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*A Short History of SNCC and its Contribution to the Student Movement in
West Germany*

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1 Introduction

In April 2010 at Easter Weekend, about 1100 people met at Shaw University in Raleigh to celebrate the 50th birthday of an outstanding civil rights group, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced ‘Snick’). The former activists of the group and scholars of the field engaged in a four-day conference to discuss the experiences in the black freedom movement and the legacy of SNCC especially. In addition, a new program was formed, the SNCC Legacy Project, which was established to address pressing issues that still haven’t been resolved and to bring back the memory of the remarkable organization.^{1 2}

But what kind of organization was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee? What did it accomplish? Why was it exceptional? Why did it cease to exist? These and other questions should be approached in the following paper. First, the beginning of the group in 1960 to its climax in 1964 should be addressed. Then, the development towards the radicalization and fall of the group – including the reasons for the decline – will be traced. Subsequently, SNCC’s connections with and influence on the West German student movement will be shown.

2 Rise of SNCC

SNCC’s rise began, when on February 1, 1960, four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, decided spontaneously to stand up against segregationist traditions in the South and sat down at a lunch counter, which was usually reserved exclusively for whites. Thus the so called sit-in movement, based on nonviolent tactics of protest, started. At first, the movement wasn’t organized at all, but nevertheless spread throughout the South, mainly carried forth by college students. Gradually, even sympathetic students in the North of the United States would join in and wouldn’t buy at store chains that practiced segregation in the South. By mid-April, an estimate of 50.000 students participated in the

¹Cf. California Newsreel. “SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference”. <http://www.newsreel.org/video/SNCC-50TH-ANNIVERSARY> (accessed October 10, 2011).

² Cf. SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference. <http://www.sncc50thanniversary.org/> (accessed October 10, 2011).

actions.³ “It was not just the largest black protest against segregation; it was the largest outburst of civil disobedience in American history.”⁴

In order to continue with the protests and to coordinate them in a better way, it was clear, that a more structured organization was needed. Ella Baker, the famous and influential civil rights activist, at that time working with the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), was also aware of the need of a civil rights group especially for younger people, since the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the SCLC and other central civil rights groups couldn't successfully attract a lot of the younger generation. “More than any other adult activist, Ella Baker grasped the significance of the sit-ins. [...] She knew, though, that these young people would need guidance to turn the scattered sit-ins into a cohesive force.”⁵

Therefore, Baker – under the sponsorship of the SCLC – called for a Student Conference at the Easter Weekend of 1960 to discuss the future of the sit-in movement and the possibility of forming a new organization with representatives of various colleges and universities. The conference was held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, the University that Ella Baker herself once had attended.⁶

The Students formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, with Marion Barry, an early participant in the lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, as first chairman. For the time being, SNCC was voted to be only of temporary character and “was established on the understanding that its permanent status would be determined at a future meeting of students.”⁷ Also, SNCC managed to establish itself as an independent group, though a lot of the representatives of the traditional civil rights groups would have liked SNCC to join their organizations as a youth branch. Especially the SCLC and its leader Martin Luther King Jr. shared this idea, but SNCC rather aimed at cooperation with various civil rights groups.

³ Cf. Clayborne **Carson**. *In Struggle. SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981, 9-11.

⁴ Andrew B. **Lewis**. *The Shadows of Youth. The Remarkable Journey of the Civil Rights Generation*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009, 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ Cf. Charles **Payne**. “Ella Baker and Models of Social Change.” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer, 1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174689>, 890-891.

⁷ **Carson** 1995, 24.

