country by blocking their ability to vote. Twenty other states, nine of which were located in the South, had literacy qualifications.<sup>52</sup> Arkansas was not much different from the rest of the south over all; however, Bill Hansen felt like “[s]ocially it wasn’t absolutely as rigidly segregated as elsewhere. . . a white person could have black friends in Arkansas without raising an enormous amount of stink the way that may have happened elsewhere.”<sup>53</sup> Hansen thought that while Arkansas wasn’t as bad as other places in the Deep South, it was still bad. He said that Arkansas “wasn’t as recalcitrant, which isn’t to say that it wasn’t hard and wasn’t recalcitrant. It just wasn’t as much as compared to Mississippi and

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<sup>48</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 111; Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project," in *Arnsnick : The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 70.

<sup>50</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 108; Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

<sup>51</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 109. Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

<sup>52</sup> Jr. Ervin, Sam J., "Literacy Tests for Voters: A Case Study in Federalism," *Journal of Law and Contemporary Problems* 27, no. Summer (1962): 481, 83 n. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 107. Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

Alabama."<sup>54</sup> There were still significant obstacles to black voter registration, including a poll tax and widespread corruption with which they had to contend.<sup>55</sup>

Hansen received significant help from Worth Long and Ben Grinage during his time in Little Rock. Both Worth Long and Ben Grinage played a significant role in the Arkansas and national civil rights movements. Worth Long was born and raised in Durham, North Carolina. Long was a student at Philander Smith College and rose to be one of the student leaders after the initial student sit-ins at Woolworth's and Walgreen's. Long's belief in social justice began at an early age with his father as Presiding Elder at a Durham African Methodist Episcopal Zion church. Prior to college, Long was in the Air Force stationed in Korea and Japan. Long developed a passion for oral history while in the Air Force. Long attended Philander Smith College starting in 1962 where he quickly rose to up the ranks in Arsnick.<sup>56</sup> Reverend Ben Grinage, a Methodist minister, was born in 1932 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was involved with and was one of the leaders in student protests in Little Rock. Grinage rose to the position of co-field director of the Arkansas Project and ultimately field director after Hansen resigned from his position.<sup>57</sup>

After meeting the leadership of the previous protests in Little Rock, Hansen engaged in several meetings with a group of about thirty individuals committed to nonviolent protests who were willing to go to jail if needed to bring notoriety to the sit-in protests. While there existed little enthusiasm among the students when Hansen arrived

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<sup>54</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 107; Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

<sup>55</sup> Wallach, "We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced," 109; Hansen, "Hansen, Interview by Wallach."

<sup>56</sup> "SNCC Digital Gateway - Worth Long Biography," <https://snccdigital.org/people/worth-long/>.

<sup>57</sup> "SNCC Digital Gateway - Benjamin Grinage Biography," <https://snccdigital.org/people/benjamin-grinage/>.

in Little Rock,<sup>58</sup> he led several workshops to help protesters learn how to be nonviolent regardless of the tactics that the business owners and police officers used against them. After about two weeks of training, Hansen felt they were ready to begin the sit-ins at the downtown lunch counters.<sup>59</sup>

Hansen planned to target the Woolworth's and Walgreen's lunch counters first. Instead of descending on the lunch counters with great numbers, Hansen kept the initial sit-in with just a couple protesters, Hansen and Worth Long. One reason for this may have been the fact that Hansen was going to be included in the protest and another could have been the fact that the initial protests in Little Rock had died out a couple of years earlier and Hansen wanted to start slowly and build up so that things did not die out again. The police arrested both peacefully.<sup>60</sup> However, the sit-in participants also faced additional difficulties from the local black community not wanting to increase the protest movement to include boycotting the downtown stores.<sup>61</sup> As historian John Kirk explained, "the major obstacle to the protests remained the difficulty in winning support from the wider black community which hampered efforts to extend the sit-ins to a boycott of stores." Many blacks in the South did not want to stir up trouble in their communities because there always seemed to be a price to pay.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> While there was great enthusiasm with some of the students, there were less students protesting than what was originally the case because of pressure from Philander Smith and the student's family who did not want them getting into trouble protesting.

<sup>59</sup> Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 189.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>61</sup> Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas."

<sup>62</sup> Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes : Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line : Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970*, New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 145.

On the morning of October 25<sup>th</sup>, Hansen, Bert Strauss, and William Bush protested at the lunch counter at Woolworth's.<sup>63</sup> The three of them entered one at a time, and Hansen was the first to take a seat at the lunch counter and ordered right away. This was of the rare times Hansen's race helped, because he could enter the establishment first and be seated as undercover protester before the store's management realized he was there as part of the protest. Bush sat down at the counter a few seats from Hansen where he tried to order something to eat. Strauss watched from a distance. Once a black employee told Bush that Woolworth's would not serve blacks at the counter, he got up and went to see the manager about ten minutes later. The manager told Bush that it was not the policy of the store that prevented him from serving him, but rather city policy. Interestingly, the entire situation at the counter involved no tension while Bush requested service. Hansen used the lack of tension to try to get the downtown businesses to integrate. Hansen felt that there was no major worry in the white community about serving blacks at the lunch counters and that perhaps they could use that fact to convince the store manager to open the lunch counter without having to even engage in sit-ins.<sup>64</sup>

A couple of days later, Hansen and Bush went to see Reverend William Gentry at Little Rock University to arrange a meeting between the students attending Little Rock University and Philander Smith College. The next morning Hansen and Bush met with Reverend Gentry on campus in order to meet some of the students. Later that

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<sup>63</sup> The strategy was to look as inconspicuous as possible in terms of looking like they were together and ready to start trouble for the business.

<sup>64</sup> Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962."

afternoon, there was another Philander Smith student meeting where they discussed their new organization, the Student Freedom Movement (SFM).<sup>65</sup>

Later that night, Hansen and Ben Grinage drove to Pine Bluff to see if they could convince any of the residents to engage in the fight for integration, which was indicative of how Hansen handled Arkansas. He had a hand in multiple cities at the same time trying to plan and engage in activities in several locations at the same time. Hansen and Grinage roamed the Arkansas Agriculture, Mechanical and Normal College campus talking to students trying to convince them to meet with SNCC about desegregating Pine Bluff. They convinced several student leaders to meet with them to talk about “SNCC, Pine Bluff, the movement, segregation and other connected items.” Life in the rural Arkansas Delta was far different than in the urban Little Rock which made a difference in the student response. The students in Pine Bluff feared protesting because of violence from the residents and facing expulsion by the administration of the University.<sup>66</sup>

Back in Little Rock, the SFM held a meeting near campus after the weekend. The student leaders decided to invite a lawyer and several other adults. Bush disagreed with this idea feeling that this was strictly a student movement and adults should not be involved. Bush informed the others that he would not be attending the meeting because he did not believe adults should be involved in the students’ protest. This attitude was typical for Bush.<sup>67</sup> Bush, in fact, showed up at the meeting and brought a plan with him

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. This was not unique, this happened at other black university and colleges to dissuade black students from participating in the civil rights movement.

<sup>67</sup> Bush carried a great deal of influence and Hansen learned the sit-ins stopped in 1960 because Bush would pout if he did not get his way.



for how SFM should proceed to desegregate Little Rock. However, SFM decided not to adopt Bush's plan completely, and therefore he resigned.<sup>68</sup>

During his time in Arkansas, Hansen used the "Sherrod Technique"<sup>69</sup> to gain the trust of the locals and students. Charles Sherrod was the field secretary and director of SNCC in southwest Georgia and played a major role in the Albany Movement. Part of the Sherrod technique was for SNCC members and volunteers to participate in local activities to gain the trust of African Americans.<sup>70</sup> This was especially important for Hansen to do because he was a northern white man trying to convince southern blacks to follow his advice about civil rights. While in Little Rock that meant building floats during homecoming at Philander Smith College. This would not be as easy once SNCC moved outside Little Rock into the rural delta region.<sup>71</sup>

The SFM elected Worth Long chairman, and the executive committee felt that it was possible to convince the manager of Woolworth's to open the lunch counter to blacks. Therefore, four of the students decided to go down to Woolworth's on Monday, November 5 to attempt to confront the manager. However, if that failed, the SFM scheduled subsequent sit-ins. Worth Long, Fran Blackman, Ben Grinage, and Bert Strauss - the four students that were sent to negotiate with the manager of Woolworth's about desegregating the lunch counter - would enter the store first in an attempt to peacefully negotiate with the manager. If the negotiations failed then the students would

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<sup>68</sup> Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, October 23, 1962 through November 1, 1962."

<sup>69</sup> "Field Report - November 2, 1962 " (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>70</sup> Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart : Sncc's Dream for a New America*, 38-39, 204.

<sup>71</sup> Hansen, "Hansen, Field Report, November 2, 1962."

take matters to the next level, starting a sit-in protest in the store.<sup>72</sup>

The negotiators went to see the manager that afternoon. Initially the manager was unprepared to discuss the desegregation of Woolworth's lunch counter. But Worth Long convinced him that refusing to serve black customers at the lunch counter upset many people, and the students and manager might be able to find a solution through dialogue; therefore, they could avoid any hostility through public action like sit-ins or protests. Eventually, the manager gave in and spoke with the four students. It appears that the post Little Rock crisis influenced the manager's decision to ultimately engage in discussions with the students.<sup>73</sup>

During his initial dialogue with the students, the manager was reluctant to consider the request of quietly desegregating Woolworth's lunch counter, but Fran Blackman informed him that the students felt extremely agitated about the situation, and they could not hold them back from action much longer. This threat made it appear as if the other students were radical and these four students were present to offer moderation to the store. The manager informed the students that community customs prevented him from serving black customers at the lunch counter, not Woolworth's or him. Feeling the walls closing in, the manager sought time to consider the offer. The negotiators gave him a couple of days to consider things and get back to them. He

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<sup>72</sup> "Field Report - November 4, 1962," (Arkansas 1962). Bert Strauss went because he had been an observer in their test case a week before as a witness to the lack of any issues from the white customers when a black sat seeking service at the counter to with the white people. Ibid. Ibid. Worth Long went because he was chairman of the SFM and he spoke to the manager previously to have the "white" and "colored" signs removed from the water fountains. Ibid. Fran Blackman went because she was a cute woman which Hansen thought may soften the manager's hostility toward the group of students. Ibid. Ben Grinage went because he was a licensed Methodist minister and the other negotiators planned to introduce him as Reverend Ben Grinage. Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

informed them that he would make his decision two days later by Wednesday November 7, 1962.<sup>74</sup>

An impromptu poll of white community leaders by the *Arkansas Democrat* revealed that the majority rejected the sit-ins as an acceptable form of protest. The hesitancy of Little Rock whites to enter dialogue with blacks about desegregating the city mirrored the initial reactions to sit-ins in many other Southern cities. The national policy of stores like Woolworth's declared that the segregated lunch counters would continue.<sup>75</sup> In this regard Little Rock was very similar to other urban cities in the Deep South. There was a distinctive Deep South attitude regarding whites hating sit-in protests and refusing to yield to the pressure of the sit-ins. Therefore, Hansen would take this into consideration for their desegregation strategy. Even SNCC saw Little Rock differently than the cities in which they were already protesting.

Hansen and the student protesters made plans in case the manager decided not to desegregate the lunch counter. The plan was to demonstrate at Woolworth's only with the students entering the store as fictitious shoppers after the negotiators talked to the manager. If the negotiations broke down, then the student shoppers would receive a signal to sit down at the lunch counter and begin the protest.<sup>76</sup> The protesters had to work together so that they wouldn't tip their hand and give away their strategy. However, that was not the only problem that faced Hansen and the protesters.

Prior to their first protests, Hansen had realized several major issues with the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Morgan and Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*, 26-27.

<sup>76</sup> William Hansen, "Field Report - November 5, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

student protesters in Little Rock: First, to the students everything seemed more abstract – going to jail, nonviolent responses, the value of the sit-ins – but after the protests started things would seem more real and more students would unite around the cause. Second, many students did not want to go to jail, but they knew that Woolworth's might respond by involving the police to arrest protesters. If that happened, Hansen felt that the cause would suffer from not being able to convince enough people to engage in the protests and sit-ins. Hansen believed that the solution to this might be that protesters may have to remain in jail to set an example for the students that were unconvinced that this was important for the cause. Third, several students asked Hansen what his role was going to be when the sit-ins began. He found that it became more difficult to convince students about the importance of going to jail and organizing the students if they did not feel that he was in it with them. Therefore, Hansen felt that it might be necessary to participate in the sit-ins and go to jail if necessary, to prove to the students that he was right there with them in this fight for civil rights. For Hansen, this was even more important since he was a white man trying to convince black students that engaging in this course of action was not to be a fruitless endeavor.<sup>77</sup> Hansen pondered this, writing:

A difficult situation is arising in that a number of times I have been asked by some of the students what I am going to do when the sit-ins start. It is becoming difficult to continue talking to these kids about sitting-in, organizing them to do so, and then not go with them when they go downtown. At this point the most emphasized thing that can be done in terms of the movement is to sit-in and, if necessary, go to jail. I am afraid that my relationship with these students may deteriorate if I don't go with them.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Dr. M. Lafayette Harris, president of Philander Smith College, released an official statement denying any prior knowledge of the student protests. In that statement President Harris claimed “the college does not and has never subscribed to mass action in dealing with difficult problems. A full [-] scale investigation is already under way to determine the facts relevant to the incident.” Harris had to strike a tenuous balance between supporting his students, maintaining a helpful relationship with the local whites in Little Rock, and appeasing Philander Smith’s board of directors and trustees who did not always agree with the sit-ins.<sup>79</sup> Having this enormous pressure over their heads, the Philander Smith students, had to worry about someone being disappointed in their actions, and this did not stop at school.

