Utopian Aspirations in the Black Freedom Movement: SNCC and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1960–1965*

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IF, AS ASSERTED BY ERNST BLOCH, “all freedom movements are guided by utopian aspirations” (7), then the modern black freedom movement, dating from the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, can be examined for the articulation and enactment of those utopian aspirations. Operating on both discursive and dramaturgical terrains (Benford and Hunt), the black freedom movement confronted what one study of the origins of the civil rights movement calls a “tripartite system of racial domination—economic, political, and personal oppression” (Morris 3). On one hand, it is not surprising that such racial domination gave rise to utopian aspirations, especially considering that many “utopian beliefs can, in fact, be understood as a more or less systematic negation of an existing pattern of exploitation and status degradation as it is experienced by subordinate groups” (Scott 81). On the other hand, because of the institutional constraints of segregation and white violence and the persistence of fear, any manifestation of utopianism in the black freedom movement provides a courageous reflection of Bloch’s “concrete hope” that “leads . . . towards the radical termination of the contents of fear” (Bloch 5).

What this essay intends to highlight are those representations of utopian aspirations in the black freedom movement in its activist civil rights phase, the period from 1960 to 1965. I will argue that the function of such utopian aspirations combines a sense of the Bloch’s concrete utopia as “anticipatory and transformative” (Levitas 89) with the critical utopia that attempts to “achieve a breach in the ideological and cultural structures that surround us” (Moylan 213), producing a grounded utopianism. Such grounded utopianism incorporates clear and practical goals with a desire for a willed transformation. As the African-American historian Vincent Harding
asks in his religiously rooted study of the black freedom struggle: “Who dares to dream without acting” (104)? Or, as one of the activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) contended: “When we talk about growing up in a better world, a new world, we mean changing the world to a different place” (qtd. in Zinn 14).

SNCC emerged from the civil rights movement of the late 1950’s and black student activism of early 1960. Founded in April of 1960, SNCC ushered in what one study has called “a decade of disruption” (Morris 195-228) and another study has labeled the “invention of the 60’s” (Payne 100). Historians of that decade have noted that it was a time of fecund promises (Rorabaugh) and great dreams (Farber). While SNCC’s anticipatory consciousness resonated with the promises and dreams of the early sixties, it was also bounded by the historical horizon of a form of liberal-humanitarian utopianism that Mannheim first identified in *Ideology and Utopia* (219-29).1 However, where Mannheim saw this formation as part of a middle stratum whose class and intellectual orientation led to “elevated” and “detached” ideals (221-22), SNCC’s class and intellectual orientation (working class and activist) produced grounded and connected ideals that often challenged liberalism as much as being bounded by it. As one of the early leaders of SNCC, Charles Sherrod, maintained: “We are the last Negroes and liberals; if we are victorious over the system, human beings will be our posterity” (qtd. in Powledge 343).

While the sit-ins of the early months of 1960 gave an impetus to the dramaturgical moment of utopian aspirations in the civil rights struggle, they more often conformed to the promises of liberal-humanitarian horizons than challenged, as actions and articulations later would, the contradictions of such horizons. As one historian of SNCC has argued about these opening direct action sit-in campaigns: “Although the lunch counter protests and the social struggles that followed would ultimately stimulate revolutionary ferment, initially most student protestors aspired to middle-class status and did not basically object to American society or its dominant political institutions. They protested against the pace rather than the direction of change” (Carson 14). Nevertheless, there was a glimmer of the transformative and transfigurative power in the sit-ins that Charles McDew, the first Chairman of SNCC, underscored when he later spoke to a human
rights conference: "The sit-ins have inspired us to build a new image of ourselves in our own minds and, instead of sitting idly by, taking the leavings of a sick and decadent society, we have seized the initiative and already the walls have begun to crumble" (qtd. in Sellers 44).