However, King's vision of a nonviolent protest was a collective belief among the young students, also they were convinced of the principles of direct action and a group-centered power structure, which was also displayed in their founding constitution:⁸

“We affirm the philosophic or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith and the manner of our action”⁹

SNCC reached the “institutionalized stage”¹⁰ at its fall conference in Atlanta, which took place October 14-16, 1960. “The principal accomplishment of the conference was to create a permanent organizational structure for SNCC.”¹¹ Delegates discussed goals of the group, voting procedures and political issues. Within almost a year, the loosely structured sit-ins helped to create a new civil rights organization that should leave a mark on America.^{12 13}

Another challenge for the newly founded group was presented in May 1961, when a group of CORE activist decided to contest the practice of segregated interstate bus travel and started the Freedom Ride project. As a racially integrated group, they would travel from Washington D.C. to Jackson Mississippi in Greyhound buses and the blacks of the group would try to use public spaces – like for example the waiting rooms or the seats in the front of the bus – designated for white passengers only. The students risked their lives during these rides: Especially in the Deep South they were welcomed with fury and violence, and more than once activists had to be hospitalized after they had been brutally beaten by white mobs. After unprecedented attacks and opposition CORE decided to withdraw from the rides, but SNCC members wanted to continue to force the government to step in and bring about a change. Moreover, they didn't want to leave the impression that they were intimidated by the white resistance and wanted to show that change in the South was possible with the help of nonviolent, direct action. And finally, after massive media coverage and an international outcry about the events in the American South, President Kennedy had to step in and sent federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders. On May 24, the first Riders arrived in Jackson, Mississippi and were immediately arrested. About 300 more Riders came into Jackson during the next months.^{14 15}

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 21-25.

⁹ SNCC's founding constitution cited in: Emily **Stoper**. *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization*. New York: Carlson, 1989, 27.

¹⁰ Martin **Oppenheimer**. *The Sit-In Movement of 1960*. New York: Carlson, 1989, 59.

¹¹ **Carson** 1995, 28-29.

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 27-30.

¹³ Cf. **Oppenheimer** 1989, 59-63.

¹⁴ Cf. **Carson** 1995, 33-37.

Because of the media attention during the Freedom Rides, SNCC was now well-known to the nationwide public and was either admired for their rigidity or condemned as troublemakers. In fact, media consciousness was a deliberate feature of SNCC's identity as a group, since they "took advantage of the power of the media in its direct action campaign [...] for fund-raising and publicity purposes."¹⁶

SNCC more and more moved away from their early sit-in phase and now engaged in political rights issues such as voter registration, which was highly dangerous, especially in the rural regions in the Deep South, where prejudices and discrimination were most persistent and white supremacists still held control. But with their uncompromising and youthfully optimistic attitude SNCC was able to bring about decisive progress. In the following years, SNCC members made a name for themselves as idealistic and courageous activists who also dared to risk their lives for the cause of civil rights.¹⁷ "Viewed as 'shock troops' of the civil rights movement, SNCC activists established projects in areas such as rural Mississippi considered too dangerous by other organizations."¹⁸

By the time the March on Washington was held on August 28, 1963 SNCC was established as one of the "major civil rights groups"¹⁹. Alongside the SCLC and Martin Luther King, the NAACP, CORE and the National Urban League, SNCC was a main organizer of the March, which was supported by more than 200.000 people. SNCC had arrived on the center stage of the black freedom struggle.²⁰

This position was to be expanded in 1964, when SNCC organized the Mississippi Freedom Summer. SNCC still mainly consisted of students, a lot of them, however, had dropped out of academic life by then in order to fully concentrate on their activism. Thousands of students came down to Mississippi for a huge campaign that included voter registration, voter education, literacy teaching and mobilizing regional civil rights groups. A lot of the activists also came from northern colleges and there were also a lot of whites. The Freedom Summer was a follow-up campaign to the 1963 mock election, the Freedom

¹⁵ Cf. John A. **Salmond**. *"My Mind Set on Freedom". A History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968*. Chicago: Dee, 1997, 87-93.

¹⁶ Iris **Schmeisser**. "Camera at the Grassroots: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Politics of Visual Representation" In *The Civil Rights Movement Revisited. Critical Perspectives on the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States*, edited by Patrick B. Miller et al., 105-125. Münster: LIT, 2001, 106.

¹⁷ Cf. **Carson** 1995, 38-41.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ Mary B. **Norton**. *A People and a Nation. A History of the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007, 865.

