

Although the invitations Baker sent to student leaders did not suggest that the conference would result in a permanent organization, her long career had convinced her of the need for a new type of protest group to stimulate mass struggle among blacks. The SCLC, which provided funds for the conference, was anxious to have the students affiliated as a youth branch but Baker urged the students to resist any efforts to subvert their autonomy. 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 that would attack racism in all its dimensions.

SNCC

By 1961, SNCC was spearheading the first voter registration drives in Mississippi. SNCC also initiated with CORE the Freedom Rides as an effort to test whether integrated groups could travel, as federal law said they should be able to, in the buses and bus stations of the South. From the start, SNCC's seemingly casual mode of organization and operation contrasted sharply with the more hierarchical and centrally controlled structure of other civil rights groups. Local SNCC chapters were free to choose their own strategy and tactics to deal with local problems and grievances. Women took active organizational and leadership roles in all the SNCC work, heading up local projects as well as keeping the main office in Atlanta together. SNCC typically was less willing than other civil rights groups to impose its ideas on local black leaders or to restrain southern black militancy. The voter registration campaigns were seen as a means of educating potential community leaders and organizing local communities to deal with broader issues of political power. While other civil rights groups were seeking legal and judicial changes in black people's status and forming alliances with white liberal and labor forces to put pressure on government and sections of the ruling class, SNCC's strategy was one of power, based on building a movement within the black community capable of collective advancement and of remaining autonomous. These attitudes, along with a willingness to establish projects in rural areas considered too dangerous by other organizations, gained respect for SNCC in black communities in both the North and South.

In November 1963 SNCC field workers mounted a mass voter registration campaign in Greenwood, MS, and with the help of white students organized the Freedom Ballot, a mock election for a black governor in Mississippi.

In the following summer of 1964, SNCC was the main organizational force in the Mississippi Summer Project, in which almost one thousand volunteers from the North and South, both black and white, worked to register voters, open Freedom Schools, and organize black communities to express their grievances. One important result of this organizing was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). In 1964 the MFDP sent a delegation to the National Convention of the Democratic Party, demanding to be seated instead of the official all white Mississippi delegation. Their efforts gained wide support among delegates from other states, and the Johnson administration, fearful of losing support for the Democratic ticket in the South, orchestrated a compromise offer of two token seats for the MFDP. The MFDP delegation rejected the compromise. The failure