Family expectations about what a student should be doing at school also influenced the behavior of the black students. Many black parents warned their children against engaging in anything that could potentially harm their future employment opportunities and bring shame to the family. One white SNCC activist remembered, “for most of those students who were sitting in . . . going to jail was about the worst possible thing that could happen and yet they were willing to put everything on the line; they were willing to sacrifice not only their future but their family’s investment in them.” These pressures were increased by the fact that Hansen was white because if the students were going to find themselves in trouble at home and school, they certainly did not want that to be for following behind a white man.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, the day had arrived for the negotiators and protesters to embark on the

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<sup>79</sup> Morgan and Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC : The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*, 25-26.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

beginning of their protest for desegregating the downtown lunch counters, starting with Woolworth's. The negotiators arrived in a separate car from the other students who would engage in the sit-ins if negotiations broke down and failed. Hansen drove the student protesters in his car. Worth Long and the other negotiators went with the manager to his office to talk. When the negotiations failed, the manager informed the negotiators that he was working on the problem and that the lunch counter would be open to everyone, but he could not say when that would occur. This tactic by the manager would not be acceptable to the students. Little Rock blacks were not willing to just accommodate whites slow down approach to civil rights. Long came back and took a seat at the lunch counter, which signaled that negotiations had failed. Hansen signaled to the other students to enter the store, and they all responded by coming inside and having a seat at the lunch counter also. Immediately, as a response to the protesters, the manager closed the lunch counter to everyone.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly thereafter everyone but the students left the lunch counter. The students took out their school books and began studying (Figure 3). While a crowd gathered around the store, no violence occurred. While several onlookers began to mumble things like "damn niggers" the crowd that gathered were more curious about what was happening at the lunch counter. While not all customers were disturbed when they realized what had happened, some were when they entered the store and tried to take a seat at the lunch counter to order lunch.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> William Hansen, "Field Report - November 7, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. *ibid.* Hansen relays one interesting incident, "a white teenager came in and sat down near Worth. Seeing no waitresses he turned to Worth and said[,] 'Where are the waitresses?' Worth replied that he did not know what was going on either and that he had sat down at the counter and asked for a cup of coffee



**Figure 3: Picture of student sit-in protest at Little Rock lunch counter.**  
<https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/sitting-in-for-rights/Content?oid=2045790>

The sit-in was only one phase of Hansen’s plan. The other phase was to bring as much notoriety as possible to the protest because the last thing Little Rock wanted was another Little Rock Crisis incident. Hansen was hoping the whites would react violently in order to bring more notoriety to their protests. The more notoriety that came to the protests, the more sympathy the protesters would receive which would help them achieve their goal of desegregating the lunch counters as quickly as possible. To that end, as soon as the protest began, Hansen contacted the local newspapers – the *Arkansas Democrat* and *Arkansas Gazette*, the United Press International (UPI), the Associated Press (AP) – and the local television and radio stations to make them aware of the protests and get press coverage to put more pressure on the downtown

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when the waitresses turned off all the lights and closed the counter. The white boy commented, “That’s silly,” got up and left.

businesses to desegregate. The press showed up followed by the police; however, the police did not arrest anyone.<sup>83</sup>

After talking to many students, engaging in the protests with them and showing his dedication to the movement, Hansen found out at the next meeting with the students that evening, after this initial sit-in at Woolworth's, more than fifty students were interested in participating in the protests. Not only were more students interested in participating now but, new Philander Smith President David Crockett now supported the students and their protest.<sup>84</sup> The media provided excellent coverage of the protest. The television stations and radio stations all recorded the sit-ins, and the UPI and AP sent out stories along with the *Gazette* covering the sit-ins in their early edition of the paper. Hansen's strategy was beginning to work, and he was winning over the school officials, media and students.<sup>85</sup>

When the SFM negotiators met with the Little Rock businessmen about desegregating the downtown lunch counters, the businessmen were reluctant. Therefore, the SFM executive committee decided to increase their protests. Hansen and Worth Long attempted to recruit additional students from a college in North Little Rock for the protests in Little Rock. The students showed interest but were unwilling to sacrifice for what they viewed as someone else's cause. The North Little Rock students wanted promises that they would not end up getting arrested or assaulted by angry white people. In addition, the students felt they needed the permission of the college

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. This was not always the case. When the students initially engaged in the protests before SNCC arrived, President Harris did not show unfaltering support of the protests.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



administration before getting involved in civil rights protests.<sup>86</sup>

Hansen figured that with the memory of the Little Rock crisis looming over the heads of the white community, increasing the pressure would cause the whites to desegregate the lunch counters much quicker. While in the eyes of many local whites, Hansen was viewed as a race traitor, in a negotiation with managers, Hansen benefited from his whiteness because he would be seen often times as equal with the managers because of their shared whiteness. This does not mean that they would be able to reach a agreement all the time, but it helped to make negotiations a little less contentious. Hansen met with the student protesters and informed them that the negotiations had ended, and they would again begin protesting the next day, but this time they would increase their efforts. The protesters planned to engage in sit-ins at Woolworth's, Walgreen's, McLellen's, and Blass' Department Store.<sup>87</sup> Just before noon, students descended upon Walgreen's lunch counter, and the owner closed the counter "in the interest of public safety." The manager became annoyed with the protesters; therefore, Hansen and Worth Long decided to push the manager's buttons. The manager had informed the students who left the lunch counter that if they left the lunch counter for any reason, he would not allow them to come back to the counter. Hansen and Long decided to leave the counter and return, then refuse to leave when ordered by the manager. When the manager informed Hansen and Long that they would have to leave, they refused, and he called the police. The police arrested them for trespassing.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "Field Report - November 26, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>87</sup> "Field Report - November 27, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>88</sup> "Field Report - November 28, 1962," (Arkansas1962).

After the police arrested Hansen and Long, things began to heat up with the downtown businessmen over desegregating Little Rock. The next day Hansen and the students received constant phone calls in an effort to prevent additional protests.<sup>89</sup> Hansen's strategy worked, he and the students made additional contact with the downtown businessmen and made amazing progress on desegregating the lunch counters. Walgreen's, Woolworth's, McLellen's, and Blass Department Store agreed to desegregate their lunch counters and allow black customers to eat at the counters. The desegregation would happen in about a month, on January 2, 1963. In addition, the businessmen decided to engage in negotiations about desegregating the downtown theaters and hotels if the protesting would stop immediately.<sup>90</sup> In early December, Hansen moved on to Pine Bluff to begin working on desegregation efforts there.<sup>91</sup>

SNCC was engaged in many important activities and impacted life in the communities in which they worked. Of those activities, SNCC's presence in Arkansas impacted the creation of local groups where local citizens helped to fight for equal rights. These groups fought legal battles in court where some of their cases made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court and impacted the civil rights movement in the south. Prior to the Supreme Court of the United States deciding how the sit-in cases were to be handled by the lower courts, there were many more sit-in demonstrations in Little Rock and throughout the Arkansas delta. The civil rights movement was shaped by the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Lupper v.*

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<sup>89</sup> "Field Report - November 29, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>90</sup> "Field Report - November 30, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

<sup>91</sup> "Field Report - December 3, 1962," (Arkansas 1962).

*Arkansas*. Frank Lupper and Thomas Robinson, students at Philander Smith College, were arrested in April 1960 during the early round of sit-ins in downtown Little Rock. While Lupper and Robinson were arrested in April 1960, however, their cases were not resolved until late in 1964 following the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>92</sup>

Lupper and Robinson entered Blass's and requested to be served at the lunch counter. They were refused service and asked to leave by the manager. When they refused, the assistant manager called the police and they were escorted from the premises and charged with violation of Arkansas Act 226 of 1959 which prohibited "any person from creating a disturbance or breach of the peace in any public place of business."<sup>93</sup> In addition, these students were also charged with Arkansas Act 14 because they refused to leave the store when requested by the manager. Act 14 made it "unlawful for any person to refuse to leave the business premises of any person when so requested by the manager or owner therefore."<sup>94</sup> In other words, Lupper and Robinson were charged under an additional trespassing law that the earlier protesters were not charged.<sup>95</sup>

On April 21, 1960, Lupper and Robinson were tried for their violations of Arkansas laws 226 and 14 in Little Rock's Municipal Court in front of Judge Quinn Glover. After they were found guilty, Historian John Kirk, argued that Judge Glover imposed harsh penalties upon the students, showing the anger and hostility of the white

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<sup>92</sup> Kirk, "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas." *Lupper v. Arkansas*, 367 S.W. 2d. 750 (1963). *Lupper*, 379 U.S. 306.

<sup>93</sup> Act 226, 1959 Special Session of the Arkansas General Assembly.

<sup>94</sup> Act 14, 1959 Special Session of the Arkansas General Assembly.

<sup>95</sup> Lupper, 379 U.S. 306, 308. *Lupper v. Arkansas*; *ibid.* "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas."

community with the inconveniences of their protests. He sentenced Lupper and Robinson with a ninety-day jail sentence and four hundred dollar fine. Lupper and Robinson appealed their decision and Judge William J. Kirby heard their case on June 17, 1960, when the students opted for a jury trial. After just fifteen minutes the all-white jury found them guilty of violating on both counts. Judge Kirby fined them and sentenced them to seven months in prison. Lupper and Robinson determined they would appeal their convictions and sentences to the Arkansas Supreme Court.<sup>96</sup>

On January 16, 1961, the Arkansas Supreme Court heard the sit-in cases from March and April 1960. The students raised several constitutional and factual issues. First, they argued that the arrest violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. They argued that while a private business had to right to exclude certain patrons, using state criminal laws to bring about the exclusion of the blacks from their premises when they were not doing the same to whites was akin to state support of private discrimination. Second, they argued that the Arkansas laws the students were charged with violating were unconstitutional because they were vague and broad, since the state already had a disturbing the peace law and these new laws added nothing new and were broader than the older law. Third, they argued that even if the laws were constitutional there was not enough evidence for which a jury to have found the students violated the laws. Fourth, they argued that the sentences and fines that were handed down by Judges Glover and Kirby were unusually harsh solely because the punishments were specifically designed to end the protest against segregation. The Arkansas Supreme Court took the cases under

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<sup>96</sup> Lupper, 379 U.S. 306, 308. "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas."

consideration for almost two and a half years prior to ruling on them because they were waiting for direction from the United States Supreme Court which had been hesitant to address constitutional aspects that were raised in these cases previously in other decisions. This delay by the Arkansas Supreme Court had a similar effect on the lower courts in Arkansas as the United States Supreme Court had on the Arkansas Supreme Court. The lower courts decided to delay ruling on later sit-in cases until the Arkansas Supreme Court had ruled on the constitutionality of the Arkansas laws that were at issue and the cases kept being continued and rescheduled.<sup>97</sup>

For any sit-in cases that were decided by the United States Supreme Court prior to the *Lupper* decision, the majority worked hard to avoid the Equal Protection Clause issue in these cases but used other legal justifications to ultimately overturn the sit-in convictions. The legal wrangling used by the Court allowed it to avoid making a decision based on principles they wanted to avoid using to dismiss these sit-in cases.<sup>98</sup>

The Arkansas state courts viewed the Lupper and Robinson cases differently than the other early Little Rock sit-in cases because they were charged with Act 226 as well as Act 14. While Lupper and Robinson were not the first students to be arrested for sitting-in, their case was most significant because of the implications it had for all the other. Because Lupper and Robinson did not leave the premises when requested by the manager, the court found that the students were guilty of trespassing. The court held that this was not a violation of the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment because the statute applied to anyone who refused to leave

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<sup>97</sup> *Lupper v. Arkansas*; "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas."; *Lupper v. Arkansas*; *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas."

and not just restricted to blacks. In addition, the court decided that there was enough evidence presented to the jury for them to find that Lupper and Robinson were in fact trespassers. When the case made its way finally to the United States Supreme Court the Court decided that “the convictions must be vacated[,] and the prosecutions dismissed [because] the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids discrimination in places of public accommodation and removes peaceful attempts to be served on an equal basis from the category of punishable activities. This case was important inside Arkansas and across the country as it was the final sit in case that the Supreme Court heard because it led to the dismissal of the thousands of sit-in cases that were awaiting final appeal in the courts.<sup>99</sup>

SNCC’s arrival in Little Rock helped galvanize the sit-in movement in the city and ultimately was the beginning of what turned out to be a strategically planned civil rights movement in the state. While there was some action prior to SNCC’s arrival, the organization altered the civil rights conversation by coming into the community and empowering local people to help their own cause. SNCC also came in and stayed in the community instead of galvanizing the community and leaving them to continue on their own. In essence, SNCC became a part of the community that they helped which allowed them to gain the trust of the communities and those surrounding them that they would ultimately branch out into later.

The resistance and violence by the local whites in Arkansas showed that Arkansas was not as moderate a state as it appeared from the outside. The reaction by the local whites in response to the protesters show that the myth of Arkansas being a

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<sup>99</sup> Lupper, 379 U.S. 306, 308. *Lupper v. Arkansas*. "The Origins of SNCC in Arkansas," 35-36.

moderate state was a false narrative. Not only was the arrival of SNCC important to show what life was really like in Arkansas but the *Lupper* case that ultimately made its way to the United States Supreme Court helped to shape the civil rights movement by determining that it would be unconstitutional for states to punish sit-in protesters that were merely trying to be served like any other member of the community by nonviolent means.

## CHAPTER 3

### SNCC AND THE ARKANSAS DELTA

After reviving the sit-in protests in Little Rock, Bill Hansen helped establish a SNCC presence of which the cities of Pine Bluff, Helena, Forest City, and Gould, towns located in the Arkansas Delta were some of the main locations. The group was attacked by local whites during direct-action protests and voter registration drives. In fact, both in Arkansas, and throughout the south, SNCC members were physically assaulted, threatened with physical violence, and even arrested. They were met with resistance from both white and black residents who were bothered by the protests that would challenge their community power and status. In Arkansas there was a small amount of interracial cooperation which was related to the bad publicity from the Little Rock Crisis because whites were fearful of a repeat of coming across as looking bad to the national and international community again.<sup>100</sup>

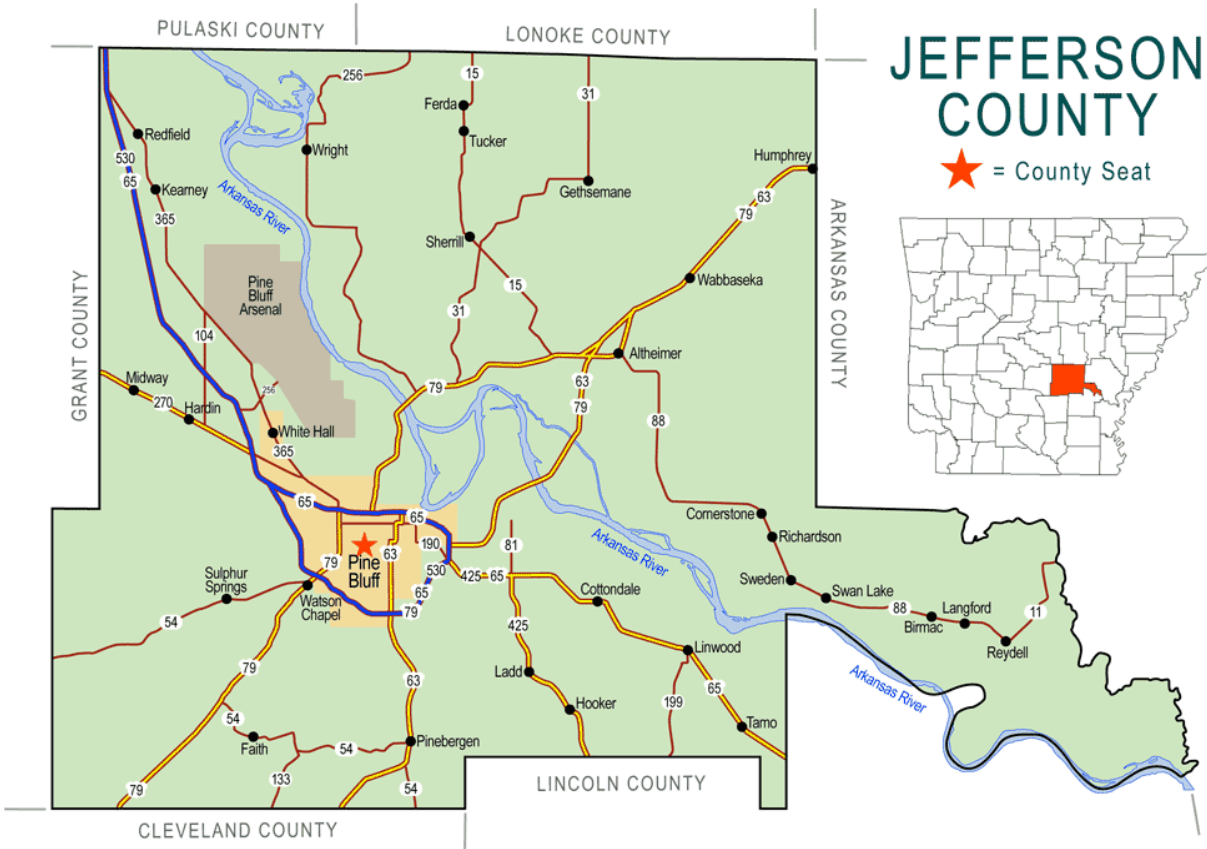
After a single reconnaissance trip at the end of 1962, Hansen and Grinage loaded up their car and headed permanently forty miles south to Pine Bluff to set up camp in a different sort of Arkansas, one far less willing to accept what Little Rock had accepted. In those days, Pine Bluff (Figure 4) was the center of black Arkansas. With a population of around 50,000 residents, Pine Bluff was about half black and a large number of those were black professionals. One reason for the large number of black professionals was because Arkansas AM&N (AM&N), the black state college was also located in Pine Bluff which meant that it was one of the major hubs of educated blacks

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<sup>100</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project," *ibid.*, 156-57.



in the state of Arkansas. Hansen and Grinage found a location to stay close to the AM&N campus.