One of the key figures in the development of SNCC's utopian aspirations was the Rev. James Lawson whose radical Christian ideology and militant nonviolence permeated much of the discursive and dramaturgical moments in the early civil rights struggles. Lawson's influence was originally spread through the workshops he conducted for mostly black college students in Nashville in 1959. As one commentator on those workshops noted, the "crucial lesson" was that "[o]rdinary people who acted on conscience and took terrible risks were no longer ordinary people. They were by their very actions transformed" (Halberstam 62). When those transformed black college students from Nashville met with other college students from around the South in April 1960 in North Carolina for the founding of SNCC, Lawson was there as one of the keynote speakers to inspire the gathering with his religiously-based utopianism. Calling upon the power of transcendent love, Lawson asserted: "Such love goes to the extreme; it remains loving and forgiving even in the midst of hostility. It matches the capacity of evil to inflict suffering with an even more enduring capacity to absorb evil, all the while persisting in love" (qtd. in Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 291). Explicitly endorsing Lawson's approach to nonviolence and his vision of a "beloved community," SNCC's original statement of purpose proclaimed: "We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. . . . Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. . . . hope ends despair. . . . The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality" (qtd. in Carson 23).

The obvious spiritual component of this utopianism was given greater credence in the later reflections of key members of these workshops who became important SNCC leaders. Diane Nash, a SNCC organizer of sit-ins in Nashville in 1960 and Freedom Rides in 1961, affirmed: "We aspired in the sixties to the redeemed community or, as we frequently called it, the beloved community. A community recovered or fulfilled, a
community that could become more of what its potential was" (Greenberg 18). In his memoirs, John Lewis, one of the Nashville students and longtime Chairman of SNCC (1963-1966), avowed that “believers in the Beloved Community insist that it is the moral responsibility of men and women with soul force . . . to respond and to struggle non-violently against the forces that stand between a society and the harmony it naturally seeks” (87). For Lewis the Beloved Community was “nothing less than the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God on earth” (87). Through the articulation and enactment of the Beloved Community or redemptive politics, often problematic and continuously beset by racist resistance and violence, SNCC attempted to proclaim in its early moments its utopian aspirations.2

Although rooted in the messianic resonances of “prophetic black Christianity” (West 95-127) and black liberation theology, SNCC’s organizational ethos worked against the idea of a church-based messianic leadership. In particular, as a consequence of the mentoring of Ella Baker, a former NAACP and SCLC organizer, SNCC developed a “group centered leadership” (Ransby 245) that contained an implicit critique of charismatic church leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King. Baker saw in the black student activism of 1960 the potential for a mass-based freedom movement in the south. She confided to her close comrade and white anti-racist activist, Anne Braden, in early 1960 that such a student-inspired mass based movement “may only be a dream of mine, but I think it can be made real” (qtd. in Ransby 238). Making it “real” for Baker meant breaking “with the largely middle-class male centered leadership of existing civil rights organizations” and stripping away “the class-based and gender-based notions of who should and could give leadership to the movement and the black community” (Ransby 259). Baker not only steered the students through the early organizational difficulties of SNCC, but also provided a grounded sense of the difficulties of bringing the new world out of the old. “Even if segregation is gone,” Baker argued, “we will still need to be free; we will still have to see that everyone has a job. Even if we can all vote, but if people are still hungry, we will not be free. . . . Remember, we are not fighting for the freedom of the Negro alone, but for the freedom of the human spirit, a larger freedom that encompasses all mankind (qtd. in Zinn 103). Finally, Baker admonished SNCC’s idealists with the following: “Old
radicals have a saying: ‘You can’t make the new world and live in it too’” (qtd. in Stoper 270).

On the other hand, SNCC’s commitment to a grounded utopianism compelled it to participate in direct action campaigns that confronted racial domination in the South while prefiguring the kind of society where African-Americans would achieve first class citizenship as well as dignity and respect. The direct action campaigns of SNCC in 1960 and 1961, according to John Lewis, dramatized “the issue of segregation by putting it onstage and keeping it onstage” (181). When SNCC rescued the stalled Freedom Rides in May of 1961 amidst the vicious violence of die-hard segregationists in the Deep South and against the attempts of derailment and then hesitant assistance of the federal government, the student activists of SNCC gave courageous meaning to what would become a slogan of the sixties—putting one’s body on the line (Branch, Parting the Waters, 451-91 and Halberstam 248-323). Within the dramaturgy of SNCC’s bodily involvement with the Freedom rides was a spiritual transformation that emboldened the youthful participants. In the testimony of SNCC activist Lucretia Collins on what the Freedom Rides meant to her, she volunteered that “I am willing to do it all over again because I know a new world is opening up. To me, the entire movement is symbolic of the fight for human dignity” (qtd. in Forman 157).

