

Intensive Program: Europe and the US in the 1960s

Seminar: Coming Together or Coming Apart? Europe and the United States in the Sixties

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Session: 'Eyes on the Prize': The Struggle for Black Equality and Social Justice in the United States and in Germany, 1960-1972

Lecturer: PD Dr. Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson

Presenter: Veronika Schäfer



Rise, Radicalization, Fall and Legacy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

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1 Rise

- **February 1960:** Black students hold first lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, NC; sit-ins spread throughout the country; a new organization is needed to give the protest more coordination
- **April 15-17, 1960:** SNCC is founded at Raleigh Conference at Shaw University (sponsored by the SCLC and mentored by Ella Baker), first chairman is Marion Barry
- SNCC is designed as a nonviolent, direct action organization, mostly sustained by students and with a group-centered leadership
- **May 1961:** SNCC, together with CORE, carries out the first *Freedom Rides* from Washington, D.C. to Jackson, MS under great personal risk
- In the following years SNCC is engaged in voter registration campaigns in the Deep South
- **August 28, 1963:** *March on Washington*; by then SNCC has become one of the major civil rights organizations
- In the **summer of 1964**, SNCC is part of the *Mississippi Freedom Summer*. Thousands of black and white students help to mobilize voters, form *Freedom Schools* and organize the *Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party* (MFDP, an alternative to the all-white *Democratic Party*)

2 Radicalization

- **August 1964:** MFDP fails to present a serious political challenge to the *Democratic Party* (though the integrated delegation manages to get extensive national attention), a lot of SNCC members are disillusioned and disappointed in the jurisdiction and political decision-making
- **March 1965:** SNCC alienates itself from the SCLC and other mainstream civil rights organizations during the *Selma To Montgomery Marches*, because SNCC increasingly supports a more militant and uncompromising tactic
- **May 1966:** Stokely Carmichael becomes new chairman and steers SNCC towards the ideology of Black Power. From this turning-point onwards, SNCC radicalizes more and more and gradually abandons nonviolence as a tactic.
- **1966:** SNCC excludes all white members
- **1967:** SNCC is covered by the FBI's Counterintelligence Program
- **1968:** SNCC changes its name to *Student National Coordinating Committee*

¹ <http://libinfo.uark.edu/eresources/news/collectionsnews0207.asp>

3 Fall

- The decline of *SNCC* already started with its alienation from the mainstream Civil Rights Movement and its radicalization; the actual downfall, however, starts in 1968
- Among the various reasons are: discrepancy of ideology and results, political frustration, influx of members → fragmentation, growing separation from other civil rights organizations, dwindling financial support, expansion of actions from South to North, radicalization and fragmentation because of frustration within *SNCC* (also parallel to the development of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole)
- **1972:** *SNCC* simply ceases to exist

4 Legacy

- *SNCC* played a crucial role in the success of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. With its courageous campaigns in the Deep South *SNCC* helped to improve the lives of many Blacks.
- *SNCC* was a role model for the Student Protest all over the world by focusing on nonviolent, direct action.
- *SNCC*'s development in the second half of the 1960s, however, is highly disputable; nevertheless, its achievements outshine its deficits. In honor of its 50th birthday an Anniversary Conference was held at Shaw University and a *SNCC Legacy Project* was created to continue the work of this significant civil rights organization.

5 Selection of important members

- Marion Barry: first chairman of *SNCC*, later mayor of Washington D.C.
- Stokely Carmichael: *SNCC* chairman 1966-1967, turned *SNCC* towards Black Power, expelled from *SNCC* in 1967, became Honorary Prime Minister of the *Black Panther Party*
- John Lewis: early activist, Freedom Rider, *SNCC* chairman 1963-1966; since 1986 member of the US House of Representatives
- Bob Moses: *SNCC* field secretary 1960-1966; nowadays he is engaged in educational projects
- Diane Nash: early activist, Freedom Rider and successful organizer in the Civil Rights Movement

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