**Figure 4: Map of Jefferson County, Arkansas,**  
<https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-jefferson-county-6760/>

The next day Hansen and Grinage entered the campus in an effort to recruit students to participate in their planned protests in Pine Bluff. Because of Hansen's race, Hansen and Grinage's presence on campus was not a secret very long, as a white man wandering around the campus of a black university was not something that could be hidden easily. Hansen and Grinage were received with mixed feelings by the black students at the student government office. The student government president, James Dorsey, did not want SNCC on his campus and requested that Hansen and Grinage leave Pine Bluff and return to Little Rock or even better, leave the state. In fact,

Dorsey's attitude was so poor that SNCC's main office in Atlanta had to write him a letter to try to bring him over to their side or at the very least keep him from being a hinderance.<sup>101</sup>The student government secretary, Ruthie Buffington, had a different perception of Hansen and Grinage and helped introduce them to students who might be interested in engaging in the protests to integrate Pine Bluff.

That same evening Hansen and Grinage left campus with one of the students and went to do laundry at a local laundromat. As soon as they arrived, they were stopped by two police cars and informed that they were being arrested upon which they were escorted to the local jail. Subsequently, the police chief and other officers took Hansen to several downtown businesses to show him to some white employees for determination of whether Hansen had written checks to stores the previous week on accounts with insufficient funds. Ironically, Hansen was still in Little Rock the previous week. Hansen was released from custody once the police realized that this intimidation tactic was not going to stop Hansen and his efforts to desegregate Pine Bluff.<sup>102</sup>

The Arkansas Delta resembled Mississippi in many ways, with firm distinctions based upon race and class. The rural delta region also differed from the urban Little Rock which provided a distinction in how Hansen and SNCC was received in the delta region. Pine Bluff and Helena were the main locations of SNCC's efforts in the Arkansas delta. Hansen and the student leaders decided Pine Bluff would be their starting point.

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<sup>101</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*. Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 191. Some of the students that Hansen and Grinage were introduced to were, Bob and Bill Whitfield, Jim Jones, Janet Broome, Shirley Baker, Joanna Edwards, Mildred Neal, Leon Nash, and Odell Thorne. Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."

<sup>102</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*. The Arkansas Project Staff, "Annual Report," (1963); Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 192.

SNCC and the student protesters found that white and black resistance in the Arkansas delta was more than they experienced in Little Rock when the protesters began trying to desegregate Pine Bluff's public spaces, which suggested to the protesters that the local blacks may not be ready to change their way of life. However, this may not be an accurate perception of why the local blacks resisted desegregation. An equally plausible reason was that the blacks in the delta were worried about repression from the whites which would make their lives more difficult. Because of SNCC's tenacious reputation and presence in town, upper class whites were more interested in working with SNCC on a peaceful integration plan in order to avoid any bad publicity. While this was true of white business owners, there was not always the case with working class whites.<sup>103</sup>

In the afternoon of February 1, 1963, thirteen students of AM&N descended upon the F.W. Woolworth in downtown Pine Bluff prepared to conduct the first sit-in in the city as the Pine Bluff Student Movement (PBSM). They chose this particular date to honor the initial sit in 3 years before in Greenboro. The PBSM was created by AM&N students that were inspired by the arrival of SNCC to Pine Bluff and their way to engage in an organized protest movement to help desegregate Pine Bluff and dismantle Jim Crow. The students were prepared to sit at the lunch counter until the store closed that night. However, as soon as the students took a seat at the lunch counter, a waitress turned the lights off and closed the counter for business. Over the next couple of hours word

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<sup>103</sup> Riffel, "In the Storm: William Hansen and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas, 1962-1967," 68. Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 124. Phillips County was the largest of the delta counties and give an idea of the challenges that awaited the protesters. In Phillips County there were 25,308 blacks, which was 57.8 percent of the county population and 18,552 whites, which was 42.2 percent of the county population during the 1960 census. However, in 1963 only one quarter of the residents registered to vote were black. Sixty-five percent of the black residents had no more than an elementary education. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."

spread quickly around the city that a sit-in was occurring downtown.<sup>104</sup>

As onlookers gathered around the store, the manager of Woolworths spoke to the leader of the student protest in his office trying to resolve the protest. When no resolution resulted, the manager closed the store early and the protesters left the lunch counter. Pine Bluff was different than many other cities in Arkansas in that the black community operated separate from the white community. The black community offered many businesses and services that blacks would be unable to obtain from the white community, such as restaurants, beauty parlors and financial institutions. This gave the students at AM&N the strength to engage in a protest without as much fear of repercussion from the white community because they did not have to rely on the white community for everyday services.<sup>105</sup>

To continue with the demonstrations beyond the initial sit-in while continuing their education, the student protesters planned to conduct the sit-ins in two to three hour shifts so that no one would have to dedicate extraordinary time to the protest. However, this would require more student involvement to pull off this strategy. The AM&N students found these other students at the local high school. The high school students provided a tremendous assistance to the movement. They would arrive at Woolworth's immediately after school every day and help the AM&N students occupy as much space at the lunch counter as possible. While only one black student would be enough to close

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<sup>104</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*. Field Report "students expelled." Ibid., Letter to SNCC. Ibid., SNCC field work in Arkansas. Holly Y. McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963," in *Arsnick : The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 169-69. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."

<sup>105</sup> McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963," 169.

down the lunch counter, when the high school students showed up, Woolworth's would be packed with black children protesting.<sup>106</sup>

The presence of high school students provided a profound benefit to the sit-in protesters. The high school students allowed PBSM students to protest Woolworth's for the whole first week in February 1963. In other protest locations, black sit-in protesters may be susceptible to arrest or physical violence, however, in Pine Bluff these college students were shielded by the high schoolers and the larger black community based on the sheer number of students present and the power of the black community at large.<sup>107</sup>

The typical response to the black protesters entering a business to engage in a sit-in was for the business to close the store or the lunch counter in hopes of cutting off the protest possibility. This however caused the business to lose money so Woolworth's decided on the morning of February 5, to leave the lunch counter open for business and ignore the students when the protesters arrived for the sit-in. However, this strategy was hoping the students would see their protest was not working and leave. This strategy failed because the students did not get frustrated, bored, and ultimately leave as anticipated by Woolworth's but instead remained for hours until the end of the business day. While the AM&N students avoided retaliation, the white allies were not as fortunate. On February 14, after engaging in a sit-in protest, Hansen and other protesters were physically assaulted by a mob of white locals after leaving the establishment. Hansen and the other protesters were kicked and beaten with belts and poles as they left downtown to meet with fellow protesters while they were

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."

<sup>107</sup> McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963," 169. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."

defenselessly practicing nonviolence. This type of response was not unique for white protesters. Around February 16, Hansen was harassed by an elderly resident of Pine Bluff. On February 24, a white resident pulled Hansen off a stool while he sat at a lunch counter protesting and Hansen was kicked and beaten for several minutes until he was removed and arrested by three policemen. While the black students faced less violence because of the large number of people involved in the protests, the same was not true of Hansen. This was partially true because he was not a student and partially because he was white. This was another instance where his whiteness served as a hindrance to his engaging in the protests, he hoped would help desegregate Arkansas. Hansen was more vulnerable to violence from whites because they viewed him as a sellout to his race which was not the same view that whites had of the black students. This is not to suggest that Hansen had it worse than blacks in the delta or was even more vulnerable. The reality is that even though Hansen might be treated more violently in very specific contexts, he did not live with the casual violence with which African Americans in the delta lived on a daily basis. His whiteness made him stand out sometimes, but more often than not it offered him a lot of veil of protection. Local black residents and black SNCC volunteers constantly had their lives threatened, houses bombed, and were arrested by the police.<sup>108</sup>

Violence was not the only response from the white residents. They also used procedures to attempt to thwart the sit-ins. Some days, white residents would occupy the lunch counter seats the protesters typically used to prevent them from sitting-in and

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<sup>108</sup> McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963," 169. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."

protesting. In fact, these residents would use the same strategies that the PBSM protesters used to stage their protest all day by sitting in shifts and exchanging seats with new residents who took their place at the lunch counter so that PBSM wouldn't get the seats to conduct their protest. It was not until late in the afternoon when the residents finally left and the PBSM members were finally able to sit down and conduct their protest which they did until the store closed.<sup>109</sup>

Starting in March 1963, the PBSM suggested that they might start integration efforts at other businesses. There was a need to expand their protests because Woolworth's decided to stifle their sit-ins at the end of February by removing every stool at the lunch counter so that there would be nowhere for the protesters to conduct their sit-in. Therefore, the protesters had to either expand their protest locations to other businesses or figure out another strategy to integrate the lunch counter at Woolworth's.<sup>110</sup>

While the students had some protection from the whites in town based on the black community strength, one place they were vulnerable was closer to home. The PBSM students were vulnerable at school. AM&N was placed in a tenuous position because it received its operating funds from the state legislature and at this moment their future was being decided by the legislature. AM&N Chancellor Lawrence A. Davis, Sr. issued a statement as soon as Hansen came to town renouncing and rejecting any

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<sup>109</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*. Staff, "Staff, Annual Report."; McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

<sup>110</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

support of the student protests. Davis had to be fearful that the Arkansas legislature might initiate reprisals against the college by withholding funds from the college and shutting it down to prevent a protest to which they were opposed. Davis penned a letter to the student body denouncing the protest participants a week after the protests began. In the letter, Davis threatened suspension of any students from the university who participated in future protests in an effort to discourage the continuation of the sit-ins.<sup>111</sup>

Prior to Davis's suspension threat, the students had a great deal of support for their protest from the black community, however, after the fear of suspension presented itself students support began to wane from fear of being suspended from school. Ten students went downtown after being treated by Davis to suspend any AM&M students that continued the sit-ins. These students would be in the group of students that would be suspended. Though these students would be suspended, it did not prevent five additional students in the following weeks from joining them in protesting downtown Pine Bluff.<sup>112</sup>

Fifteen students were expelled from AM&N that spring for their refusal to stop participating in the sit-ins Hansen and Grinage helped to organize. Several joined the SNCC staff and several pursued their education elsewhere. One who became a SNCC organizer was James Jones, a natural community organizer and, in an organization filled with brilliant field organizers. Foreman and the Atlanta office gradually came to accept the fact that, intended or not, Arkansas had become the third SNCC field project,

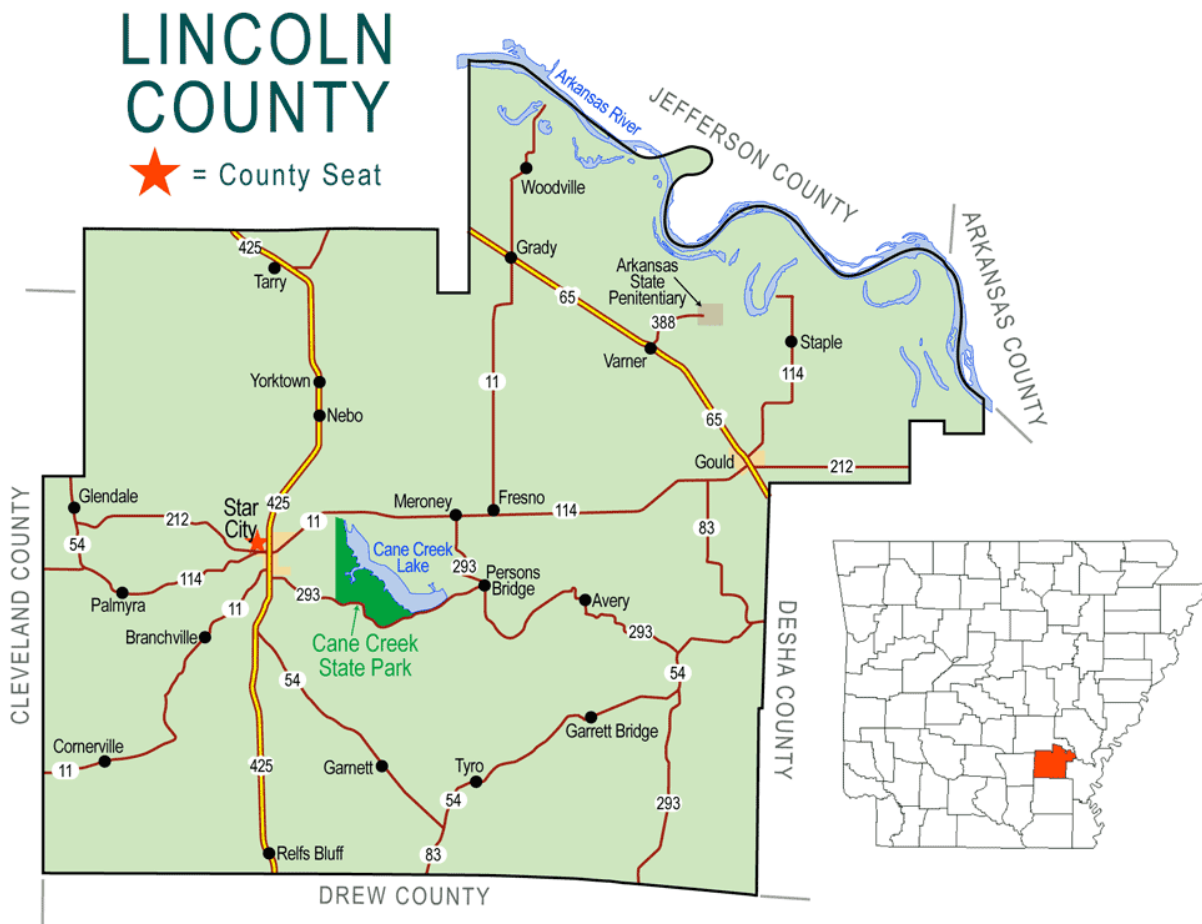
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<sup>111</sup> Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."

<sup>112</sup> Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."



Pine Bluff became the headquarters and SNCC expanded from there. The initial efforts in Pine Bluff were aimed at desegregating public accommodations, but as the project began to look at the long term, there was a shift into more involvement in voter registration and grass roots political organizing. To this end, SNCC began running candidates for political office and grass roots organizing. The first effort in this regard was Lincoln County (Figure 5), immediately south of Pine Bluff.



**Figure 5: Map of Lincoln County, Arkansas,**  
<https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/map-of-lincoln-county-6765/>

Simultaneously SNCC moved into Jefferson County (Figure 4). In the spring of 1963 Hansen drove Jones to Star City, the county seat, and dropped him off. Jones had the unique capacity to be welcomed and trusted far quicker than anyone else, especially

Hansen, because he had to overcome his whiteness in order to be trusted by local blacks in any city SNCC wished to set up operations. After getting things under way in Star City, Jones moved on to the other end of the county, to Gould, which is discussed in chapter 4 as a case study of how SNCC operated in Arkansas.<sup>113</sup>

The local Pine Bluff newspaper, the *Pine Bluff Commercial* usually did not report on black issues, however, it did regarding SNCC's early entry into Pine Bluff to desegregate the community. The *Commercial* started by running a photograph of three of the unidentified sit-in protesters. Subsequently, stories would regularly appear in the *Commercial* about the AM&N student sit-ins. This helped to deteriorate race relations in Pine Bluff and ultimately lead AM&N Chancellor Lawrence A. Davis to expel the fifteen students that engaged in the sit-ins at Woolworth's.<sup>114</sup>

The AM&N students that engaged in the protests of downtown Pine Bluff faced a great deal of pressure from many different directions. While it was clear that there was pressure from Chancellor Davis threatening to suspend any student that continued to protest, there was also pressure on many students that did not want to disappoint him. For example, Ruthie Buffington, was a senior in the spring of 1963 when Davis asked her if she had participated in the protests. Buffington truthfully responded that she had not, to which Davis replied that it was not the time to protest. Buffington pondered for the next two weeks about whether she should engage in the sit-ins at Woolworth's.

