

“You’ve Got to Work For Power”: The Rise of the Black Power Movement in SNCC
By Bonnie Belshe

Author of Lesson:

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Group Concept: Voice

Subject/Course: AP US History/ US History

Lesson Plan Title: “You’ve Got to Work For Power”: The Rise of the Black Power Movement in SNCC

Image:



[“Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, speaks to reporters in Atlanta in May 1966. That year, his use of the phrase "black power" at a rally in Mississippi grabbed the nation's attention.” Bettmann/Corbis](#)

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Brief narrative:

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created, in part, because of the success of students sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters starting in Greensboro, North Carolina and Nashville, Tennessee. Following the advice of Ella Baker, SNCC was formed independent of other civil rights organizations, particularly that of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Martin Luther King, Jr. Inspired by Baker and the Reverend James Lawson, SNCC was formed in 1960 to reflect the growth of students in the civil rights movement. SNCC was an integrated student-run organization.

After a series of relative successes--most notably the Birmingham Movement led by Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, and the Childrens' March--leaders within the Civil Rights Movement wanted to hold a March on Washington in support of the proposed Civil Rights Act that was stalled in Congress in 1963. Bayard Rustin, a former advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr. (Rustin was a black and out gay man who was instrumental in many renowned Civil Rights movements but because of his sexuality he was never given the same recognition as others) planned the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. John Lewis, chairman of SNCC from 1963-1966, was asked to speak alongside of other Civil Rights notables such as James Farmer from Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and A. Philip Randolph (Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters). Lewis--a staunch supporter of King and non-violent direct action--was instrumental in SNCC during the 1961 Freedom Rides, the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March over the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Stokely Carmichael had been a member of SNCC during the time of John Lewis' leadership. He worked as a part of the 1964 Freedom Summer in Mississippi and in Lowndes County, Alabama. The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) was in many ways a precursor to the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California. In 1966, Carmichael no longer supported nonviolent direct action as the only means for the civil rights movement. He popularized the term “Black Power” and with that changed the nature of SNCC. With the help and popularity of the Black Power movement, Carmichael succeeded Lewis as the chairman of SNCC and shifted the organization to focus on what historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries calls black freedom politics. Under Carmichael, SNCC focused on local black leadership in communities with a majority black population.

This lesson plan examines the shift in SNCC's philosophy away from nonviolent direct action as sacrosanct to the philosophy of Black Power. The violent response of segregationists in direct opposition to justice and change hardened and angered many SNCC supporters who began to question the place of white SNCC supporters within between 1961 and 1968 SNCC and its activists were transformed from an integrated, nonviolent organization to a black only, Black Power organization. Both philosophies supported the end of segregation, increase in voting enfranchisement, battling prejudice and racism in the justice system, and economic opportunity. But how these would be achieved was the area of contention. Students will examine the following primary source excerpts to trace the philosophical shift and compare historical interpretations of SNCC and the rise of the Black Power Movement.

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Guiding Questions:

1. How and why did the philosophy of SNCC shift from nonviolence to Black Power from 1961 to 1968?
2. What are the connections between the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and the Black Panther Party? How did Stokely Carmichael influence these two organizations?
3. Examine the varying historical interpretations of SNCC and the Black Power Movement. What are the similarities and differences between the historical arguments?
4. To what extent does the Black Power Movement reflect the increased white violence towards Civil Rights activists?

Learning Objectives:

1. Analyze primary sources related to the formation of SNCC and rise of the Black Power Movement.
2. Analyze a variety of historical interpretations on the formation of SNCC and rise of the Black Power Movement.
3. Compare the varying historical interpretations to evaluate the historians’ claims.
4. Evaluate which historian’s claim is most convincing in relation to the primary source evidence.

