

FUNDI:

THE STORY OF ELLA BAKER

ANGRY
ARTS
INFORMATIONAL
LEAFLET NOV. 1981

by Joanne Grant
63 minutes, color, 16mm



THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks of Montgomery, AL refused to give up her seat in the "whites only" section of a crowded city bus and was arrested. A massive 381-day-long bus boycott followed in which Montgomery blacks chose to "walk to freedom" rather than ride in segregated buses. The boycott, which resulted in the desegregation of city transportation, marks the beginning of the modern mass-based Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged from the boycott as a national leader, and in time became the chief spokesman for non-violent direct-action civil disobedience. In 1957, Rev. King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to coordinate demonstrations for civil rights, school desegregation, and voter registration campaigns. The SCLC soon joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, founded 1909) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE, founded 1942) as the main organizations in the integrationist civil rights vanguard, with legal and legislative battles by the NAACP and sporadic protests in Southern cities and towns by CORE and SCLC being the main weapons of civil rights activists.

A new phase of activity began on February 1, 1960 when four black college students entered a Woolworth's in Greensboro, NC and sat down at a lunch counter reserved exclusively for whites. Within weeks, other black students and some white supporters were doing the same thing throughout the South. They were arrested for trespassing, beaten by angry whites -- and sometimes served. And, what was most surprising to observers across the nation, they did not stop. Ella Baker, then executive director of SCLC, saw the need for coordination and common action among the various student groups conducting sit-ins and organized a conference of student leaders for April 1960. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged from the conference as an independent student activist organization.

ELLA BAKER

Ella Baker is a veteran of life long civil rights activity. She began her organizing work as a founder of the Young Negro Cooperative League and developed a consumer education program in Harlem under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930's. In 1942 she joined the NAACP staff and later became the first Director of Branches of the NAACP and traveled throughout the country organizing local campaigns and membership drives. In 1958 she became the Executive Director of SCLC, but became restive under the leadership of Dr. King and was planning to resign her post when the lunch counter sit-ins began.