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<sup>113</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. Jim Jones, interview by Bob and Vicki Gabriner, August 8, 1966. Hansen, "Arkansas Daze," 192-93; Jim Jones, interview by Bob and Vicki Gabriner, August 8, 1966.

<sup>114</sup> McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

Eventually, Buffington decided that the right thing for her was to join the protest. However, she felt a pressure from two different directions. First, she needed to resolve her need to protest with not wanting to disappoint Davis. Davis told Buffington that he would suspend her if she decided to join the protest which would keep her from graduating. Second, Buffington felt the need to get her family's approval to join the protest. Buffington's aunt, with whom she lived, told her that if she chose to join the protest, she would not be able to continue living in her home. Buffington decided that the fight for civil rights was more important than her education and family. Therefore, she decided to join the protest in spite of the consequences.<sup>115</sup>

Of the fifteen students that were suspended or expelled from AM&N, six were forced to leave Pine Bluff by their parents and two additional were kicked out of their home by their parents. Another student had a scholarship taken away when she was suspended from the AM&N. The dishonor of being suspended stayed with many of them for years to come. However, many of the former students stayed in Pine Bluff and continued to fight for civil rights in one way or another. Nine of the students stayed in Pine Bluff to continue fighting with SNCC. Of those nine, four former students continued to live in Pine Bluff. Of those four, two were thrown out of their homes by their parents.<sup>116</sup>

SNCC had such an impact that the high school students also engaged in the sit-ins with the college students. During approximately the month of February the

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<sup>115</sup> Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." *ibid.*; Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview."

<sup>116</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. Hanesn, "William and Ruthie Hansen Interview." McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

Commercial chronicled the protests and reactions from the community.

*Early Edition 2/28/63*  
**Woolworth Counter Closed to Sit-ins**

An undetermined number of demonstrators was turned away from the Woolworth Drug Store Fountain at Jefferson Square this morning.

A sign was placed at the entrance to the lunch counter when the would-be sit-inners arrived at about 11:30 a.m., and the lunch room was closed.

The sign said: "This fountain has been closed in the interest of public safety."

A spokesman for the store would not say if the counter would continue to be closed. He said, "No comment by any employee of this store." The spokesman would not identify himself.



**Woolworth Store Closes Counter, Removes Stools**

The lunch counter at the F.W. Woolworth store here was closed today, obviously due to a series of sit-in demonstrations by a group of Negroes during the past month.

THE MANAGER of the store, Thomas Harper, said he had no comment to make on the closing of the facility.

He did not disclose whether the closing will be permanent or if it will be re-opened at a later date.

A group of Negroes filed into the store about 10:30 this morning—as they have each day since the sit-ins began—and found the stools at the counter had been removed.

A DISPLAY of artificial flowers lined the counter, and plastic bags covered the metal stands on which the stools had rested.

A policeman at the store said the group walked in, looked at the counter and left the store. There were no incidents.

Bob Whitfield, chairman of the Pine Bluff Student Movement, which has sponsored the sit-ins.

(See WOOLWORTH, Pg. 2)

**LUNCH COUNTER CLOSED AT WOOLWORTH** —Commercial Staff

This was the scene that greeted Negro sit-in participants when they entered F.W. Woolworth store this morning to resume the 28th day of demonstrations. The store's manager did not disclose whether the facility will be closed permanently.

*Thursday Feb 28, 1963 Pine Bluff Commercial*

Figure 6: Picture of *Pine Bluff Commercial* articles about sit-in movement, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972 (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982)

When the students started engaging in sit-ins at Woolworth's one of the first reactions was to close the lunch counter down. The intention was to frustrate the students in hope that they would give up and go home. Thomas Harper, the Manager of Woolworth's did not know whether the lunch counter would ever reopen, which must have frustrated the students because it was hard to plan around a situation that you were unsure would allow for a sit-in from one day to the next. On about February 28, 1963, when the students arrived at Woolworth's in the morning to protest, they found the seats of the

stools at the lunch counter removed (Figure 6) so that they could not “sit-in” because they could not sit. Upon seeing this the students turned around and exited the store right away. The plan had worked at least for the short term and frustrated the students’ ability to engage in the protest until they were able to reformulate a new plan to deal with the strategy of Woolworth’s to frustrate them. Around March 4, 1963, when the students arrived at Walgreens to engage in a sit-in, they found a sign that read, “the fountain has been closed in the interest of public safety.” And just as with Woolworth’s, the spokesman for Walgreens wouldn’t say when if ever the lunch counter would reopen again frustrating the students’ ability to plan the protest.<sup>117</sup>

On March 4, 1963, approximately three weeks after the students were suspended the PBSM became the Pine Bluff Movement (PBM). This new group of young people was led mainly by students who were suspended from AM&N. Six former students served as members of the PBM initial executive committee. Soon after PBM came into existence the members were engaging in sit-ins and other protests all over Pine Bluff. The local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took up protesting stores in downtown Pine Bluff. This expanded protest movement shocked white business leaders because they thought the initial student led protest movement would end as quickly as it began.<sup>118</sup>

Very quickly, the PBM started to gain momentum by making small progress right from the very start. On March 5, the restaurant at the Holiday Inn did something

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<sup>117</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8.

<sup>118</sup> McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

different than anyone expected by serving four PBM members. While this was a surprise to many, it was not a surprise to the PBM. Using a different strategy than before the PBM decided to call the restaurant manager to inform him that four protesters would be coming to integrate the restaurant and the manager informed them, they would be served which was the first time this happened in Pine Bluff. However, on March 15, when five PBM members arrived at the Magnolia Cafeteria requesting to be served, they were told by employees that they would not be served because the restaurant was closing. To test whether this was an excuse, some PBM members arrived more than two hours earlier at the Magnolia Cafeteria the next night and to their surprise they were served. Finally, the PBM sought to protest at the Keese restaurant. The PBM arrived there the same night as the Magnolia Cafeteria served them, and they were served at the Keese restaurant also.<sup>119</sup>

Being served did not happen at every location the PBM protested. For example, after Woolworth's removed its stools from the lunch counter to thwart the sit-ins, the PBM moved its protest to Walgreen where the manager closed the lunch counter rather than have to deal with daily sit-ins. However, on March 18, when the lunch counter reopened, the PBM was there to sit-in. With the success of its protests, the PBM did not rest on its laurels and targeted additional businesses as rumors began to circulate that the PBM members were targeting white churches in which to worship. Once the rumors started to circulate some of the churches decided to take preemptive action by allowing blacks who wanted to attend service to attend.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. Jones, "Jim Jones Interview;"

When the AM&N students were suspended from school, they relinquished part of their protection they possessed which was seen by the greater white community and whites decided to use this to their advantage. The AM&N students were viewed by the white community as receiving protection from several sources, one of those sources was being students at the University and receiving protection from the university community, but once they were no longer students, they were less protected from reprisal by the white community during their protests. Once the former AM&N students were suspended and eventually expelled the police started arresting PBM members who were protesting which did not happen previously. It appears that once the students were not as protected the greater white community used this vulnerability to place additional pressure on the students with the intent to end the protests. Several PBM members attempted to gain admittance to the white section of the Saenger Theater. When the PBM members attempted to purchase tickets from the white ticket window they were denied only to return a half hour later to be denied once more. On March 26, six PBM members made reservations at the Pines hotel where they were arrested following a three-hour sit-in. When the protesters arrived at the hotel to check in, they were told by the hotel manager that they wouldn't be allowed to stay because blacks were not allowed as guests. Rather than leaving, the protesters decided to engage in a sit-in in the hotel lobby. After several hours, the PBM members removed their shoes and socks while sitting in the lobby, after which they were arrested. This marked a drastic turn of events in the PBM protests. After close to two months of almost daily

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McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

protests, the Pine Bluff police department began arresting PBM protesters for engaging in sit-ins.<sup>121</sup>

Following the incident at the Pines hotel twenty-seven PBM members returned to the Saenger Theater and again they were turned away, however this time the PBM members engaged in a protest of the Theater, where the protesters blocked the Theater's doorways in an attempt to prevent patrons from entering. The manager of the theater called the police who arrested the protesters. The following day, sixteen more PBM members protested at the Saenger and all of them were also arrested. In an effort to turn the tables on the white establishment, the protesters refused bail which meant they remained in the Pine Bluff Jail until their trial. The jail was overrun with forty-four protesters which did not allow room for anyone else to be arrested and jailed. This change in strategy was necessary since the police started arresting the protesters. This helped to stifle the ability to arrest the protesters and frustrate their ability to protest.<sup>122</sup>

The PBM would last about three years, and during this time they managed to integrate public swimming pools, restaurants, organize voter registration drives, integrate places of employment and establish a Freedom Program to help young children from an academic perspective. During this same time that things were taking place in Pine Bluff, SNCC was also making moves in the Arkansas delta. While certainly not the only locations the three major locations that SNCC attacked were in Helena,

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<sup>121</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. *ibid.*, Reel 10. McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."

<sup>122</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8. Jones, "Jim Jones Interview." McGee, "It Was the Wrong Time, and They Just Weren't Ready: Direct-Action Protests in Pine Bluff, 1963."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."



Forrest City, and Gould. Helena and Forrest City are explored here while Gould is explored more fully in chapter 4 as a case study of what happened in these three cities and throughout the delta region. In these three cities SNCC pursued a multi-prong attack focusing on integration of public accommodations, increased black voter registration, improving education opportunities, providing more economic opportunities for blacks, and convincing blacks to become more politically active.<sup>123</sup>

On March 23, 1963 it was really clear that the boycott was having an effect. The lack of blacks shopping downtown was noticeable to whites and started to hurt the bottom line for local businesses. On March 24, 1963 SNCC had their second mass meeting at the St. Peter's Rock Baptist Church, which was their largest turnout at that time. There were close to 600 people in attendance which includes getting the "street folks" to join in.<sup>124</sup>

March 25, 1963, the picketing and boycotting has business owners really upset. The owners are insulting the protesters where previously they were ignored and laughed at because the owners thought the protest would not have any affect and die out in short order. Hansen called the Hotel Pines for reservations seven black protesters. He got the reservation but when they arrived at the hotel their reservation was denied. They sat down in the lobby in protest for about four hours and then decided to sleep the night in the lobby. The hotel called the police and the protesters were arrested and taken to jail. They were charged with failure to leave the premise sat the

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<sup>123</sup> Jones, "Jim Jones Interview.", Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

<sup>124</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 8.

request of the proprietor and loitering. The protesters decided not to bail themselves out and remained in the jail under arrest.<sup>125</sup>

On March 26, 1963 six people sat in at the Walgreens counter, which had no impact on the restaurant as they just ignored the protesters and served the other customers. Around midday around eight more protesters arrived and took a seat at the counter so Walgreens decided to shut down the lunch counter. March 27, 1963, SNCC stood at the Saenger Theater, but Bob Whitfield decided to leave when the management threatened to call the police and have them arrested.<sup>126</sup>

The next night, Wednesday, March 28, 1963, they planned to get arrested if it was necessary. Twenty-seven protesters went to back to the theater where they protested for about forty-five minutes before management ordered them to leave the premises. When they refused to leave, they were arrested, charged with creating a disturbance in a public place of business and jailed. Most of the people arrested were high school students. The following day, Hansen received calls all day from all over town, especially the student's mothers. Eventually after conversations with Hansen, they agreed to allow their children to remain in jail if they wanted to stay. The students decided to stay and some even became upset at the prospect of leaving.<sup>127</sup>

The next night, Thursday, March 29, 1963, sixteen more protesters descended upon the Saenger Theater. They all got arrested and went to jail. At this point, there were approximately forty-nine people in the Pine Bluff jail which included most of the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

executive members except for Hansen and Bob Whitfield. Hansen wanted to send another couple dozen to jail that night, but others thought that was not the best idea, so it did not happen. The kids that were ready to go to jail for protesting were not happy that they would not get to go.<sup>128</sup>

Reverend Robinson, chairman of the boycott committee, was not happy with the chaos that SNCC was causing in Pine Bluff and was trying to undo their progress by going down to the jail and trying to bail everyone out. Hansen and others told Robinson that they had the bail situation already planned out and Robinson promised not to do anything without letting anyone know beforehand. However, Robinson had no intention of changing his plans and he went to the jail and bailed everyone out without letting anyone know. Robinson then brought all of the kids down to his church and began to bad mouth Hansen, Bob Whitfield and what they were trying to do in Pine Bluff. It was this kind of thing that SNCC had to also overcome, not just the local whites, but some of the local blacks who did not want change or challenge from SNCC on their community power and standing. In fact, Robinson did not stop there, he also was conspiring with the local whites to maintain the status quo. Robinson made a deal with the Pine Bluff chief of police to let everyone out of jail and Robinson would assure that the demonstrations down town would end. Robinson also spoke to the parents of the high schoolers in an effort to get them to keep the kids from associating with the SNCC members so he told the parents they should forbid their kids from associating in any way with the SNCC workers. After having enough of Robinson's backstabbing, the executive committee met and voted Robinson out as chairman but kept him on the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

executive committee so that they could keep an eye on him, but he resigned from the committee anyway. This did not stop Robinson from trying to cause trouble for the organizing committee. He continued spreading lies about the committee around town. On Wednesday April 3, 1963, after meeting with the white locals, SNCC decided to call a halt to the demonstrations in an effort to negotiate a peaceful desegregation of Pine Bluff.<sup>129</sup>

Monday, May 27, 1963, SNCC began their voter registration drive while still trying to desegregate Pine Bluff. The fact that Pine Bluff was very rural and therefore did not have the largest population or many businesses competing made it difficult to convince business owners that it would be in their best interest to desegregate quicker rather than holding out. SNCC attempted to work with several restaurants, including Pine Hotel Coffee Shop, Magnolia Cafeteria, the Keese Restaurant, to come to a peaceful desegregation. The restaurants were not sure agreeing to this desegregation plan was in their best interest with their white patrons possibly being offended. SNCC was not just trying to get lunch counters and cafeterias desegregated but also finding jobs in businesses that had never hired black employees previously except in custodial positions. SNCC had several stores that they felt confident would hire these applicants and a few other stores that they were confident would follow suit after these stores broke the color barrier. The other thing that SNCC was progressing on was desegregating the school district in Pine Bluff without having to file a law suit. SNCC noticed that black community involvement increased during their initial foray into Pine

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



Helena is located approximately thirty-five miles from Mississippi. Historian Randy Finley noted that Organizer James Jones thought that “Helena is very much a Mississippi type of town. . . . When we first came to Helena people were completely afraid of anything that was connected or related to freedom.”<sup>131</sup> This meant that the same strategies and tactics that SNCC used in Little Rock and Pine Bluff would not necessarily produce the same results in the delta region. When the protesters arrived, they received a mixed welcome from the black community. There were several prominent members of the black community that welcomed the activists into the community financially, and other support both publicly and behind the scenes. However, not all blacks were supportive. Some of the highly regarded ministers in Helena outwardly opposed SNCC’s activities and told their congregations to avoid the protests when they started.<sup>132</sup>