Class Periods: Three 45 minute periods

College and Career Readiness Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

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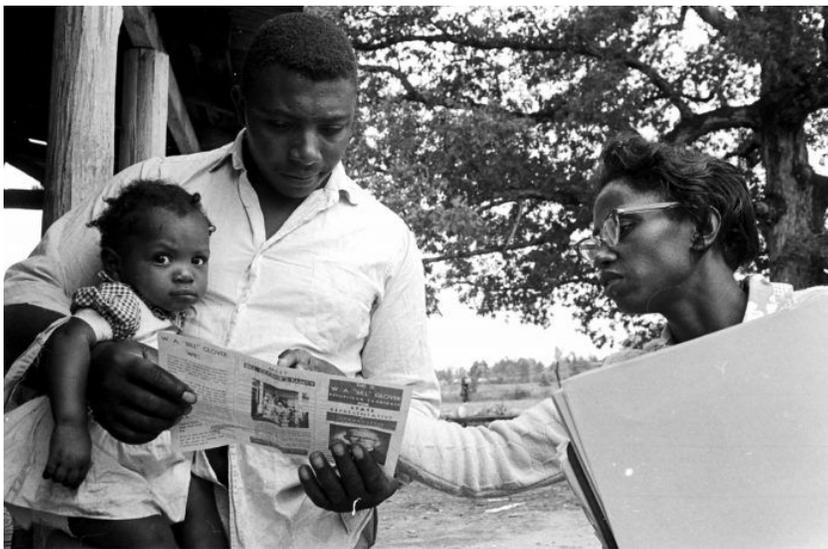
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Preparation:

1. Prior to class students should watch the two short videos on SNCC, Black Power, and Alabama. The first video is from Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on Lowndes County and the Black Panther Symbol. The video features historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries who author’s one of the interpretations in the lesson. The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12TmA1T3pqU> and is 2 minutes long. The second video is from the PBS documentary on the Black Panther Party. This segment focuses on the white media’s portrayal of the Black Panther Party. The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h91Gq9Z9-1s> and is 3 ½ minutes long.
2. Students should be familiar with historiography for the historical interpretations analysis. A primer on American historiography and schools of thought is linked below in a short video by Bonnie Belshe.
3. Additional resources for background knowledge:
 - a. Eyes on the Prize Documentary (Blackside Productions)
 - i. Episode: Ain’t Scared of Your Jails?
 - b. The Black Panther Documentary (PBS)

Lesson Activities (numbered and in order) - description and links:

1. At the beginning of class, the students will analyze the image of a SNCC volunteer working on voter registration and information. The students will use the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool to organize their analysis of the image and prepare the students for the lesson on SNCC and the Black Power Movement.



- i. <https://www.sccclegacyproject.org/projects/one-person-one-vote>
2. Students will analyze the photograph using the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool. *Expected time: 5 minutes.*
 - a. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/>

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3. Hand out the Primary Source Documents Handout and Chart. Students should work collaboratively in groups (3-4) to understand the voice and message of each primary source and how the voices shifted the purpose of SNCC during the 1960s. *Expected time: 40-45 minutes.*
4. After students have completed the primary source analysis, hand out the Historical Interpretations. Students will need 4 different colors of pens/pencils to complete this work. Working in groups of 3-4 students will analyze the historical interpretations. *Expected time: 45 minutes.*
5. For assessment, students will write a synthesis response to the following prompt: How and why did the philosophy of SNCC shift from non-violence to black power from 1961 to 1968? Give students synthesis handout with guiding questions and assessment prompt. *Expected time: 30-45 minutes.*

Assessment: For assessment, students will find their own voice as a historian by writing a synthesis response to the following prompt: How and why did the philosophy of SNCC shift from non-violence to black power from 1961 to 1968?

Lesson Extensions: This lesson is designed to bridge between the classical phase of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement.

Reference Websites:

- <http://crmvet.org/>
- <https://www.sncclegacyproject.org/>
- <http://onevotesncc.org/>
- <https://snccdigital.org/>
- <https://www.civilrightsteaching.org/>
- <https://www.teachingforchange.org/>
- https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection/search?edan_local=1&edan_fq%5B%5D=topic%3A%22Civil%20Rights%22
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3660172>
- <https://thinktv.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/civilrightsthenandnow/>

Materials and Media:

- [Image and ORQ Handout\(s\)](#)
- [Primary Source Excerpts/Handout](#)
- [Primary Source Analysis Chart](#)
- [Historical Interpretations Handout](#)
- [Synthesis Guiding Questions Handout](#)
- [Finding Your Voice as a Historian Assessment](#)
- [Historiography Video](#)

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Image Analysis: [Observation, Reflection, and Question \(Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool\)](#)



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Primary Source Excerpts:

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our belief, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence, as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition, seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society. Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear. Love transcends hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Faith reconciles doubt. Peace dominates war. Mutual regards cancel enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes immoral social systems. By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities. Although each local group in this movement must diligently work out the clear meaning of this statement of purpose, each act or phase of our corporate effort must reflect a genuine spirit of love and good-will.