²⁰ Cf. **Carson** 1995, 83 and 94.

Ballot that SNCC staged to show the willingness of black Americans to vote and to take part in political decision-making. Between 70.000 and 90.000 Afro-Americans casted their vote and demonstrated their political potential.²¹

SNCC is said to have reached its peak during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, being optimistic about the future and the possibility of ending black oppression, still believing in the values of American society, the righteousness of government and the justice of the legal system.

3 Alienation, Radicalization and Fall

Most accounts of the history of SNCC allocate the turning point in the group's philosophy and development in 1966. However, this process cannot be attached to a precise date. Rather, alienation followed by radicalization and eventually decline are constant trends from 1964 onwards and shouldn't be considered separately, but as merging aspects. The decline of SNCC already started with its alienation from the mainstream civil rights movement and its radicalization; yet, the actual downfall starts in 1968.

The first step towards a growing estrangement occurred in the aftermath of the Mississippi Freedom Summer. During the summer of 1964 there were efforts to form a regional counterpart to the all white Democratic Party. The Democratic Party in Mississippi systematically prevented blacks from casting their vote, thus SNCC formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the MFDP, as an alternative. "More than 80.000 blacks registered as members of the MFDP."²²

The delegates from the MFDP were sent to the Democratic National Convention in late August, 1964 alongside the regular delegates from Mississippi to challenge black oppression in their state and in the South in general and to pressure national leaders into action.

After several confrontations and negotiations, the administration proposed a compromise to the MFDP, SNCC, however, decided not to accept this compromise, because it stopped short of truly improving the living situation of blacks.

Charles Sherrod, participant in the MFDP, explained that "It would have said to blacks across the nation and the world that we share the power, and that is a lie! We are a country

²¹ Cf. Lewis 2009, 145.

²² Carson 1995, 117.

of racists with a racist heritage, a racist economy, a racist language, a racist religion, a racist philosophy of living, and we need a naked confrontation with ourselves.”²³

Being deeply disappointed with the government and the fact that it didn't step in to grant full voting rights to blacks, SNCC left the National convention with the feeling that nothing had been achieved.²⁴

Certainly, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party cannot be viewed as a complete failure, since a lot of the problems addressed were picked up in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and by the time the next National Convention took place in 1968 all states were obliged to send integrated groups of delegates. SNCC, however, felt a growing disillusion, a feeling that grew stronger throughout the next years.

The next step on the road to a growing radicalization were the Selma to Montgomery Marches in March 1965 that SNCC staged together with Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Martin Luther King was always caught between satisfying the movement and also not alienating the government. During the Marches he decided to obey the orders of the local government and not to push any boundaries. SNCC, however, wanted a more direct and even militant approach and felt estranged from the traditional movement groups. Internally, some SNCC members even questioned the nonviolent persuasion. All in all, SNCC as an organization started to drift to the fringes of the civil rights movement.^{25 26}

All the internal debates and problems SNCC was facing came to a higher level when in 1966 Stokely Carmichael was elected new chairman. He was one of the more radical members in the group and that was also visible in his leadership of SNCC.²⁷ This shift in ideology was shown shortly afterwards, when Carmichael proclaimed the slogan 'Black Power' during the Meredith March Against Fear in June 1966 and thereby gave SNCC a new direction. The slogan wasn't Carmichael's invention, it was the short version of the long standing 'black power for black people', which had been used for years. But "Carmichael's views and personality were in accord with the general mood of black militancy in 1966 both in and out of SNCC."²⁸ So his words fell on fertile soil and were

²³ Charles Sherrod cited in: *Ibid.* 1995, 128.

²⁴ Cf. Edward R. Nordhaus. "S.N.C.C. and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1963-64: A Time of Change." *The History Teacher* 17, no. 1 (Nov., 1983), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/493225>, 98-100.

²⁵ Cf. Carson 1995, 157-161.

²⁶ Cf. Stoper 1989, 66-67.

²⁷ Cf. Lewis 2009, 203.