For all the dramatic impact of the Freedom Rides (Dittmer 90-99), SNCC organizers realized that they would have to turn their attention to an even more perilous activity, voter registration, in order to defeat the political rule of segregation. In its voter registration campaigns from 1961 to 1964, SNCC not only provided the impetus for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but also began the process of an organizational transformation that had both internal and external implications for SNCC’s grounded utopianism. According to one historical interpretation of SNCC’s engagement with voter registration campaigns, the “decision to mobilize black communities behind efforts to secure political rights decisively changed the character of the organization. It thereafter ceased to be an extracurricular activity of student leaders and became instead the vocation of dedicated young men and women who temporarily abandoned their careers to become full time paid workers (or ‘field secretaries’) in the movement” (Matusow 499). Moreover, the impact on the indigenous communities where SNCC launched such
voter registration campaigns, such as southwest Georgia and Mississippi, created moments of grounded utopianism. As Charles Sherrod, chief SNCC organizer for the campaign in southwest Georgia, reported: “The people are thinking. They are becoming. In a deep southwest Georgia area, where it is generally conceded that the Negro has no rights that a white man is bound to respect, at least, they sing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ There is hope” (qtd. in Zinn 133)! One old man’s testimony in Greenwood, Mississippi in August 1963 provided even more grounding to this hope: “All these years, going along behind my plow, I thought some day things would change. But I never dreamed I’d see it now” (qtd. in Zinn 98).

In attempting to realize the dreams of their southern black constituency, SNCC eschewed a kind of ethereal dreaming that found its way into the speeches of Martin Luther King, especially the famous King address at the historic March on Washington in August 28, 1963. The contrast between King’s ethereal utopianism and SNCC’s grounded utopianism is particularly evident in the difference between King’s speech and SNCC’s chair, John Lewis. Lewis’s ringing denunciations of the political establishment and citing of specific incidents of brutality against SNCC fueled grounded utopian demands for “freedom now” (N. Mills 27-41). Commenting on the “dreamers” speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial on that August afternoon, SNCC activist Anne Moody was particularly dismissive of Dr. King. “Martin Luther King,” Moody noted, “went on and on talking about his dream. I sat there thinking that in Canton (Mississippi) we never had time to sleep, much less dream” (307). Thus, Moody’s critique captured the everyday realities that SNCC organizers confronted in their efforts to transform the repressive environment facing black folks in the South.

SNCC’s ability to mobilize the anger and hope of the indigenous black population in Mississippi was, in effect, a consequence of the dialectic between its organizers and the local people. Sam Block, one of the SNCC organizers in Greenwood, Mississippi, commented on this dialectic in noting that the movement “was built with older people who were angry, who were looking for somebody who could give form and expression to ideas and thoughts that they had in mind for years, that they wanted to do and just couldn’t bring together” (qtd. in Payne 178). In giving form and expression
to “individual and subjective experiences of oppression,” SNCC organizers produced “mobilizing action frames” (Robnett 201-02) that not only moved people to action, but also educated abused and oppressed African-Americans to hope. SNCC leaders, such as Bob Moses, a Northern black intellectual, embodied the qualities of those organic intellectuals who “generate and circulate oppositional ideas through social action . . . [and] challenge dominant interests through education and agitation” (Lipsitz 10). As one biographer of Bob Moses has noted: “Inspired by Moses and the other civil rights workers, by 1963 Delta blacks were more often courageously standing their ground in the county courthouses, more frequently willing to go to jail or to risk their lives; they were becoming psychologically and morally empowered” (Burner 94).

The journey to this empowerment was often fueled by a grounded utopianism that had deep roots in African-American religious traditions (Payne 257). “Mass meetings,” as one study of the Mississippi civil rights movement contends, “were grounded in the religious traditions and esthetic sensibilities of the Black South” (Payne 256). The powerful singing and solidarity that marked these meetings raised the spirits of local people and provided encouragement to take on the terrible terror of racial domination. Indigenous SNCC organizers, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, used her awe-inspiring voice to lead the singing at these meetings and “to articulate her ideas with a powerful religious rhetoric that had deep resonances for her audience” (Payne 242). On the other hand, Mrs. Hamer also knew that “Christian love alone wouldn’t cure the sickness in Mississippi” (vii). Yet, her hope and courage was reflective of the indigenous black community in rural Mississippi out of which she emerged in 1962 (Marsh 10-48; and K. Mills). Later testimony about the hope and courage among black Mississippians was evident during a massive turnout for an Indianola, Mississippi mass meeting in July of 1964. One of SNCC’s Freedom Summer volunteers enthused: “I sat and watched faces that had been transformed with hope and courage. . . . That sense of hope was so strong, so pervasive that each of us there felt with complete certainty that there can, there will, be a better world and a good life if we work for it” (Sutherland 76-77).