Many whites in or from Helena were not thrilled to see SNCC and the activists arrive. The Arkansas Attorney General and Helena Chief of Police made what could be easily considered threats to SNCC volunteers. While resistance from white locals would slow the progress down of the protesters, it wouldn’t completely stifle them. Just like in Pine Bluff, subsequent to SNCC arriving in Helena, the residents of Helena created an organization to help desegregate the community, it was called the Philips County Movement (PCM). The PCM was comprised of both SNCC members and local

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<sup>131</sup> Jones, "Jim Jones Interview." Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

<sup>132</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Reel 7. Jones, "Jim Jones Interview." Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

volunteers. One of biggest goals that the PCM had in mind for Helena was desegregation of places of public accommodation which was similar to the first goals in Little Rock and Pine Bluff. The locations that PCM selected for their initial desegregation protests were Henry's Drug Store and Habib's Cafeteria. Their demonstration efforts did not go unpunished. The Helena police arrested and jailed more than thirty protestors who were charged with inciting a riot.<sup>133</sup>

During the midst of all that was going on, sometimes love and romance found its way into the SNCC environment. In fact, interracial romance often grew out of working so closely with each other day and night. Around October 12, 1963, Hansen and Ruthie Buffington got married to each other. With the white Hansen marrying the black Buffington, they had to get married out of Arkansas because interracial marriage was illegal in the state. In fact, when Hansen reported the marriage in a letter to the lawyer for the Pine Bluff movement, Hansen mentioned it in a rather cavalier manner. After the news spread throughout the community; Hansen seemed to be waiting for the authorities to arrest him constantly. Hansen's marriage to the former Ruthie Buffington was significant for several reasons. First, it was significant because it challenged the Jim Crow laws that they were fighting against, so it was a form of resistance. Second, Hansen and Buffington's marriage was significant because it possibly caused some internal issues with the SNCC Arkansas Project. Black male volunteers watching a northern white man come into their community and "taking" one of their black women may have proved threatening to some. Similarly, sometimes white women found

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<sup>133</sup> Jones, "Jim Jones Interview." Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

themselves offending black women SNCC volunteers by engaging in relationships with black men in their group of volunteers. Finally, although Hansen's marriage to Buffington may have offended some, it may also have given him more credibility in the black community because by marrying Buffington, he may have given himself more capital to use with the black community because of his marriage to one of their own.<sup>134</sup>

In June 1964, the Helena Public Library and Habib's Cafeteria were peacefully integrated. However, attempting to integrate the public swimming pool was too much for the Helena whites to accept. The Chief of Police would not allow black and white youth of the opposite sex to swim together or socialize with each other. This brought out the underlying fear that blacks and whites would see other as sexual objects and ultimately end up in a relationship. The young black men who attempted to desegregate the pool were swiftly arrested and beaten while they were in custody.<sup>135</sup>

However, in July 1964, SNCC attempted to test the strength of the newly enacted Civil Rights Act of 1964. One of the concerns SNCC had protesting in the rural delta was that actions of the local whites changed from day to day. White businesses served black protesters one day but refused service the next day. For example, on July 6, the county library, and a couple of local restaurants including Henry's Restaurant served blacks and whites peacefully but then Henry's restaurant refused to serve black customers the following day and closed down to prevent blacks from protesting which

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<sup>134</sup> Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.) and Microfilming Corporation of America., *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*. See Dorothy Burlage's story about her interracial romantic relationship during the Mississippi Project and how it led to tension within the group. Burlage, "Truths of the Heart," 110. See also, Penny Patch's recollection of her sexual relationship with a black man and how it negatively affected the black women that she worked with. Penny Patch, "Sweet Tea at Shoney's," *ibid.*, 155.

<sup>135</sup> Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."



made it more difficult for the protesters to plan from one day to the next. On July 10, the local bowling alley, In-Between Grill, and Ben and Rose's Restaurant refused to serve protesters and the following day Henry's flipped again and served black students without a complaint.<sup>136</sup>

The racial dynamics in SNCC caused concerns for the volunteers outside of the organization as well as inside which sometimes caused relationships to be strained. In 1965, a Mississippi SNCC volunteer told Michael Simmons, who had just joined SNCC and began work in Arkansas, that SNCC was having an internal struggle with whites who wanted more control and power of the organization's direction. One thing that Simmons found disconcerting was that in order to join SNCC, volunteers were required to be interviewed and screened by a white sociologist, a practice Simmons resented. It disturbed him that a white woman controlled whether he was accepted into SNCC, a black organization.<sup>137</sup>

After leaving Arkansas, Simmons became a member of SNCC's Atlanta Project. His activism continued to be informed by his experience in Arkansas. In 1964 SNCC's Atlanta Project wrote a position paper that helped raise some questions about the civil rights movement and provide their idea of what "Black Power" meant. The position paper pushed the narrative that Black Power was not hatred of whites and therefore expelling whites from the organization but was related more closely to blacks taking control of their own destiny and organizing themselves. Although some whites stayed in SNCC, some voluntarily left, and some were expelled, expulsion was not the intent of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Michael Simmons, "Arkansas Roots and Consciousness," *ibid.*, 224-25.

the position paper. The paper argued that in order for blacks to truly liberate themselves, they must change the perception of blacks as being lazy and unintelligent. Even if blacks were to gain equal rights under the law without changing the perception of whites and blacks then they would never really be equal. Therefore, they suggested that the problem was not in the black community but instead in the white community and that was where they thought whites should be working to make change.

Simmons, who helped write the position paper, read a book that convinced him that empowerment of people was important to the struggle for freedom which helped him to see that being required to talk to a white sociologist as condition to joining SNCC, the views of many white volunteers in 1964 about taking a leadership roles within SNCC, and his experiences in the Arkansas Project with Hansen as the director was disempowering and showed him that blacks needed to control their own destiny of obtaining equal rights. He understood that the journey to liberation was at least as important as the destination of liberation. Simmons believed that "If the black community felt that it owed its liberation to white people the fundamental problem of subservience to whites would not be addressed. It would only perpetuate a racial paternalism that was as destructive as the overt racism that we were fighting against." Simmons believed that, the dialogue on Black Power suggested was not meant to limit white participation in SNCC but was designed instead to expand SNCC's reach into the white community.

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Black volunteers were not the only ones who found some culture shock within

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<sup>138</sup> "Position Paper for the SNCC Vine City Project on Black Power," (1966); "Arkansas Roots and Consciousness."

SNCC. Many whites found that volunteering in SNCC was very different from every other experience they have had with blacks. "One young white woman said that Raleigh was a greater culture shock for her than her experience in Africa. The whites learned that because they associated openly with blacks, their 'rights' could disappear – the right, when in an interracial group, to use a public restroom, for example or to eat a restaurant meal. They learned that their lives might be threatened by white people. Another white woman said this experience sensitized her to the difficulties black people faced in carrying the burden of desegregating the schools and public facilities. Several said they had learned for the first time just how vicious racism could be." Hansen experienced these issues several times while in Arkansas as he was physically assaulted several times just because he was a white man helping blacks fight for equal rights. Even though there were differences between white and black experiences, blacks and whites often worked and socialized together in public locations.<sup>139</sup>

SNCC also decided to test the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in Forrest City (Figure 8) and Gould (Figure 6). In February 1965, black SNCC workers dined without much incident at a restaurant in Forrest City. Throughout 1965 mixed race SNCC teams integrated restaurants in Forrest City and Gould. The tide seemed to change because whites appeared to be angrier at white protesters more than they were at black protesters. Often, servers waited on blacks but ignored their white companions, seeing white protesters as the worst type of racial traitor because they were helping blacks bring an end Jim Crow instead of helping to keep blacks in their proverbial place. Additionally, often white customers would physically assault white protesters when they

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<sup>139</sup> Burlage, "Truths of the Heart," 111.



only come with political power to help enforce the civil rights laws that were in place. SNCC understood that the more blacks that had the right to vote and hold political office the more blacks would be able to control their future. The real trick would be to get the local blacks to understand this. In 1964, just over seventy-five thousand blacks had paid poll taxes, an increase of almost ten thousand from three years earlier. SNCC volunteers set out in black neighborhoods to register as many black residents to vote as possible. Their desire was to register at least one hundred thousand or about half of the eligible residents to vote. During the summer months SNCC volunteers brought loads of black residents to the Phillips County Courthouse to register to vote. Trying to register blacks to vote was not a safe task because whites would do anything to prevent this from happening because in many of these locations blacks outnumbered whites and would have more control in local politics. Local black residents and SNCC volunteers had their lives threatened, houses bombed, and were arrested by Helena police.<sup>141</sup>

Fearing that the racial violence would get out of hand, the white and black business owners and ministers promised to work together to improve race relations in Helena. The local whites were willing to make progress on race relations but insisted the local black leaders renounce SNCC and their activism. The black leaders knew this was a lot to ask of them and therefore they demanded that the city hire a black police officer, fireman, and employee at the Helena City Hall.<sup>142</sup>

While this protesting was happening in Helena, SNCC also had groups of people engaging in Forrest City and Gould where the main efforts were in voter registration

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

<sup>142</sup> Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."

drives. Just as in Helena, they found that some blacks and whites in Forrest City and Gould refused to assist SNCC when they first arrived in early 1964. These groups of blacks and whites thought SNCC was there to start trouble and did not want this trouble in their neighborhood in order to register as many blacks to vote as possible. However, in both cities SNCC wanted to register blacks to vote. SNCC went to where they could reach as many potential black residents as possible that were eligible to vote such as black churches, barbershops, and restaurants to canvas, which is to talk to locals and convince them to register to vote. Working with SNCC often made life difficult for blacks in these cities. In Gould for example, some black teachers were terminated from their jobs at the Lincoln County High School for giving SNCC assistance.<sup>143</sup>

Though SNCC had to combat violence, psychological intimidation, and apathy from the black residents, SNCC did not have to wait long to see their success from their actions. In the 1964 elections for the school board, city council, legislative, and presidential elections the percentage of eligible black residents registered to vote rose approximately fifteen percent from thirty-four percent to forty-nine percent and voter registration only increased after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. In addition to the dramatic increase in black voter registration, SNCC was also able to convince eight black candidates to run for the state legislature in 1964 also. This was an important step to get local blacks to register to vote because many blacks did not see a reason to register to vote or vote when to them there was little difference between the candidates.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Another project that SNCC undertook in the delta area during this time was to improve educational opportunities for blacks in the region. Forrest City was ground zero for the most noteworthy conflict regarding education. After the United States Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>145</sup> in 1954 there were many states that delayed integrating their schools. In many instances, when they finally took steps, they found ways to only appear as if they were making strides towards integration without actually integrating their schools. One way the states used to delay integration was “freedom of choice” plans that many districts adopted which left the burden on students to integrate schools by giving students the freedom to choose which school they attended or in other words, placing the burden of desegregating the schools on the students. Without fail, most of the time students remained at the school they were attending all along, which left the schools segregated and the state able to pretend they attempted to implement the *Brown* decision while in reality they were not. Just like with voting and integrating places of public accommodation, some blacks wished to maintain the status quo of segregated school systems just with equal funding. When the school system delayed making any changes the black students boycotted going to school. However, not all students remained in their previous all black schools, some black students exercised their freedom of choice by selecting the previously all white school to attend and when these students attended the previously all white school they were segregated in that new school away from the white students. In essence, the black students’ decisions did not really have the impact on integration that they had hoped.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Brown*, 347 U.S. 483.

<sup>146</sup> "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."

SNCC volunteers paid for their presence in the delta from the constant daily harassment by the local police. The police arrested volunteers and searched their homes without legal justification ordering whites not to rent space to them, and even monitored SNCC volunteer's activities on a daily basis. Black students faced a dilemma about where to focus their energies between school and protesting. For instance, in Helena one particular student spent much of September 1963 working on voter registration and convincing additional students to join the movement, and in November he worked with SNCC to desegregate places of public accommodations in downtown Helena. Working the many hours it took engaging in sit-ins, protests and recruiting fellow students to join in the fight meant that those hours could not be used for studying.<sup>147</sup>

During Arkansas's version of Mississippi's famous Freedom Summer Project, which took place in 1965, SNCC brought in lots of additional volunteers to help. With all of these new people pouring into the state even routine interactions between blacks and whites within the organization had the potential to cause tension. Every new volunteer had to make it through SNCC orientation. During this week of orientation, Simmons got into an argument with a white female volunteer. He made a comment that he did not want to ride alone in a car with a white woman but if he did, he wouldn't sit beside her for both his and her safety. However, a white woman took offense with his comment as an attack on both her and all white people. Simmons at this moment "experienced whites viewing a black point of view in terms of its impact on white people," instead of its impact on black people. He saw this happen again when a white volunteer was

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.



offended by someone saying white people instead of some white people as if they were talking about all white people instead of some.<sup>148</sup>

The main activities of the Arkansas Project were voter registration and voter education, which included canvassing rural neighborhoods in an effort to get people to register to vote. This was not easy because whites have always viewed registering to vote by blacks as an ultimate defiance by black people. Whites have responded to this defiance by violence. Whites viewed this as black people believing they were the equal to whites. During the summer of 1965, the black volunteers did not interact very often in West Helena with the white community for safety reasons because of segregated housing.<sup>149</sup>

On September 16, the Forrest City police arrested nearly two hundred students and SNCC volunteers for disturbing the peace causing the St. Francis county jail to burst at the seams with protesters. Because the jail had reached capacity, the police had to house many of the protesters at the swimming pool, civil center and even the dog pound. Always seeking to stop the protests and run SNCC out of town the authorities promised to drop the charges against the children if the children promised to avoid SNCC's Freedom Center and discontinue protesting. In a further attempt to intimidate SNCC volunteers, the Forrest City police broke into SNCC's freedom center in the early morning hours of September 21, to scare workers away from the city. White officials in Forrest City suspended or expelled eleven black high school students. State education department officials threatened Forrest City students that they could be beaten like

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<sup>148</sup> Michael Simmons, "Arkansas Roots and Consciousness," *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

people in Mississippi and Alabama for their protest actions. This attempt failed in its goal as the local blacks and SNCC workers refused to yield and went down to protest outside the courthouse as Millard "Tex" Lowe was sentenced to a year in prison where he was severely beaten by prison officials. These scare tactics by the local whites only convinced the local blacks to press on and in Forrest City local blacks continued boycotting businesses in spite of all the threats and violence from the white community.<sup>150</sup>

In 1965, black parents in West Helena and Gould protested the inequalities of separate but equal schools and the lack of choice in freedom of choice plans that were being used to circumvent integration. In West Helena, only eighteen black students decided to attend the previous all white schools. The schools were unequal in several different ways in that whites paid less fees for their books and some teachers in the black school had not even completed high school. Black parents in West Helena and Gould sought to equalize the black and white schools. To help get more voice in the educational process, SNCC volunteers sought for local women to join local civic organizations and run for office, such as the local school board.<sup>151</sup>

Conflict between different socioeconomic classes caused tension in the African American community. In Helena, the black voter's league turned its back on the working class and student protesters and instead negotiated directly with the whites in power. Other fears that black protesters had was that their white employer would get wind of their activities and fire them for their participation in SNCC protests. An example of this

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<sup>150</sup> Randy Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

is a black employee was fired from the Helena City Water Company because he allowed SNCC volunteers to stay at his home while they were in Helena.<sup>152</sup>