²⁸ Stoper 1989, 88.

quickly adopted by a lot of people who were disappointed by the achievement of the civil rights movement so far. From Carmichael's election onwards, SNCC's radicalization was growing constantly.²⁹ Carmichael left SNCC in 1967 to serve as honorary prime minister for the Black Panther Party.³⁰

On the other hand, there were huge controversies among the public about the connotation of Carmichael's wording, which was too militant and aggressive in the view of moderates. Even within SNCC especially the older members were alienated with the new direction the organization was taking.³¹ "While [...] SNCC members crisscrossed the nation, making Black Power speeches to enthusiastic crowds, the organization's membership was steadily declining."³² The group nearly collapsed, but was nevertheless able to attract a new following among poor blacks.³³

In 1967 occurred what former member and field secretary of SNCC Michael Thelwell referred to as "the most traumatic moment in the history of [the][...] organization, the moment of the 'expulsion' of whites."³⁴ This was a serious step for a group whose initial self-concept was based on working together with whites to set an example and shows the drastic changes SNCC was undergoing. This process could probably be attributed to the new leadership, since the pre-1965 members of SNCC worked together with their white colleges during a lot of projects and came to appreciate their commitment.³⁵

Due to the new black power rhetoric, also women in the group had to suffer from increasing male chauvinism. Before 1966 a special feature of SNCC in general had been that a lot of women participated and also held vital positions in the organization. That distinguished SNCC from other civil rights groups who preferred women playing their traditional part and not taking responsibility in the movement. (That is not to say that SNCC was an emancipated group; it was just the least sexist of the civil rights groups.)³⁶ A

²⁹ Cf. **Carson** 1995, 209-2010.

³⁰ Cf. Cheryl L. **Greenberg**. *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 259.

³¹ Cf. **Lewis** 2009, 205.

³² Cleveland **Sellers**. *The River of No Return. The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990, 183.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 183-184.

³⁴ Michael Thelwell cited in: **Greenberg** 1998, 152.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁶ Cf. Belinda **Robnett**. "African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization." *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (May, 1996), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782115>, 1673-1676.

lot of the women in SNCC were later to join the emerging women's liberation movement.^{37 38}

SNCC wasn't able to make a permanent impression on the civil rights movement after 1967. The following year was consumed by lengthy discussions about the future of the civil rights movement and SNCC. Different fractions within SNCC tried to get the upper hand in arguments about tactics, projects, ideological concepts, organizational structure and leadership issues. By 1967, most of the original SNCC staff had resigned and the new leader H. Rap Brown took over, who proved controversial not only because of publicly advocating violence. The group's name was changed to Student National Coordinating Committee in 1969, still keeping the abbreviation SNCC for publicity reasons, since this name was widely known nonetheless.³⁹

Despite that last effort to revitalize SNCC continuously fell apart. "The only active chapters outside of New York at the end of the decade were in Atlanta and Cincinnati."⁴⁰ "SNCC finally fell apart in 1972."⁴¹ In 1973 even the FBI, which had been observing civil rights groups and leaders for years, decided to close SNCC's case "In view of the fact that SNCC has no national office, no national officers, has engaged in no significant activities for several years, and that future prospects for such are exceedingly faint".⁴² After their cometlike rise in the first half of the 1960s, SNCC simply ceased to exist in the early 1970s.

4 Reasons for SNCC's Decline

Over the years SNCC had undergone a complete turnaround in its development. But what were the reasons for that dramatic change in ideology? Clearly, there is not one precise cause, but rather a combination of circumstances.

³⁷ Cf. **Stoper** 1989, xi-xii.

³⁸ Cf. **Greenberg** 1998, 127.

³⁹ Cf. **Carson** 1995, 295-296.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁴¹ Britta **Waldschmidt-Nelson**. "'Strong People Don't Need Strong Leaders!' – Ella Jo Baker and the Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement." In *The Civil Rights Movement Revisited. Critical Perspectives on the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States*, edited by Patrick B. Miller et al., 87-104. Münster: LIT, 2001, 101.

⁴² **Carson** 1995, 298.