Working for that better world in a state like Mississippi went up against terrifying structural and psychological impediments. As SNCC field
secretary, Lawrence Guyot, acknowledged: “In '62 there was a hell of a job to even consider voting cause that meant going to the courthouse, that meant the possibility of being beaten—the probability of being beaten, the probability of not having a job and of being cut off welfare” (Burner 42). The beatings, the firings, and many other acts of intimidation and terror were visited time and again on local people and SNCC activists. Yet, local people were not deterred and collective and individual incidents often demonstrated the degree to which black folk would challenge racial domination, even if it meant using physical violence. SNCC field worker Bob Zellner witnessed one such incident when Mrs. Laura McGhee demanded to see her jailed son. When a white cop blocked her way, she pummeled him and swept by. An astounded Bob Zellner, noting that Mrs. McGhee escaped any punishment for her actions, commented: “A new day is coming when a black woman can just whip the yard-dog shit out of a white cop and not have to account for it” (Payne 214).

On the other hand, most of the physical violence was unleashed against those African-Americans and civil rights activists who threatened the status quo and proposed utopian longings to overcome the debilitating effects of racial domination in the Deep South.5 As a consequence of the lack of federal response to all of the violence and repression heaped upon those working for change in Mississippi, SNCC reluctantly agreed to bring hundreds of white students to Mississippi in the summer of 1964. In an admonition to white student volunteers during their training session in Ohio, Bob Moses said: “Don’t come to Mississippi this summer to save the Mississippi Negro. Only come if you understand, really understand, that his freedom and yours are one” (qtd. in Burner 155). For one such volunteer, Sally Belfrage, the journey to Mississippi was buoyed by the utopian aspirations embedded in freedom songs sung at the orientation sessions (3-4) and punctuating the early mass meetings she attended in the South (24-25). Acknowledging her role as an educator for hope, she avowed that “it was our job . . . to find (hope) and give (hope) substance” (50). Another white volunteer noted that those African-Americans who embraced the students “have enormous hope and are extremely practical about achieving their goals” (Sutherland 80). With practical goals and utopian hope, the prefigurative politics offered by SNCC throughout the summer of 1964
aided the black freedom struggle. (McAdam and N. Mills) According to one study of the efficacy of Freedom Summer, “by the end of the summer of 1964, defiance of white supremacy had been institutionalized” (Payne 316).6

One of the most hopeful, yet ultimately disillusioning, institutions established during 1964 in Mississippi with the primary aid of SNCC was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Begun with encouragement and assistance of Northern white liberals, the MFDP would eventually be rebuked at the 1964 national Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. While pushed along by the grounded utopianism of SNCC, the MFDP’s demands would be swept aside by Lyndon Johnson and his liberal allies, producing in the process a break with liberalism by SNCC and a turning away from the liberal-humanitarian horizons inherent in the civil rights phase of the black freedom struggle (Branch, Pillar of Fire, 456-76; Carson 111-29; Dittmer 279-302; and Forman 386-406). Nonetheless, as an organizational vehicle, the MFDP, according to one SNCC fieldworker, “was the best means of physically organizing the Negroes of Mississippi, of finding indigenous leadership, and building a political structure” (Belfrage 85). Bob Moses saw the MFDP as not only building a political organization of indigenous leadership, but also elevating those indigenous blacks from their lowly status to self-determination. “The whole point of the FDP,” opined Moses, “is to teach the lowest sharecropper that he knows better than the biggest leader what is required to make a decent life for himself” (qtd. in Burner 198). Giving voice to the inarticulate was too much of a challenge to the liberal establishment, both white and black. Thus, that liberal establishment was marshaled to defeat the demands of the MFDP at Atlantic City in August 1964. “The liberals getting upset at us,” argued Bob Moses, “was inevitable. We are raising fundamental questions about how the poor sharecropper can achieve the Good Life, questions that liberalism is incapable of answering” (qtd. in Dittmer 318). Expressing “enormous disillusionment . . . with establishment liberals,” Julian Bond, the director of communications for SNCC (Powledge 597), reflected the overwhelming sentiment of SNCC activists and supporters. According to historian Barbara Ransby: “The pivotal events of August 1964 not only transformed the national context for the civil rights movement but also reshaped SNCC’s political perspective, strategic approach, and evolving identity” (331).
SNCC's efforts to reshape its outlook and structure in the fall of 1964 reflected not only a break with liberalism, but a turn away from civil rights to black power. Grappling with myriad internal issues (white/black staff ratios, centralization, and ideology), SNCC also began to question its hope for a redemptive society at its Waveland retreat in November 1964 (Carson 133-52; Forman 411-32; and Polletta, 88-119). Nonetheless, there were still a few lingering articulations of hope and grounded utopianism. Trying to respond to questions around SNCC organizing, one anonymous paper proposed: “We hope for this world, all of us. Even though we and our programs are sometimes dull, or ugly, or impatient, the hope is beautiful” (M. King 446). Jim Forman, SNCC’s executive secretary and one of those pushing for a tighter organization and internal discipline, nevertheless still articulated SNCC’s utopian aspirations, albeit in reconfigured form. “We must continue,” Forman opined in his opening remarks at the Waveland retreat, “not necessarily to work for the redemptive society, but to work toward a new spirit of brotherhood, a spirit that transcends both black and white, a spirit that supercedes, a spirit that goes above and a spirit that sees all of us simply as men and women, struggling for a sense of dignity” (qtd. in M. King 449). Forman’s hope for transcending the black/white divide foundered on the failures of the political and economic system to address fundamental needs of its minority population and from an increasing assertiveness of the minority population to seek its own liberation through identity politics. As SNCC turned towards Black Power and away from the Beloved Community, it lost not only some of its moral and social moorings but its grounded utopianism. (Carson 215-28; Forman 433-47; and Payne 366).