Whites used many different tactics to intimidate and control the blacks trying to exercise their right to vote. Local Police often used dogs in an attempt to intimidate blacks at voting precincts trying to vote. In Forrest City local whites marked ballots for blacks who were illiterate, ultimately voting for whoever the white person wanted. In West Helena, deputies threatened local blacks to not vote for SNCC supported candidates. While the threats and fraud were bad enough, there was sometimes division in the black community that added to the pressure on blacks voting. In Helena there was division between the black elite and the black working class which split the black vote. As an example, almost all candidates in 1965 who ran for school boards were defeated which was particularly troubling in Gould and Helena which both had a majority black population. Therefore, SNCC attributed this to voter fraud on the part of whites however, this could have been related to the split of the black vote.<sup>153</sup>

One thing that SNCC understood was that voter registration and direct-action protests were important but if they wanted to dismantle Jim Crow, they would need to do more in the black community so that local blacks would desire getting involved in the political process. SNCC's major focus was on younger residents by establishing Freedom Houses or Freedom Centers where they could spend time with their friends while learning about SNCC. In 1964, after SNCC established a Freedom House in Helena, a white mob threatened SNCC volunteers causing them to seek protection for

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

the night in a cornfield. SNCC could not be picky. They had to turn whatever they could find into a space to get work accomplished. The Freedom Center in Gould was a run-down house owned by a local black while the Freedom Center in Forrest City was previously used as a funeral home. These houses served the purpose of giving blacks a location to change their outlook of their future.<sup>154</sup>

In June 1965, the St. Francis County Achievement Committee (SFCAC) began to picket downtown Forrest City because white businesses refused to hire blacks. In response, the Forrest City city council passed an ordinance prohibiting all demonstrations with more than fifteen people participating. To counter this ordinance, the SFCAC limited protests to ten people so they would not violate the ordinance and give the police more reason to arrest protesters. In Phillips County, SNCC encouraged black residents to sue two businesses for discrimination in their hiring practices in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. SNCC tried to convince blacks to support black businesses throughout the delta. Boycotting the white businesses could bring more economic opportunities to the blacks in the area because the money that normally would go to white businesses could now go to black businesses or at least not go to white businesses which would stress the white businesses and pressure the white community to change their discriminatory practices. In Gould, SNCC volunteers and other activists protested disparity in agricultural pay, poor neighborhood roads, lack of job training and white's refusal to hire blacks in downtown stores. Unfortunately, while

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<sup>154</sup> Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."; Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

the volunteers were making progress in the Arkansas communities, they also had to deal with internal racial issues regarding white participation within SNCC.<sup>155</sup>

The issue of white participation in SNCC projects overshadowed much else for a while. In 1966 newly elected chair of SNCC Stokely Carmichael issued a call for “Black Power” at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. Shortly thereafter, the Atlanta Project published a position paper about Black Power. This call for Black Power became a point of contention inside and outside of SNCC. The issue of white participation became a source of internal conflict since 1964 but was mostly resolved when SNCC decided to not send white volunteers to black communities so blacks could take control of their own evolution. Two years later only a few white volunteers remained in SNCC. There was an anti-white attitude by some black SNCC volunteers and also anti-black attitudes from more militant blacks who felt the less militant blacks of the past were antiquated. Historian Clayborne Carson argued that “Black SNCC workers who had white friends or who were too light-skinned or too imbued with white cultural values became targets for criticism from other blacks.”<sup>156</sup>

Ultimately, SNCC was unable to come to a consensus on the issue of how much white involvement was too much involvement in the struggle for equal rights because the constant pressure of whites wouldn’t allow some black members to move beyond the issue with whites. Several Arkansas Project volunteers resigned in the wake of the Black Power movement. Most Arkansas staff members ultimately accepted the validity of the Black Power concept, but one white member resigned after being offended by a

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<sup>155</sup> Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967."

<sup>156</sup> "SNCC Position Paper." Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*.

report written by a northern SNCC volunteer. Hansen finally left the Arkansas Project, partially due to SNCC's lack of control of Stokely Carmichael's comments in front of the public, Ben Grinage, who opposed Black Power, issued a public statement criticizing the Black Power movement as negatively affecting the black people in Arkansas, also resigned to join the AHRC.<sup>157</sup>

Not all white volunteers were scared or upset with the SNCC shift to Black Power. For example, Constance Curry white SNCC volunteer felt that "when Stokely Carmichael. . . issued his call for Black Power in 1966, I was neither surprised nor alarmed. I understood the new-emphasis on Black Power within some ranks of the movement; dashed dreams, broken heads, and loss of faith can demand a new strategy." One of the ways that conflict presented itself within SNCC was interracial romantic relationship. White SNCC volunteer Dorothy Dawson Burlage mused that "competition for the same person caused arguments that on occasion were articulated along racial lines. One night I was really scared that someone might get hurt when two women were interested in the same man, and one pulled a knife on the other. After helping them resolve their dispute peacefully, I felt more like a housemother than a civil rights worker." These types of altercations could lead to very tense relations among workers that had to work in close proximity with each other all the time. Romantic relationships caused strain between members, especial female members. These relationships caused tension in the group because men and women of different races found themselves in relationships with each other. The white women many times did not

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<sup>157</sup> "SNCC Position Paper." *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project," 175-6.

consider the fact that the black women would have a problem with their relationships with black men. For example, White SNCC volunteer, Penny Patch admitted that, “I was aware, however, that some of the black women on the Mississippi SNCC staff were not particularly friendly toward me, and I found it difficult to close the distance they maintained. For the most part I experienced no overt hostility, but I felt excluded. I now recognize that some many have been reacting to my romance with a black male staff member. Unfortunately, at that time, I was abysmally ignorant of their feelings. For me it wasn’t an issue. For me, black as well as white SNCC men were my comrades, and I saw no reason I should not fall in love with one of them.”<sup>158</sup>

However, the internal racial dynamics were not completely strained. In some ways there were benefits to having white women in SNCC, and therefore there was not always tension between black and white women. For example, Patch realized that, “It occurs to me that as the nearest and safest white woman, some of us became vessels into which black women, if they chose to, could pour their accumulated anger – anger they had borne for hundreds of years. I am trying to say, I suppose, that if we hurt each other, it was not my fault, nor theirs. It is slavery and oppression that created the distance between black women and white women, not the fact that white women slept with black men during the Civil Rights Movement.”<sup>159</sup>

There seemed to be a growing tension in SNCC that made some white people uncomfortable in the aftermath of the Mississippi Summer Project, the racial climate within SNCC was changing markedly. Patch felt that, “the anti[-]white feelings I had

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<sup>158</sup> Burlage, "Truths of the Heart."

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

become aware of the previous spring were increasing. I was beginning to feel a growing distance between my black SNCC comrades and me, and I no longer felt as welcome as before in my beloved SNCC community. Unlike some of the newer white staff or summer volunteers, I experienced little overt hostility. People simply withdrew from me.”

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Patch gave some insight into what it was like during this time to be white in SNCC by “Only once did I experience a direct attack, when [a] black male [SNCC worker] locked me out of our office. . . while screaming at me that I was a white bitch. . . . Although we did reconcile enough to continue to work together, his profound doubts about my right to participate in his movement remained.”<sup>161</sup>

The tension that occurred not only placed black volunteers in unfamiliar territory, it also put white volunteers in precarious situations about how to walk a very thin line and balance between speaking up and being disloyal. For example, Patch noted, “as the months went by, I felt torn whenever I observed hostility directed at white volunteers. I felt that as a white person I had responsibility to be supportive of them, yet I felt loyalty to my old black comrades. I also was afraid that if I expressed my dismay at this attitude, I would lose my own place in the SNCC community. One thing was clearly changing by the end of 1964; interracial sexual relationships were no longer tolerated – black SNCC folk who took part openly in such relationships were subject to the charge of backsliding, and those relationships, when they did occur, tended to be hidden from view. Looking back, I am aware that some white volunteers were no doubt guilty of

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.



arrogance and insensitivity, but many were not. It seems to me that ultimately it did not matter how anybody, white or black, behaved. The sheer number of white volunteers simply constituted a perceived threat to the integrity of the black movement, or at least to SNCC, a predominantly black organization in which the leadership had always been (and continued to be) black. “

White women also had to be careful in their interactions from a physical vulnerability perspective as all intimate interracial interaction were not consensual. When Laura Foner arrived in Arkansas, she was forbidden from going out in the field with the other workers to talk to workers in an effort to get them to vote. She was told that this was too risky for her and she should not travel far or go out alone at night. It is possible that the fear was never really expressed to her was related to her being physically harmed by the people she was actually there to help or one of the other local volunteers. One pertinent example was Nancy Stoller’s recollection of a story where she and Arlene Wilgoren, who lived together across the street from Philander Smith College in an apartment where they were the only white women living. attended a party while in Little Rock with several Philander Smith students. After going to the party for some time, she headed back home and a student who had been around some of the SNCC activities walked her home. When she arrived home, he kissed her, and she pulled back. He then entered her home, closed the front door and tried to force himself on her. They struggled for several minutes and Stoller even screamed for help out the living room window, however, she was not heard and therefore no one came to assist her. Stoller felt as if someone should have heard her, yet no one came to her calls for help, and therefore she felt that no one wanted to help her because there seemed to be

others in their apartments. Ultimately, Stoller was raped by this man and he left as if this was all in the normal day. Stoller felt defeated and realized that she had limited options available to her because of the interracial nature of the rape.<sup>162</sup>

After the influx of white people into Mississippi for Freedom Summer, many wanted to stay and continue with their work for civil rights for blacks past the summer, a tension began to develop between whites and blacks about the role whites should play in the civil rights movement before the Black Power movement even began.<sup>163</sup>

The result of so many whites infusing themselves in the SNCC projects was different in Arkansas than it was in Mississippi, mainly because the Mississippi Project was a much larger project from a personal perspective. The Arkansas Project was always integrated from the very beginning and remained integrated until the end, while Mississippi was not and therefore the large influx of whites into the Mississippi project caused much more tension in Mississippi. However, in spite of the size difference in the projects, that tension was one of the reasons why when Arkansas decided to hold their own freedom summer, they intentionally limited the number of whites that were going to come into the project. Having such a small staff and few new whites entering the state to participate in the project the SNCC volunteers were more familiar with each other than in the bigger Mississippi Project, which sometimes resulted in a more pleasant situation. It seems that the white Arkansas volunteers were not as alienated by SNCC's move toward Black Power, which appears to be different than the feelings that whites

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<sup>162</sup> Nancy (Shaw) Stoller, "Lessons from SNCC - Arkansas 1965," in *Arsnick : The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 275. Laura Foner, "Arkansas SNCC Memories," *ibid.*, 324.

<sup>163</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sccc's Arkansas Project," *ibid.* Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

had at other SNCC locations.<sup>164</sup> While in SNCC overall the internal ties with whites were severed typically, but the same cannot be said for SNCC Arkansas.<sup>165</sup>

A close view of the Arkansas project reveals a more nuanced perspective of the Black Power movement. The responses of the white volunteers were more wide ranging in that they eventually realized that they inadvertently strengthening the racial hierarchy they were attempting to tear down. In other words, the white members were doing exactly what the Atlanta Project position paper had determined was the result of having whites assisting the movement in the black community, which was to give credibility to the generalization that black people were unable to lead their own movement or were not intelligent enough.<sup>166</sup>

The same types of issues that confronted the volunteers in other locations confronted the SNCC volunteers in Arkansas. For instance, Nancy Stoller, a white Arkansas Project volunteer was joined during her stay in Arkansas by her boyfriend, a black man from Boston. She was assigned to Little Rock and he was assigned to West Helena and Forrest City because there was fear that if they were located in the same city there may be horrible consequences for them and the work SNCC was trying to accomplish if they people found out they were dating. The people that were worried about were both local whites and blacks who may not approve of a white woman dating a black man. In addition to the same interracial relationship issues that could cause problems in the Arkansas Project there were also interracial issue that were not related

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<sup>164</sup> Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project." Jones, "Jim Jones, Interview by Gabriner."

<sup>165</sup> Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project."

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

to sexual relationships. For example, Bob Cableton, a black volunteer in Arkansas, appeared to have some interpersonal issues with Hansen related to race.<sup>167</sup>

Lara Foner, a white SNCC volunteer, commented on the fact that the operation in Gould, Arkansas was run by Bob Cableton and two white volunteers and there was conversation that took place about whether having a white woman volunteering in Gould with the black and white men would cause a tense situation to become even more tense.<sup>168</sup> Foner felt that Bob Cableton was filled with anger toward white people which affected his feelings toward her which was close to love/hate relationship.<sup>169</sup>

Arlene Wilgoren Dunn, a white SNCC Arkansas volunteer, became close with a group of AM&N students and even dated one of the students and the two of them shamelessly went out in public together riding on his motor cycle. Some SNCC volunteers believed that this relationship would be detrimental to both of their lives as well as the detrimental to the SNCC mission in Arkansas. However, they were intent on outwardly expressing their feelings for each other and their "belief in racial equality."<sup>170</sup>

In the summer of 1965 rumblings were progressing within SNCC about Black Power and the place for whites in SNCC and the fight for civil rights. She eventually realized that her presence was holding the back to the movement, and therefore she ultimately left SNCC.<sup>171</sup>

Some of the most ardent critics of Hansen, including Arlene Wilgoren and Nancy

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<sup>167</sup> Robert Wright, "Excerpts from an Interview with Bob Cableton," *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Laura Foner, "Arkansas SNCC Memories," *ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Arlene (Wilgoren) Dunn, "My Arkansas Journey," *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

Stoller, were the white volunteers of the Arkansas Project. Willgoren and Stoller thought Hansen was rather oblivious of his white male privilege. Still others wanted Hansen out because he failed to embrace the Black Power philosophy.<sup>172</sup> While some white SNCC volunteers asserted their support for the Black Power principle and did not have homogeneous feelings about how Black Power applied to their situation. Willgoren and Stoller knew when the right time to leave for a variety of reasons, but other whites in SNCC such as Mitchell Zimmerman viewed his presence in the SNCC Arkansas Project as antagonistic to Black Power.<sup>173</sup> Still other white SNCC Arkansas Project staffers such as Howard "Himmelbaum found ways to embrace the ideology of Black Power, never seeing a conflict between it and his own involvement with SNCC. In fact, the infamous December 1966 expulsion meeting never affected Himmelbaum directly. He clame[d], 'No one kicked me out. No one said a bad word.'"<sup>174</sup>

Some black SNCC Arkansas staffers appeared to have a more expansive opinion of Black Power but were much more uncertain about the place of white people in the civil rights movement. Jim Jones, the Arkansas Project's second project director, was accommodating to the white staffers in Arkansas, such as, Mitchell Zimmerman and Howard Himmelbaum, however, he limited the number of white staffers in the project also.<sup>175</sup> Overall, the Arkansas Project was remarkable for the pleasant relations

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<sup>172</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Replicating History in a Bad Way?: White Activists and Black Power in Sncc's Arkansas Project," *ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

between blacks and whites mostly because the white staffers embraced the Black Power movement.<sup>176</sup>

During this tumultuous time in SNCC the Black Power struggle took its toll on the Arkansas Project. Several Arkansas Project volunteers resigned in the wake of the Black Power movement. Most Arkansas staff members ultimately accepted the validity of the Black Power concept, but one white member resigned after being offended by a report written by a northern SNCC volunteer.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Carson, *In Struggle : SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CITY OF GOULD, ARKANSAS – A CASE STUDY

Most of SNCC's early organizing efforts were in the delta region where they helped locals fight for their civil rights. One of the communities in the delta region that SNCC helped organize in Arkansas was the city of Gould. This chapter describes SNCC's activities in Gould, specifically focusing on SNCC's efforts in the areas of voting rights, education, and desegregation of places of public accommodation. This chapter looks at the history of life in Gould prior to SNCC's arrival and then investigate SNCC and SNCC-inspired civil rights activities, asking what impact their activities had on the lives of the residents in Gould. While SNCC had an impact on the lives of the residents of Gould, SNCC was not completely successful with what they had hoped to accomplish. Although SNCC was successful with regard to desegregating the local schools and places of public accommodation, these victories had some unforeseen consequences. Some of the unforeseen consequences to SNCC's actions in Gould, were Black students not having as much support from their teachers, white businesses relocating out of town and Blacks not feeling at liberty to run for office or take leadership roles in Gould.