In one of her essays⁴³, Emily Stoper (who specialized in SNCC), identified five crises which destroyed SNCC and showed the group's "tension between its ethos and its political effectiveness."⁴⁴

First, there was the challenge during the Democratic National Convention in 1964 described above. SNCC was disappointed with the incomprehensive compromise and slid off into a period of disillusion, from which it never recovered. "[SNCC's] leaders felt betrayed by Johnson and the Democrats, by King and the civil rights leaders"⁴⁵. SNCC lost its faith in achieving equality through legislation.

Secondly, Stoper lists the influx of white membership as crises. After the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, a lot of the white northern college students stayed in SNCC. From about 800 volunteers 100 became permanent members, thus doubling membership numbers. Instead of taking this as a chance to broaden efforts and projects, SNCC was nearly paralyzed. Political decision-making based on group discussion was becoming complicated by the various new positions, the diverse backgrounds of members and the mere number of participants. Furthermore, a lot of the new members hadn't taken part in the early sit-in activities and therefore "had never shared the unifying experience"⁴⁶. Hence, many white members left SNCC again, making the way for internal racism that would eventually lead to the expulsion of white members.⁴⁷ But not only whites left the group. Many original activists left, too, mostly due to exhaustion, or to take up their academic education again, or out of dissent. This trend was intensified with the proclamation of Black Power in 1966 and evolving militancy, which alienated more moderate members.⁴⁸

Thirdly, the breaking coalition with other civil rights groups further damaged SNCC. During 1965 SNCC started drifting apart from the mainstream civil rights groups (SCLC, NAACP, CORE, the National Urban League), mainly because of its own growing militancy and intransigence. The Selma to Montgomery Marches especially showed divergent opinions of leadership style and tactics between the SCLC and SNCC. The question of communist tendencies (of which the whole movement was charged) caused a

⁴³ Emily **Stoper**. "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: Rise and Fall of a Redemptive Organization." *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 1 (Sep., 1977), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783687>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵ **Nordhaus** 1983, 100.

⁴⁶ **Stoper** 1977, 23.

⁴⁷ *Cf. Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁴⁸ *Cf. Stoper* 1989, 88-89.

rift with the NAACP. By 1966 and after the slogan of Black Power SNCC became more and more isolated within the movement.⁴⁹

Fourthly, SNCC wasn't able to shift its actions to the cities in the North. After 1965 and the Voting Rights Act, the new overall theme of the civil rights movement was the persistent poverty in northern city ghettos. But SNCC grew out of the grassroots movement in the South and couldn't adapt to the new surroundings. Additionally, competition of black interest groups was stronger in the cities.⁵⁰ Though SNCC was able to convince a considerable number of poor blacks due to the black power rhetoric,⁵¹ former leader of the group James Forman "concluded that SNCC's decline resulted from its failure to organize black workers".⁵²

Fifthly, the financial base of SNCC crumbled after Stokely Carmichael proclaimed Black Power. "Contributions from whites declined drastically and they were never replaced by black money (as had been hoped)."⁵³ The rejection of the war in Vietnam War and the ignorance of the accusation of communist infiltration contributed their part in alienating white liberals, who funded SNCC mostly.⁵⁴

Besides, SNCC with its group-centered leadership structure had no central bureaucracy or charismatic leader that could keep the fragmented organization together.⁵⁵

Therefore, SNCC's decline can be attributed to its own disability to adapt to new conditions and its growing militancy. But this may be the case only after 1964.

5 West German Protest Movement

"The eruption of student protest in the 1960s was a global phenomenon,"⁵⁶ where "activists from numerous countries established contact, shared ideas, and adopted each other's social

⁴⁹ Cf. **Stoper** 1977, 25-27.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵¹ Cf. **Sellers** 1990, 184.

⁵² **Carson** 1995, 296.

⁵³ **Stoper** 1989, 88.

⁵⁴ Cf. **Stoper** 1977, 28.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁶ Martin **Klimke**. *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010, 1.

and cultural practices”⁵⁷. Though SNCC experienced declining attention in the United States after 1966, interest in its ideas and activities grew considerably in West Germany.