SNCC Statement of Purpose, largely based on a speech by Rev. James Lawson, 1960

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text2/snccstatementofpurpose.pdf>

We...represent the thinking of thousand of Negro and white Americans who have participated in, and supported student efforts that have been characterized, generally, as Sit-Ins, but which in truth were peaceful petitions to the conscience for our fellow citizens for redress of the old grievances that stem from racial segregation and discrimination. In a larger sense, we represent hundreds of thousands of freedom loving people, for whom our limited efforts have revitalized the great American dream of “liberty and justice for all”.

Statement by SNCC to the Democratic National Convention, July 7th, 1960

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/statement_by_sncc_to_the_national_democratic_convention/

To President John F. Kennedy, May 23rd, 1961

White House, Washington DC

The recent outbreak of mob violence and the massive assault upon freeborn American Negro students who are first class citizens of the United States as they travelled throughout the cities of the state of Alabama as interstate passengers on interstate buses is completely unjustifiable at a time in the history of our great nation when we are telling the people...of the free world ...we desire to be their friends...Negro Americans continue to be assaulted by the Southern reactionaries.

SNCC Telegram to JFK, 1961

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/telegram_to_john_f_john_fitzgerald_kennedy/

We march today for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here. They have no money for their transportation, for they are receiving starvation wages, or no wages at all. In good conscience, we cannot support wholeheartedly the administration's civil rights bill. There's not one thing in the bill that will

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protect our people from police brutality. This bill will not protect young children and old women from police dogs and fire hoses, for engaging in peaceful demonstrations: This bill will not protect the citizens in Danville, Virginia, who must live in constant fear in a police state. This bill will not protect the hundreds of people who have been arrested on trumped-up charges. What about the three young men in Americus, Georgia, who face the death penalty for engaging in peaceful protest? The voting section of this bill will not help thousands of black citizens who want to vote. It will not help the citizens of Mississippi, of Alabama and Georgia, who are qualified to vote but lack a sixth-grade education. "ONE MAN, ONE VOTE" is the African cry. It is ours, too. It must be ours.

John Lewis, Original Text, March on Washington 1963

<http://www.crmvet.org/info/mowjl.htm>

We march today for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here, for they are receiving starvation wages or no wages at all. While we stand here, there are sharecroppers in the Delta of Mississippi who are out in the fields working for less than three dollars per day, 12 hours a day. While we stand here, there are students in jail on trumped-up charges. Our brother James Farmer, along with many others, is also in jail. We come here today with a great sense of misgiving. It is true that we support the administration's Civil Rights Bill. We support it with great reservation, however. Unless title three is put in this bill, there's nothing to protect the young children and old women who must face police dogs and fire hoses in the South while they engage in peaceful demonstration.

John Lewis, Speech Actually Given, March on Washington, 1963

<http://billmoyers.com/content/two-versions-of-john-lewis-speech/>

Today, we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops. It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal. It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case...The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated...Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law.

President John F. Kennedy, Televised speech on Civil Rights, June 11th, 1963

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkcivilrights.htm>

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An act to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States of America to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/>

SNCC says that white America cannot condemn herself. And since we are liberal, we have done it: You stand condemned. Now, a number of things that arise from that answer of how do you condemn yourselves. Seems to me that the institutions that function in this country are clearly racist, and that they’re built upon racism. And the question, then, is how can black people inside of this country move? And then how can white people who say they’re not a part of those institutions begin to move? And how then do we begin to clear away the obstacles that we have in this society, that make us live like human beings? How can we begin to build institutions that will allow people to relate with each other as human beings? This country has never done that, especially around the country of white or black...Now, several people have been upset because we’ve said that integration was irrelevant when initiated by blacks, and that in fact it was a subterfuge, an insidious subterfuge, for the maintenance of white supremacy.

Stokely Carmichael, Berkeley “Black Power” Speech, October 29th, 1966

<http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/carmichael-black-power-speech-text/>

Some time ago, we organized a political group of our own known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, whose emblem is the Black Panther. We were criticized, we were called communists, we were called everything else, black nationalists and what not, because we did this. Any group which starts at a time like this to speak out for what is right — they are going to be ridiculed. The people of Lowndes County realized this...Too long Negroes have been begging, especially in the South, for things they should be working for. So the people in Lowndes County decided to organize themselves — to go out and work for the things we wanted in life — not only for the people in Lowndes County, but for every county in the state of Alabama, in the Southern states, and even in California. You cannot become free in California while there are slaves in Lowndes County. And no person can be free while other people are still slaves — nobody.