Gould, Arkansas (Figure 6) is located in Lincoln County in the Delta region of the state and had approximately 1200 residents. Lincoln County was divided such that, Gould, located in the eastern portion of the county, was where the great majority of African American residents resided. In reality, it was not just Lincoln County that was racially divided, as SNCC volunteer Tim Janke noted, "the town of Gould was physically divided into white and black by the highway and by railroad tracks." Life in Gould was

not altogether pleasant, and even worse if you were black. Historian Randy Finley observed that in Gould, “there was a disparity in agricultural pay, poor neighborhood roads, lack of job training, and white’s refusal to higher blacks in downtown stores.”<sup>178</sup>

The conditions in Gould were both psychologically and physically depressing for the local African Americans. Therefore, SNCC couldn’t just be concerned with breaking down physical barriers to integration and discrimination, they had to fight against the years of psychological damage to the African Americans of Gould. If all SNCC focused on was having the ability to vote, the ability to attend the same schools as whites or sit and order food at the same lunch counters as whites, SNCC wouldn’t have been successful by any metric. SNCC had to also focus on breaking down the psychological barriers that had been built up over decades of living in a completely different world. Overcoming this may have been more difficult than the physical barriers that stood in their way. SNCC saw that overcoming the psychological barriers was part of their mission as well. Laura Foner, a white SNCC volunteer from Brandeis University expressed that SNCC was fighting against a “wall formed of the century-old attitude of fear of the white man, [of] powerlessness in the face of a white world,” which took time to tear down.<sup>179</sup>

Gould, unlike Little Rock was a small rural farming town that was more similar to

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<sup>178</sup> “Ironically, [the] small town of Gould, Arkansas was named for railroad baron Jay Gould whose view of America never included having little black children cross his track to interact with little white children, not unless they were there for work or to deliver a message.” Janis F. Kearney, *Cotton Field of Dreams: A Memoir* (Chicago: Writing Our World Press, 2004), 210. Wallach, “We Beame Radicalized by What We Experienced,” 107. Wallach, “An E-Mail Interview with Tim Janke,” 157. Randy Finley, “Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967,” *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>179</sup> Laura Foner, “Typed Notes ” in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 3.



the towns in the Deep South in attitude of its residents. Most people thought of Arkansas as being more liberal than Mississippi, however, not everyone in the Black community was thrilled when CGP, a local civil rights group inspired by SNCC, was initiated. Foner notes that when SNCC arrived in Gould, the town was run almost exclusively by one man, Howard Holtoff, one of the largest cotton planters in the state. He owned the cotton gin, almost every store in town and all the land in the county and in some of the adjoining counties also. Most of the people in Gould who had jobs worked for the Holtoff family, as tractor drivers at the cotton gin or in the field. Obviously Holtoff wielded a considerable amount of power in Gould.<sup>180</sup>

Like anywhere in the South, there were some lines in Gould you just could not cross. Whites and blacks mingling in social settings was frowned upon by the locals. For example, historian Randy Finley describes an incident in November 1965, where Dwight Williams, a black activist accompanied by a white female were pulled over and cited by the police for “crossing the white line,” which may be a traffic infraction but also describes a breach of “racial etiquette” that occurred in the south. Engaging in such behavior would be putting your life in danger because some behavior was just not tolerated by the power structure in the south.<sup>181</sup>

Foner described her impressions of Gould this way:

Gould was a town like most any other small town in southeast Arkansas. Look to your right and you are in typical small town America. The main street had two or

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<sup>180</sup> Robert Wright, “Excerpts From an Interview with Bob Cableton,” in *Arsnick: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, edited by Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk, 124. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011. “Handwritten Notes,” in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 3.

<sup>181</sup> Randy Finley, “Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967,” *ibid.*, 52. Foner, “Foner, Whs, Handwritten Notes, Bos 4, Folder 3,” Box 4, Folder 3.

three grocery stores, one general store, the post office, the bank, and a pool hall. There were two small restaurants and an ice cream stand. The paved streets are lined with neat, white houses and well kept lawns. A few blocks away is the school, a one story new brick building with a large football field and the home in silver letters – Gould Public High School. Except for the big cotton gin in the middle of town, the fields of white cotton which stretched out in every direction; you might imagine yourself to be somewhere in New York State just as much in the middle of the Mississippi delta country.

However, Foner claimed the same could not be said for the Black side of town, But look to your left, on the other side of the highway 65 and (literally) the other side of the tracks. Instead of the paved streets we find dirt roads. When it is dry – the dust covers you at every step; when it rains the roads become impassable muddy streams. Ramshackle two or three room wooden shacks where perhaps 10 or 15 people must share each other's warmth when the wind or rain comes through the large cracks. The African American high school, in the midst of a field of weeds and dust (and when it rains – mud) consists of 4 old wooden buildings. It is described by the students as "a rats nest" because of the rats, the large cracks in the walls, floors and ceilings, the poor heating and toilet facilities. There is no library to speak of and no science lab (yet the students pay an annual lab fee) and no cafeteria.<sup>182</sup>

SNCC came to Gould to break down these physical and psychological walls and provide organization and encourage the people of Gould to organize themselves and make changes.

SNCC came to Gould to empower the local Blacks to engage in the fight for desegregation in their community and fight for their civil and constitutional rights. SNCC helped the local Blacks organize GCP and then worked in conjunction with local efforts. Many blacks and whites in Gould had similar attitudes about changing the way life was conducted. Professor John A. Kirk determined "that many locals in the Arkansas delta – both black and white – resented SNCC's presence in the area." Some church leaders in the area were even opposed to SNCC coming in to force their beliefs on the

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<sup>182</sup> Foner, "Foner, Whs, Handwritten Notes, Bos 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 3. Laura Foner published portions of her handwritten observations about the conditions in Gould in "82% Negro, 100% White," *The Justice*, October 26, 1965. The article has been reprinted in "82% Negro, 100% White," 220-23.

local residents. While the reality was as historian Brent Riffel found “many black clergymen, in particular, actively opposed SNCC because it threatened” the Pastor’s authority in the African American community.<sup>183</sup>

The truth is that, SNCC’s arrival to the Delta region was met with mixed reviews. While some blacks were not happy to see SNCC arrive, many blacks welcomed SNCC into the area. Typically, SNCC was welcomed more by the younger black members in the community rather than older people. Many supporters were working class and not middle class. Some of the supporters were those who didn’t feel like they had much to lose unlike Black pastors and teachers. Black pastors and teachers were the leaders in the community prior to the SNCC’s arrival. Like anyone else in that position, they were not excited to see someone else come into the community and assume the role of community leader. For example, in *Mourner’s Bench*, a novel about life during the civil rights movement in Arkansas, author Sanderia Faye shows the Pastor of the local Black church using his power and influence over the congregation to try to dissuade them from engaging with the SNCC volunteers that came to their town in the Arkansas delta.<sup>184</sup> While this is a fictional story, it is based on real events and real people that were in Gould trying to organize local Blacks to fight for their civil rights.

While SNCC pursued black empowerment in Gould, some whites believed SNCC was only there to make waves. Gould’s Mayor A.L. Butcher believed SNCC came to town to “to stir up trouble.” Butcher warned the volunteers that if they broke any laws,

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<sup>183</sup> Riffel, "In the Storm: William Hansen and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas, 1962-1967," 26. (citing John A. Kirk, "The Other Freedom Summers: SNCC in the Arkansas Delta 1962-1967," (Unpublished Conference Presentation 1998).

<sup>184</sup> Wright, "Excerpts from an Interview with Bob Cableton," 126; Sanderia Faye, *Mourner's Bench : A Novel* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2015), 87-89.

they would be arrested just like anyone else. There were several white residents that felt that African Americans had bad intentions when SNCC came to town. Mayor Butcher said the Black activists want “social integration and I think they want to intermarry. That’s my general picture of the Negro today.” Victor Holthoff, a local businessman said, “he can’t think of anything else that SNCC came to Gould for other than to start trouble. Most of the troubles over the desegregation plan, he suggested have come from the civil rights workers at SNCC.” He described the community’s attitude toward the people from SNCC as one of “aggravation.” It appears that Holtoff was equating the white community’s attitude and some of the older black local’s attitude toward SNCC with the attitude of the entire Gould community. These were the people that had everything to lose and nothing to gain while the working-class blacks had everything to gain and nothing or little to lose by SNCC’s arrival and activities. He was clearly incorrect in his assumption as many of the younger Black locals were happy to see SNCC arrive. Laura Foner felt that “as far as [she] knew, all the whites in Gould were hostile.” In fact, Foner was warned by law enforcement and others that whites would like to cut her head off and throw it in the river.<sup>185</sup>

A view of SNCC’s activities in Gould provides more insight into the changes that came about because of SNCC’s activities. SNCC’s goals were not to come to town as the messiah and lead the locals to the “promised land.” SNCC wanted to help the locals help themselves by realizing that change was within their powers. SNCC volunteers

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<sup>185</sup> Bill Stroud, "Delta Town's Changing Economy, Conditions of School Facilities," *Pine Bluff Commercial*, January 30, 1966, Box 4, Folder 3. Foner, "Arkansas SNCC Memories," 167. Randy Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," *ibid.*, 64; *ibid.* Foner was also threatened by Billie Sheppard, head of the school board, who told her "I'm going to beat you up and throw your head in the river," Foner, "Foner, Whs, Handwritten Notes, Bos 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 1.

taught the Gould residents how to engage in nonviolent protests in order obtain their desire of equal rights.<sup>186</sup>

Right after the spring of 1965, Gould Citizens for Progress (GCP) was created and started off strong until whites began to take notice of their activities. At first whites tried being "civil" with the members of GCP. However, SNCC Field Secretary in Gould, Robert Cableton, claimed as soon as GCP began boycotting white businesses and showing the power of the local black dollar things changed. After that, whites in Gould began to exercise more of their power in an attempt to intimidate African Americans to give up their fight for equality.<sup>187</sup>

Whites did not stand idly by and allow GCP to dictate integration without attempting to delay things. One strategy that was relied upon was to use "insiders" to help whites stay one step ahead. For example, Cableton described one strategy whites used was have an Uncle Tom<sup>188</sup> bring them back information on GCP strategy for integrating the town. A poignant example is in *Mourner's Bench*, in which Sanderia Faye shows how this type of behavior occurred by having the Pastor and the parishioners using her grandchild to spy for the local whites in charge and bring them information about the strategies and plans in which SNCC was engaged. Again, while this is a fictitious novel it gives a good example of how whites used blacks to obtain information about the strategies of the civil rights volunteers. In addition, about a year

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<sup>186</sup> Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 54. Foner, "Foner, Whs, Handwritten Notes, Bos 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 3.

<sup>187</sup> Wright, "Excerpts from an Interview with Bob Cableton," 126.

<sup>188</sup> Uncle Tom is a derogatory nickname used in the African American community to describe an African American who is overly obedient and subservient to whites. "The Free Dictionary," [thefreedictionary.com](http://thefreedictionary.com).

after GCP came into existence, it had its headquarters torched by the Ku Klux Klan. Sheriff Harold Pearson and other police officers, black and white, arrested and harassed local Black community members for no other reason than to attempt to intimidate them. Thereafter, the local Black citizens petitioned to have sheriff Pearson removed from office for lack of competence.<sup>189</sup>

GCP engaged in various civil rights activities throughout town. Some of the activities that GCP engaged in, were a voter registration drive, picketing the county courthouse when registration was taken out of Gould and moved to the county seat in Star City, testing the two previously segregated restaurants, picketing the gas station where an African American was fired for participating in the freedom movement demonstrations in Gould and Little Rock to protest the conditions in the black school and the desegregation plan, which GCP filed in a federal law suit about, and for the first time running a black candidate for the school board. Some other impressive ideas that GCP had were being interested in starting their own co-op grocery store, day care center, and training programs to help locals obtain the skills to find employment in technical areas.<sup>190</sup>

Three of the biggest activities that SNCC engaged in while in Gould were voter

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<sup>189</sup> "Excerpts from an Interview with Bob Cableton," 126-27. Faye, *Mourner's Bench : A Novel*, 209-16. "Typed Notes (of Handwritten Notes)," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Marison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 1. Several individuals detailing the harassment that they endured by the police because of their civil rights activity. "Handwritten Notes," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 3. See also, "Petition to the Mayor of City of Gould by Citizens of Gould," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 3.

<sup>190</sup> Laura Foner, "Handwritten Notes," *ibid.* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society). "Typed Notes, List for Little Rock Office of the Items We Want Researched," *ibid.*

registration/voter fraud prevention, desegregation of schools and direction action protests. One of the biggest activities in which SNCC engaged during their time in Gould was attempting to increase the number of blacks that were registered to vote. Even the SNCC letterhead for the Arkansas Project pictures a black and white hand giving a handshake to each other with the slogan, "one man, one vote."<sup>191</sup> This shows that the issue of black voter registration and voter fraud was a major theme for SNCC while in Gould.

Gould was 82% African American, yet there had never been an African American mayor, city council member, sheriff or school board member. Randy Finley suggested that this was not to say that blacks in Gould were not registered to vote, like African Americans in Mississippi. In Gould, blacks had been registered to vote for some time, but their vote and the whole political process was controlled by the same group of white men and the few blacks who had the courage to run for office in the past were defeated by rampant voter fraud and intimidation. SNCC worked very hard to put an end to the intimidation and fraud that endured over the years. Voter fraud occurred all the time and in a variety of ways. While whites in Arkansas used deceptive practices that watered down the votes that African Americans were casting, it was not the only strategy that was used to prevent blacks from voting. One way that was used was a poll tax. The poll tax was used in Arkansas from the time of their first State Constitution in 1836 until it was repealed in 1964 when a new constitutional was enacted. In Arkansas, a poll tax was a one-dollar tax levied upon all state residents on a yearly

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<sup>191</sup> "SNCC Staff Memo on SNCC Arkansas Project Letterhead," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 2.

basis. In other words, it was a tax on the person, not a tax that was paid merely to vote. However, before one was allowed to vote, they had to pay the tax. The tax was used to prevent blacks from voting even though it was not a voting tax. While one dollar may not seem like a lot to pay every year, in reality it was a deterrent to someone who barely made more than that for their hard-physical labor. Before a resident was given a ballot, that individual was required to show a receipt proving that the poll tax was paid. In Arkansas, the local sheriff was the individual who collected the poll tax, which often served as intimidation to paying the tax. Between Arkansas repealing the use of a poll tax and the federal government ratifying the twenty-fourth Amendment, which outlawed poll taxes in federal elections, SNCC was able to capitalize in order to encourage voter registration. One of the things that SNCC engaged in was attempting to bring the federal government into the voter issues. For instance, Arkansas Project Director, Reverend Ben Grinage wrote to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to complain about the disenfranchisement of blacks in Gould because of voter fraud. Unlike the main instrument for disenfranchising blacks in Mississippi, which was violence and intimidation, in Arkansas it was voter fraud.<sup>192</sup> Grinage defined several forms of fraud typically used to disenfranchise African Americans were

destruction of African American ballots, the mistabulation of votes for African American candidates, illegal voting of the ballots of illiterates by election officials,

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<sup>192</sup> "Handwritten Notes," *ibid.*, Box 4, Folder 3. Carrie Dilworth, a black activist since the 1930, ran for mayor, but failed in her bid. Finley, "Crossing the white line," 60. With a black population of 82% in Gould, unfortunately black candidates lost decidedly. Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 62. Foner, "Foner, Whs, Handwritten Notes, Bos 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 3. "Poll Tax," <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=5045>. Poll Tax, *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=5045#>, Reverend Benjamin S. Grinage, "Letter to United States Commission on Civil Rights," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1965), Box 4, Folder 7.



probable multiple white voting, segregation at the polling places (including ballot boxes), and denial of access to African American poll watchers.<sup>193</sup>

SNCC also engaged in helping to desegregate the schools in Gould. When SNCC arrived in Gould the school system was divided in two, the Gould schools and the Field schools. The Gould schools were the white schools while the Field schools were the African American schools. Even after the United States Supreme Court decided separate but equal schools were unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*,<sup>194</sup> whites in Gould engaged in tactics to delay integration of the school system. Therefore, "SNCC helped organize a boycott of the schools in Gould in the 1965-1966 school year that brought. . . about turmoil [in the community and because of] the boycott, one merchant went completely out of business."<sup>195</sup>

Early in the school year, during registration time, GCP decided to have all of the black children go to the white school and try to register and attempt to have all the kids that were registered for the black high school, Fields High School, skip school as a protest against inadequate conditions. A few days later, about twenty-five black people attempted to register students at the white school but were met by crowds of white people and twenty-five police cars. They were served an injunction to prohibit demonstrations and congregating within a block of the school and preventing the group from meeting to heap disgrace upon the school. The following day, about fifty black

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<sup>193</sup> "Grinage, Whs, Letter to Us Commission on Civil Rights, Box 4, Folder 7."