Germans found out about the American civil rights movement through different channels, an important source of information were exchange students, but also emigrants and tourists. Also Martin Luther King’s visit to Germany in 1964 catapulted the incidents from the American south in the general media coverage.⁵⁸

When slowly the German protest movement was about to get started, many looked to the American student movement and the civil rights movement for an exemplary role model and also adopted some of their nonviolent tactics.⁵⁹ “In particular, German students were impressed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee”⁶⁰ and the success of the nonviolent sit-ins. In June 1966 the first German sit-in took place at the Free University of Berlin where 3000 students successfully protested against the administrative reform of limited student tenure.⁶¹ In the next months and years, the movements in both countries grew more militant, a development met with suspicion by the West German press. German students formed an extraparlimentary opposition and SNCC proclaimed Black Power.⁶²

A loose alliance between the different student groups emerged on the basis of common issues, for example the fight against the war in Vietnam and American imperialism. German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund – German Socialist Student League) showed solidarity to the American SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), SNCC and the civil rights struggle.⁶³ In February 1968, the German SDS organized the Vietnam Congress in West Berlin, which guest speakers from SNCC and the American SDS attended as well. SNCC’s delegates Ray Robinson and Dale A. Smith “defended the legitimacy of violence”⁶⁴ and gained enthusiastic applause and support, quite the opposite to the situation of SNCC in the USA, where it suffered from a loss of members. Delegates

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ Cf. Maria **Höhn** and Martin Klimke. *A Breath of Freedom. The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 108.

⁵⁹ Cf. Richard L. **Merritt**. “The Student Protest Movement in West Berlin” *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 4 (Jul., 1969), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/421493>, 525-526.

⁶⁰ Michael A. **Schmidtke**. “Cultural Revolution or Cultural Shock? Student Radicalism and 1968 in Germany”. *South Central Review* 16, no.4 – 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1999 – Spring, 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3190078>, 82.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶² Cf. **Höhn** 2010, 110.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁴ **Klimke** 2010, 93.

connected the black freedom struggle to liberation efforts of third world countries, thus emphasizing the global dimension of their suffering.⁶⁵

But similar to the development in the US SNCC's influence faded in Germany, too. The Black Panther Party (also advocating black power) gradually took over SNCC's terrain – both in Germany and the USA. The German students “had become even more interested in this organization [the Black Panther Party], which was, unlike SNCC, open for alliances with white groups and represented an ideology of worldwide revolution.”⁶⁶

All in all, the last flare-up of SNCC as an influential political group was in Germany, but couldn't revitalize the declining organization.

6 Conclusion

In the first half of its existence from 1960 to 1966 SNCC accomplished a lot within the American civil rights movement. The members uncompromisingly sacrificed their lives for racial equality on the basis of nonviolence. They played a crucial role in parts of the US South where only few dared to challenge racial oppression.

Yet, members were frustrated with the lack of speed at which change was achieved and gradually drifted towards radicalization. From this point onwards SNCC wasn't able to live up to the goals and convictions of the earlier years. A development the whole civil rights movement faced analogically. Due to various reasons SNCC lost importance as a civil rights group and fell into insignificance. Though SNCC was able to influence the German student movement to a certain extent, the group couldn't gain momentum anymore. But when evaluating SNCC's legacy, one must not forget its influence not only on American society but also its political impact on other protest movements elsewhere.

Eventually, “[SNCC's] legacy consists of the lessons learned in ongoing struggles that did not begin with SNCC's emergence and did not end with its demise.”⁶⁷ Even though SNCC can't show numerous legislative achievements, its importance shouldn't be underestimated, since the organization left an impact on American society. Thus, “the story of SNCC and the influence of the civil rights generation stretches from World War II to Barack Obama's election.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Cf. Höhn 2010, 107-108.

⁶⁶ Klimke 2010, 118.

⁶⁷ Carson 1995, 306.

⁶⁸ Lewis 2009, 5.

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