John Hulett, Chairman LCFO, How the Black Panther Party Was Organized, 1966

<http://www.crmvet.org/info/hulet1.htm>

You’ve got to work for...power. The mistake we made was that we went to the National Democratic Party begging them to come into their party. If we’re to do anything, we have to stop begging... Now what happened in Alabama is that we started building something, and we made whites irrelevant to everything we did...We were building a party for black people, because they were disenfranchised in Lowndes County. I’m not in any bag about "Black Nationalism" and all that...We just don't want to become a part of the Man...What I've learned about integration is

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that this country always defines it. But it was always a one-sided thing: Negroes were always going to whites and it was in fact white supremacy. Because everything good was white.

Stokely Carmichael, The Movement, June 1966

<http://www.crmvet.org/info/lowndes2.htm>

The myth that the Negro is somehow incapable of liberating himself, is lazy, etc., came out of the American experience. In the books that children read, whites are always "good" (good symbols are white), blacks are "evil" or seen as savages in movies, their language is referred to as a "dialect," and black people in this country are supposedly descended from savages. Any white person who comes into the movement has the concepts in his mind about black people, if only subconsciously. He cannot escape them because the whole society has geared his subconscious in that direction.

Stokely Carmichael, The Basis of Black Power, 1966

http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SNCC_black_power.html

WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. We believe that Black...people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves.

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, Black Panther Party, Ten Point Platform, 1966

<http://www.blackpanther.org/TenPoint.htm>

Uh! Your bad self!

Say it loud! I'm black and I'm proud

Say it louder! I'm black and I'm proud

Look a-here!

Some people say we got a lot of malice, some say it's a lotta nerve

But I say we won't quit movin' until we get what we deserve

We've been buked and we've been scorned

We've been treated bad, talked about as sure as you're born

But just as sure as it take two eyes to make a pair, huh!

Brother we can't quit until we get our share

James Brown, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” 1968

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY2N8BAmkTM>

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Primary Source Analysis Chart:

Primary Source: Title, Year	Summary: No more than 2 sentences. Must be in your own words.	Key Quotation: Pick one quote that best represents the point of the primary source. No more than 4-5 words in total.	Analysis: How and why did the philosophy of SNCC shift from non-violence to black power from 1961 to 1968?
SNCC Statement of Purpose, 1960			
SNCC to DNC, 1960			
SNCC to JFK, 1961			
John Lewis, Original Text, 1963			

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John Lewis, Speech Given, 1963			
JFK Civil Rights Speech, 1963			
Civil Rights Act, 1964			
Stokely Carmichael, 1966			

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John Hulett, 1966			
Stokely Carmichael, The Movement, 1966			
Stokely Carmichael, The Basis of Black Power, 1966			
Black Panther Party Platform, 1966			
James Brown, 1968			

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Historical Interpretations:

Directions: Read the following historical interpretation carefully. Using your four pen colors, mark up the passage. **Identify the historian’s claim in red.** A claim is the main argument of a passage. What is the historian trying to prove in their writing? **Identify the historian’s evidence in blue.** How are they proving their claim? **Identify any new vocabulary in green.** Look up any new words and write the definition in the margins. **Identify the context of the interpretation in purple.** What is background understanding is needed for their evidence and claim?

Interpretation #1:

“Accordingly, the major thrust of Black Power was to make blacks proud to be blacks, a psychological precondition for equality. It fostered a new sense of racial pride and self-confidence that helped revolutionize the black perspective, confining into the dustbin of the African-American past the belief born out of centuries of oppression that what was white was good and what was black was inferior. Supplanting Northern black nationalist stirrings and the transformative successes of the Southern freedom struggle, which had heightened many an African-American’s sense of efficacy and self-respect, the Black Power ethos equated “black” and “beautiful”....But, as Carmichael observed, “to most whites, Black Power seems to mean that the Mau Mau are coming to the suburbs at night.” His leadership did much to make that seem inevitable. Arguing that SNCC’s Southern mentality caused it to fail in the North, and that it was too reformist, lacking an ideology, Carmichael prodded SNCC to become progressively more anti-capitalism and pro-black nationalism. Under his leadership, SNCC abandoned all pretense of working within the civil-rights movement. Recognizing the contradictions of using white field secretaries to inspire African-Americans to win their own freedom, to be proud of themselves, and to develop their inherent leadership potential, SNCC decided that the few whites remaining in the organization should henceforth work only within white communities.”