<sup>194</sup> *Brown*, 347 U.S. 483. A landmark case where the Supreme Court overruled *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) declaring state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

<sup>195</sup> Wright, "Excerpts from an Interview with Bob Cableton," 127.

children stayed out of school to protest the inequalities between the white and black schools.<sup>196</sup>

However, the boycotting was not enough, and soon the black parents in Gould began protesting the inequalities in “separate but equal” school systems and the lack of choice in the Gould freedom-of-choice plan. As mentioned earlier, a freedom-of-choice plan was one way that southern states used to get around the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. According to the Gould freedom-of-choice plan students were required to choose every year between the Gould schools and the Field schools. Any student that decided not to choose would be assigned to the school in which they previously attended. After three years of freedom-of-choice, not a single white student chose to attend the Fields school and more than 85% of the black students still attended the Field schools which was still all black. One reason that there was not much of a change into a unitary school system was because the black students and parents were pressured to remain at the all black Fields schools instead of selecting the white Gould schools. Principal of the Fields School, Mr. Dalton attempted to intimidate black students to remain at the Fields schools by suggesting that anyone selecting the Gould schools would be unable to return to the Field schools if their experience did not work out at the Gould schools. Gould’s black parents organized a PTA to pressure school officials, but white leaders locked the high school to prevent the PTA from organizing. After massive community conversations about what a reasonable integration plan would

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<sup>196</sup> "Handwritten Notes," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, September 7, 1965), Box 4, Folder 1; *ibid.* Notes written regarding Gould Citizens for Progress protests on the segregation of the public schools in Gould.

look like, GCP came up with a plan that Laura Foner described like this:

demolish the substandard black high school and require all the elementary students, black and white, to go to the now 'white' high school. The 'white' elementary school could become a junior high school for everybody. Each school would have an integrated staff of black and white teachers. The plan, we argued, was the only fair way to achieve true integration in Gould. Obviously, no white families were going to 'choose' to send their children to the black schools and the few black children 'choosing' to attend the white schools faced unfair burden of being a small minority in a sea of hostility.<sup>197</sup>

GCP was very active in the education arena. They filed a lawsuit challenging the freedom of choice plan that they appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court. In *Raney v. Board of Education of Gould*, GCP brought an action in district court to prevent the board of education from maintaining a segregated school system. The district court dismissed the complaint and the court of appeals affirmed the ruling of dismissal. The question before the Supreme Court was whether the freedom-of-choice plan was adequate as compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Supreme Court determined that the district court and court of appeals were in error and the plan was not adequate to convert the schools in Gould to a "unitary, nonracial school system." The Court found that the plan maintained a dual system instead of moving to dismantling the dual system, and the plan burdened the parents and children with the school board's responsibility.<sup>198</sup>

The freedom of choice plan has become the most used desegregation approach in the south. This scheme pretends to give each student the unrestricted right to attend any school in the district. In reality, the plans have been used in the south to perpetuate

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<sup>197</sup> Foner, "Arkansas SNCC Memories."

<sup>198</sup> *Raney*, 391 U.S. 443. Finley, "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 61-62.

segregation. Notes suggest that Mr. Dalton tried to intimidate black students and parents to remain at the black school in order to maintain his job. The Court held that in the circumstances of this case the freedom of choice plan for Gould was not constitutional in complying with the Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate but equal is unconstitutional in the educational setting.<sup>199</sup>

Although direct action protests weren't paramount in the plans SNCC and GCP had for Gould to desegregate the town, they were still a piece of the puzzle. There were some direct-action protest locations that were in the plans likely because of who owned the establishments. One of those establishments was Holtoffs Restaurant, which was owned by the most powerful member of the community, Howard Holtoff. GCP made plans to boycott a couple of establishments, Knights Dixie Queen in addition to Holtoffs Restaurant, during SNCC's early days in Gould. Summer volunteers ultimately forced Holtoffs Restaurant and Knight's Dixie Queen to integrate peacefully. Those that were going to engage in these direct-action protests received extensive training on how to behave during the confrontations with whites in those establishments. Participants were trained on how to avoid physical confrontation with whites during their protests. They were provided with scripted sheets to explain to them how to handle the situation when someone prevents them from entering the establishment, when no one refuses to admit them, but the waitress refuses to serve them, and on the rare occasion they are admitted and served with little trouble.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Raney, 391 U.S. 443, 445. *ibid.*, 446. "Whs, Handwritten Notes, Box 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 3. "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 61-62. Raney, 391 U.S. 443, 443. *ibid.*, 443-48.

<sup>200</sup> "Handwritten Notes," in *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Arkansas Project Records, 1960-1971* (University of Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, July 25, 1965), Box 4, Folder

SNCC had an impact on Gould. The experiences of black author Janis Kearney who grew up in the Arkansas delta and wrote a book about her formative years in the area gives us some insight into the perceptions of the black community and shows some of the unforeseen realities SNCC's influence had on Gould and other. Kearney believed that there was a change in the mid 1960s. In 1965 Kearney recalled that select families were allowed to transfer to the white school. The Gould Freedom-of-Choice plan was in operation from approximately 1965-1967. Kearney explains that in the 1967 academic year, Gould experienced "full integration," however in reality it was not full integration because only five to ten percent of the white students attended the desegregated school. The rest of the white students attended private academies that were government funded or other schools that their parents sent them to outside the county. Kearney said that at the integrated schools the administrators and teachers were integrated, however the principal and superintendent were white and the high school teachers were mostly white. Interestingly, Kearney explained that some of the white teachers sent their own children to private schools instead of the integrated schools, choosing to inconvenience themselves instead of sending their children to an integrated school. According to Kearney, one impact that SNCC had on the community that probably was not foreseen was in integrating the schools in Gould was that Black students lost a sense of belonging that they enjoyed when they attended the all Black schools. At the segregated schools, black students were taught by black teachers who had high expectations and hopes for them and their future. Once they integrated the

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3. "Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963-1967," 57. Foner, "Foner, Whs, Typed Notes, Box 4, Folder 3," Box 4, Folder 3.

schools, black students were now being taught by mostly white teachers that had much lower expectations and less concern for how the students performed in and out of the classroom.<sup>201</sup>

Viewed from the surface, Janis Kearney felt that this so-called integration looked like Gould was complying with the law, but underneath there was still institutional segregation. For example, blacks were able to go to restaurants, hotels and health care providers without going through the back door. However, there is, to this day, a black and white side of town and black and white churches. Kearney also explained that after integration many whites left town and took their businesses with them to other locations. This mass exodus left Gould devastated economically. After the flight of whites from town, many blacks took over the positions they left behind, however, their hands were tied in many regards because Gould was now financially struggling from the businesses leaving. While there was some struggle after the businesses left town, the overall poverty level in the delta region greatly improved following the years that SNCC came to integrate the region. In 1960, the delta region had a poverty level of 63.32%. In 1970, that number dropped to 47.60% and dropped even more in 1980 to 39.98%.<sup>202</sup>

Kearney acknowledged that right after SNCC came to town and helped to usher in changes, there were still not many blacks running for community leadership positions up until approximately 1970. As a general matter, since the early 1980s, Gould has had a black mayor almost consistently. However, there are a few city councilmembers that

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<sup>201</sup> Janis F. Kearney, interview by David Lacy, April 17, 2016. (unfortunately I failed to record this conversation because I did not realize at the time that common practice was to record an oral history).

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. "From the Ozarks to the Delta: A Historical Perspective of Regional Poverty in Arkansas," <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/bridges/spring-2014/a-historical-perspective-of-regional-poverty-in-arkansas>.

are still white. Part of the reason for the lack of black representation in high level elected positions may be related to the fact that even through the 1970s most of those in control of the power were white which was related to the fact that even though Gould was and still is a great majority black residents, the representative numbers for voter registration are heavily in favor of the whites in town by almost 73% to 15%.<sup>203</sup> So, this gives some indication that SNCC was not as successful as they had hoped they would be regarding registering blacks to vote.

Once whites left and removed their businesses, Kearney suggested it created many infrastructure issues that took several years for Gould to recover. During elections right after SNCC left Gould, there was still de facto Jim Crow in place. Kearney felt that many blacks had the attitude of “don’t rock the boat” and try for something you won’t get anyway. Because Gould was an agricultural society, many blacks feared rocking the boat because there was a concern for being able to maintain your job, which was necessary to continue being able to live and pay your bills. With whites typically controlling the majority of the agricultural jobs in the town, blacks did not want to upset whites by appearing to get out of their place.<sup>204</sup>

SNCC’s impact on Gould was immense, both good and bad. Before SNCC came to Gould, the town was literally split down the middle. The physical difference between what whites had in Gould and what blacks had was startling prior to the arrival of SNCC. The schools that were attended by whites were new and top of the line, while the schools attended by blacks were old and run down. African Americans were unable

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<sup>203</sup> "Kearney, Telephone Interview by Lacy." "Gould, Arkansas Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts," <http://censusviewer.com/city/AR/Gould/>.

<sup>204</sup> "Kearney, Telephone Interview by Lacy."

to eat in restaurants where whites ate and while the town was 82% black, no black had even been elected to any major office, in spite of the fact that Blacks ran for these leadership positions.

Once SNCC came to Gould, things began to change. The community created GCP to help blacks fight for their rights and organize African Americans to chip away at what was holding them down for decades. The attitudes of Gould's African Americans did not change overnight, however, with the physical progress that was made, things slowly began to change psychologically. Local African Americans began to stand up and demand equal rights and fairness. They wrote to the federal government when necessary to seek federal intervention even in local elections because of voter fraud. They engaged in voter registration drives. They sought to boycott businesses that were segregated. They fought for integration of the public schools in spite of the stalling and delaying that whites engaged in to prevent desegregation. In fact, GCP took the issue all the way to the United States Supreme Court. SNCC's arrival in Gould clearly had an impact on the racial climate in Gould as the physical and psychological differences subsequent to SNCC's arrival were very obvious to anyone who observed the climate prior to their arrival and subsequent. While not all the credit for change in Gould goes to SNCC because there were local residents fighting for change prior to SNCC's arrival and after SNCC left, there was still change brought by SNCC's arrival.

While there were definitely some positive things that came about because of SNCC coming to Gould and helping the locals organize, there were some negative things as a result also, and not everyone sees the results the same way. One person suggested that a negative implication was the fact that the school children lost a sense



of belonging when their schools were integrated. At their segregated black schools, they were taught by black teachers and supervised by black administrators. Not only did they attend a school where all of the faces they would see would resemble them, they also had teachers that had high ambitions for them and their best interest at heart. Once they moved to the integrated schools, they lost that sense of belonging and family that they enjoyed daily from their classmates and instructors at their previous all black schools. In addition, once SNCC came to town, many of the whites left town and took their businesses with them to other locations. This exodus caused Gould to experience major financial woes. People lost jobs, a town that was mainly agricultural lost its major economic source or steady income.

In the end, SNCC was successful in many regards. While SNCC was able to help the local blacks obtain their civil rights, they also caused some of the local blacks to suffer in ways that may have been unforeseen or be a normal byproduct of taking the proverbial step forward in the civil rights arena. However, when seen in this way, SNCC was not completely successful in their attempt to improve the lives of the locals because in their attempt to bring positive changes to local blacks in Gould, those that remained in Gould after SNCC left struggled to find a new identity.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to contribute to the scholarship on SNCC by analyzing the racial dynamics in SNCC's Arkansas Project, which caused many different complexities both internally and externally in the communities in which SNCC operated. The Arkansas Project had complexities like other SNCC projects; however, those complexities have never been analyzed to show that internal racial dynamics complicated interracial interactions at times, and especially during the time of the Black Power movement. In addition, external race relations between black SNCC workers and white Arkansans were complex as well. The fact that white and black volunteers had to interact in public in an effort to desegregate places of public accommodations and register blacks to vote caused many problems in both the black and white communities.

The Arkansas Project was important because SNCC operated in both urban and rural communities, which meant the attitudes of the residents differed from one community to the next. The rural Arkansas Delta region suffered from similar attitudes in the black and white communities. Whites resisted change and fought using all means, typically with violence and fear, to keep the communities separate and the black community as economically dependent as possible. In contrast, in some urban Arkansas communities such as Little Rock, the communities were not happy to see change come, but their resistance was not on the same level as what it was in the more rural areas. Therefore, what worked in those locations or even in the Arkansas Delta, wouldn't work throughout Arkansas.

SNCC was created because a need arose during the civil rights movement for

just such an organization to engage black communities in grassroots activism. Just as this gap was filled by SNCC's creation, so was the gap in Arkansas filled by SNCC's arrival at the request of the ACHR to come to Little Rock and help to spark a movement of students engaging in sit-in protests in the downtown area. SNCC's arrival in Little Rock helped galvanize the sit-in movement in the city and ultimately was the beginning of what turned out to be a strategically planned civil rights movement in the state. While there was some action prior to SNCC's arrival, Hansen, a passionate and a seasoned civil rights activist, altered the civil rights conversation by coming into the community and empowering local people to help their own cause. SNCC also remained in the community instead of motivating the residents in the community and leaving them to continue on their own. In essence, SNCC became a part of the community that they helped, which allowed them to gain the trust of the communities and those surrounding them that they would ultimately branch out into later. Not only was the arrival of SNCC important to show what life was really like in Arkansas, but the arrival helped move progress along throughout the state.

SNCC helped to galvanize the local black community to create their own local organization to fight for civil rights, engage in direct-action protests, fight to desegregate the local high school, convince local blacks to run for office, and take cases to court to help set the state for permanent change. SNCC's activity in Gould is a good example of how SNCC operated in Arkansas and the changes that came about in Gould and other communities as a result.

SNCC's Arkansas Project has been overlooked by historians, and therefore the racial dynamics have never been thoroughly analyzed to understand how the racial

make-up of the staffers and volunteers impacted the community and internal workings of the organization. While this is not a full analysis of SNCC's Arkansas Project and its racial dynamics, it is a start. I hope it encourages other historians to undertake the greater analysis of the Arkansas Project and its racial dynamics.

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