As the religious and southern context of SNCC’s civil rights struggle changed, so did the articulation and resonance of SNCC’s grounded utopianism (Carson 299). Contrasting the waning influence of Lawson and his followers in SNCC with their ideas of “redemptive suffering,” Forman makes the argument that “the original religious thrust of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee became a contradiction” (238-39). Indeed, between 1963 and 1965, those early SNCC activists dedicated to the beloved community (James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Charles Sherrod, among others) resigned (Stoper 83). In their place, leadership gravitated to northern
black students, such as those from Howard University, represented by the Nonviolent Action Group, which included such SNCC luminaries as Cleveland Sellars and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture). Not only was this group antagonistic to the religious ethos in SNCC, but also it became hardened against utopian sentiments, especially within a liberal humanitarian horizon.

Carmichael's SNCC career, in particular, represents the coming to power of those northern black students whose antagonism to religion and growing racial consciousness often pitted them and him against religious-oriented and grounded utopianists in SNCC, such as John Lewis. In fact, according to Lewis, Carmichael, arrested with him during the Freedom Rides, was not interested "in the principles of nonviolence or even the Bible" (173). In his autobiography, Carmichael admits that he "was never into . . . spiritual evangelism. I never saw my responsibility to be the moral and spiritual reclamation of some racist thug" (172). More critically, Carmichael became the most prominent articulator of "black power," which emerged first as a slogan in a 1966 march in Mississippi and then into a full-blown ideology, an ideology often with multiple meanings that confounded even its advocates (507-63 and Carson 215-28). While the myriad threads of black power in SNCC could be traced to the impact of the speeches of Malcolm X, the writings of Frantz Fanon, and the struggles for third world liberation, each and every one of the threads contradicted the grounded utopianism of the civil rights phase of SNCC's political existence. In effect, as black power became the radical phase of the black freedom struggle, "the religious, participatory democratic and liberal dimensions of the movement seemed hopelessly reformist or bourgeois or 'white'—and usually all three together" (R. King 5).

On the other hand, many SNCC veterans view those heroic times of the civil rights struggle with a sense of accomplishment and recognition of the power and limitations of their grounded utopianism. According to one SNCC veteran, "(SNCC) challenged us to dream, a little before Dr. King started dreaming. . . . They challenged us to dream of a community, a city, and a country full of love instead of hate" (Greenberg 102). Another SNCC activist recognized the innocence and naivety of their age, the era, and the utopian horizons. "We were wide-eyed children, acting on dreams of
equality and social justice, fighting the good fight, unwilling to accept the brutality and degradation of segregation, convinced that if we could only find a way to demonstrate the truth, justice would prevail" (Curry 287). In acknowledging the difficulties of realizing the concrete utopia envisioned by Bloch and embedded in the grounded utopianism of SNCC, Sandra “Casey” Cason-Hayden, a SNCC staff member who would go on to become a leader in the emerging feminist movement, provides a perceptive assessment of SNCC and its activist core during the civil rights struggle: “We embodied, not as an abstraction, but actually, the struggle and the stress, the ambiguities and the paradoxes of creating new social realities” (Curry 374).