Sitkoff, Harvard. *The Struggle for Black Equality*. New York (New York.): Hill and Wang, 2008. Pg. 202-203.

1. Summarize the historian’s main argument/interpretation of SNCC and Black Power in 2-3 sentences.
2. List the primary source documents that best SUPPORT this interpretation.
3. List, if any, the primary source documents that REFUTE this interpretation.
4. Which other historical interpretation best complements this reading? Why? What primary source evidence supports these?

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Interpretation #2:

“The crux of the problem of relating the more recent developments to those prior to the summer of 1965 is an apparent paradox—the paradox of the most violent revolt coming on the heels of the most encouraging progress in civil rights....IN the meantime it would help to recall a certain ambivalence that black people have felt all along toward integration in white America, an old ambivalence that had been buried and put aside during the long struggle against segregation and discrimination. While resenting and opposing compulsory segregation, they had clung at the same time to the desire for enough racial distinctiveness and separateness to enable them to preserve a sense of cultural identity and racial pride and unity. Even the most complete victory over segregation would not satisfy that need, for few wished to deny racial identity or lose it in a white society. The ambivalence created a tension between those leaders of the race who were concerned mainly with protest against racial prejudice, injustice, and segregation and those mainly concerned with the preservation and fostering of racial identity, pride, and autonomy.”

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974. Pg. vi-vii.

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Interpretation #3:

“The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee left a valuable, if often misunderstood, legacy to the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice. SNCC activists were exemplars of rebellion against the varied sources of African-American oppression, spearheading an escalating series of challenges to the southern system of racial domination as well as to the cautious liberalism of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the civil rights movement’s most prominent advocate of Gandhian nonviolence, but SNCC veterans of the lunch counter sit-ins and freedom rides more resolutely tested the limits of the nonviolent protest strategy. Willing to provoke perilous confrontations with southern segregationists, they had little sympathy for liberal leaders who refused to take political risks on behalf of civil rights reform. Most SNCC activists were less committed than King to Christian-Gandhian precepts, but nonviolent direct action remained SNCC’s most effective stimulus for mass struggles. SNCC’s innovative use of nonviolent tactics contributed to its élan and effectiveness, which in turn inspired black southerners who had little power and few material resources....Besides its legacy of innovative protest tactics and organizing techniques, SNCC also left a complex and ambiguous legacy of ideas about African-American identity and destiny. The tragic significance of black power agitation of SNCC’s final years is that the new militancy obscured earlier insights about ways of sustaining struggles. While many subsequent social movements were influence by SNCC’s early values, African-American political militancy of the period after 1965 drew inspiration more often from SNCC’s black power campaign than from its civil rights activism....Moreover, although the black power slogan was an outgrowth of SNCC’s organizing efforts in the deep South, the struggle to define it permanently divided SNCC.”

Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pg. 304-306.

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Interpretation #4:

“By the end of 1966, however, Jim Crow was crumbling. The most obvious sign of its demise could be found on the voter rolls, which listed the names of nearly three thousand African Americans. In a remarkable display of collective courage, African Americans managed to set aside their fear and act on the powerful impulse to end segregation immediately. “Negroes ain’t planning on scaring no more,” said a black farmer. Their fierce determination to take action also led the to embark on a radical experiment in democracy. With the help of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the created the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), an all-black, independent political party whose ballot symbol was a snarling black panther. “We ain’t backing up,” said Sidney Logan, Jr., the LCFO candidate for sheriff. “We’re looking for power.” Their bid to take over the local government transformed Lowndes County from an unheard of bastion of white supremacy to the center of southern black militancy.”

Jeffries, Hasan Kwame. *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt*. New York: New York University Press, 2009. Pg. 1.

1. Summarize the historian’s main argument/interpretation of SNCC and Black Power in 2-3 sentences.
2. List the primary source documents that best SUPPORT this interpretation.
3. List, if any, the primary source documents that REFUTE this interpretation.
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