Of course, the ambiguities and paradoxes were not only inherent in SNCC’s organization and its members but also endemic in the larger political culture of the times. Against unremitting racist violence and lack of federal protection, SNCC members suffered a kind of “battle fatigue” (Dittmer 327; Matusow 507) that eroded their hope for change and created despair (R. King 138) and frustration, the kind of frustration that Bloch described as “the coffin that constantly waits beside each hope” (311). Nevertheless, during the period from 1960-1965 SNCC was greatly responsible for facilitating the civil rights victories in the Deep South, dissipating the prevalent fear among black southerners and gaining in the process “civic respect” (Powledge 642) for African-Americans. By 1965, however, with continuing frustration over uncooperative, and even antagonistic, federal officials, especially those in the FBI, and the growing conflicts in Southeast Asia and northern ghettoes, SNCC’s grounded utopianism and the liberal-humanitarian horizon that sustained it were shattered. Although SNCC would continue as an organization until the end of the decade, it would never again give voice to utopian aspirations even though such aspirations still managed to resonate in the 1960’s and beyond.

Endnotes

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1 For an extended critique of Mannheim and an elaboration, also, of the relevance of Bloch, see Levitas, 67–105.

2 For Lewis and other messianic religionists in SNCC, their utopianism is consonant with Bloch’s understanding of Christian utopianism and its links to the “messianic parts of the Bible” (7). Moreover, the messianic or redemptive aspects of SNCC’s references to the beloved community at times reflect the Chiliastic horizon of utopianism discussed in Mannheim, 211–19. This Chiliastic expression, as Mannheim argues, is at odds with the liberal-humanitarian horizon of utopianism. Hence, at times, the expressive and emotional components of SNCC’s utopianism would be at odds with the instrumental liberalism in its civil rights phase. The idea of redemptive politics as a component of Marxist utopianism has certainly become more problematic in the postmodern era. (See Gardiner.) On the other hand, messianic and religiously inspired utopianism still has an advocate in the postmodern Marxism of Slavoj Zizek.

3 In fact, the original text of Lewis’s speech for the March on Washington caused a temporary and last-minute break in the coalition of forces sponsoring the March. Lewis and other SNCC leaders had to tone down the criticisms of the federal government and temporize the heated rhetoric in the revision that became the actual text for Lewis’s speech. Both versions can be found in SNCC Papers (Reel 2). For SNCC’s perspectives on the tensions during the March on Washington, see Forman, 331–37 and Lewis, 201–27.

4 On the connections between mass meetings and freedom songs, see Dittmer, 131–32. For an extended discussion of the powerful role of “freedom songs” for the civil rights movement and in SNCC’s mass meetings, see Greenberg, 110–24. Also, Mary King’s reflections on her experiences with SNCC are punctuated with constant references to freedom songs. See King, 23–24 and passim.

5 For a discussion of the Klan-sponsored violence in Mississippi in 1964 alone (beyond the infamous murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner), see Dittmer, 215–18, 266–68, and 305–09.
Although SNCC was the primary motivator for Freedom Summer and directed much of the voting rights activity in Mississippi before and after 1964, it was not the only civil rights group participating in organizing campaigns. Both CORE and the NAACP were involved with civil rights struggles in Mississippi during this period under the heading of the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO), albeit the NAACP acted often without the trust of and coordination with SNCC. On the interactions of SNCC and CORE in Freedom Summer, see Dittmer, 242–71.

Certainly, black power was not exempt from its own forms of utopianism, a form beyond what Mannheim contends is the last phase of the modern utopian mentality—the Socialist-Communist utopia (239–47). In fact, one could posit an anti-colonialist utopian mentality that combines elements from the Chiliastic, Liberal-Humanitarian, and Socialist-Communist phases. For a fuller exploration of the varieties of black power and some utopian traces, see Van Deburg. For a critical examination of the "colonial analogy and black power," see Richard King, 150–65.

Works Cited


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