ABSTRACT

HISTORY

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STUDENT ACTIVISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE (SNCC) AND THE
SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT ORGANIZATION (SASO), 1960-1977

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The main aim of this study is to make comprehensible the actual interactions or

connections between the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the

South African Student Organization (SASO) in their black freedom struggle between

1960-1977. The primary focus is on how broadly similar conceptualizations of black

liberation by black students were modified or reinterpreted to suit local circumstances,

and what occurred when similar ideologies were acted upon under conditions that were in

some ways very different. There were cross-cultural links and mutual awareness between

the freedom struggle of students in the United States and South Africa. For instance, in

their condemnation of apartheid policy in South Africa during 1962, SNCC activists were

confronting white power on behalf of black South Africans.

In the same vein, SASO activists were inspired by the history of SNCC freedom

struggle in the United States. They even employed SNCC and its Black Power language

in their formulation of policies and ideology. This ideological congruence between

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SNCC and SASO manifested itself in a number of instances. First, students in both organizations confronted comparable questions on the methods to be used in their freedom struggle. The alternative in both cases was nonviolent resistance to challenge the status quo, and a revolutionary violence to overthrow the system. Although this similarity, per se, does not tell the whole story, evidence by SASO activists conclusively proves that SASO's moral idealism was largely influenced by SNCC. This is not, however, to suggest that SASO was a carbon copy of SNCC; yet the profound effect of SNCC and its Black Power variant on SASO's particular language and slant must be recognized and acknowledged if the developments of the 1970s are to be understood in the total context of the black south African intellectual struggle.

Another issue that arose in the context of students' discussions was the role of whites in the black struggle. In South Africa, this took place under the rubric of Black Consciousness; in the United States it was espoused under the slogan of Black power. How all these common ideological and tactical issues were debated and finally resolved, and how the theoretical and practical results of these deliberations affected the historical trajectory of the respective student struggles, is the main concern of this study.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC   African National Congress

BAWU   Black Allied Workers Union

BCM   Black Consciousness Movement

BPC   Black People Convention

COFO   Council of Federated Organizations

CORE   Congress of Racial Equality

FRELIMO   *Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique* (Front for the Liberation of

            Mozambique

MFDP   Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party

NAACP   National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NUSAS   National Union of South African Students

PAC   Pan Africanist Congress

SASO   South African Student Organization

SNCC   Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, 1960-1977

> The destiny of Afro-Americans is inseparable from that of our black brothers in Africa. It matters not whether it is in Angola, Mozambique, Southwest Africa, or Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Harlem, U.S.A. The struggle is…the same…It is our struggle against a vicious and evil system that is controlled and kept in order for and by a few white men throughout the world.[1]

The struggle against racial discrimination by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the South African Student Organization (SASO) between 1960-1977 reflects common ideological links and influences. There was a mutual awareness and exchange of ideas and rhetoric from both sides of the Atlantic, especially by the South African students. In the United States, the liberation movement in Africa, especially South Africa, spurred on SNCC activism. One of the most significant influences of SNCC was the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, when the South African police fired into a crowd of eight thousand blacks who peacefully protested against the pass laws, wounding 180 and killing 69 people. This event, together with the achievement of independence by black people in other parts of Africa and elsewhere around the world, had an additional impact to the developing climate of protest by SNCC activists.[2]

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[1] John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 229.

[2] Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1995), 131.

Though created eight years after SNCC, SASO was largely inspired by the SNCC struggle against racial discrimination. Evidently, SASO adapted the language and terminology of SNCC in order to influence mass thinking in South Africa. To be sure, SASO policy formulations on culture, consciousness, and ideology, all which were spelled out lengthily in SASO policy papers and articles, further reinforced the ideology of American black power writers such as Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. While these similarities cannot tell the whole story, evidence based on, among other things, Black Power literature, provides concrete testimony of mutual borrowing from both sides of the struggle.

This ideological parallelism between SNCC and SASO reflected an awareness that theirs alone was no singular, isolated struggle. From the 1960s onward, these students were keenly aware of the larger struggle of Africans and people of African descent throughout the world against the efforts of Europeans or people of European descent to enslave, colonize, disfranchise, and segregate people designated as black. Hence, students in the two societies shared in a larger Pan-African discourse and responded to changing international currents of black thought and opinion. As a result of this black internationalism, these students inspired and influenced each other and, in some ways, responded in a similar creative manner to the same ideologies that may have originated in neither the United States nor South Africa, including Gandhian nonviolence and Marxism.

Interestingly enough, there has been little sustained historical research on the comparative analysis between SNCC and SASO in their struggle for social change. In order to comprehend the historical roots of this mutual awareness and inspiration between

these students, it is necessary to understand the development of segregation and apartheid in the United States and South Africa, respectively. Chapter One provides an overview of segregation and apartheid to establish the historical context out of which SNCC and SASO evolved. The chapter examines the historical, policy, and institutional contexts, all of which constitute the major ingredients of student activism in the United States and South Africa.

Chapter Two addresses the role of SNCC, out of whose sheer evolution, frustrations, ambitions, and disappointments the most important formulations of resistance have taken shape in the black freedom struggle. The themes that are explored include the Mississippi Freedom Summer, Freedom schools, the concept of Black Power and the rejection of white liberals.

Chapter Three focuses on SASO and the South African black struggle. This chapter presents an overview of the movement launched by student and worker activity, in particular, as well as the activism and support of larger groups. Some of the key themes that are explored include SASO Black Consciousness ideology and Steve Biko's philosophy of psychological liberation.

Chapter Four compares and contrasts certain features of student activism in SNCC and SASO, and the organizations' overall impact on the American and South African socio-political system. The first basic similarity was nonviolent resistance to challenge the oppressive system in the hope of forcing more rapid and fundamental changes. The second similarity is the role of whites in the black struggle. Roughly parallel debates in both countries developed on the issue of whether black movements should welcome or exclude whites who professed to be sympathetic to the cause of

liberation. Often, but not always, the decision made reflected whether liberation itself was conceived as the triumph of an inclusive nationalism or primarily in terms of ethnic or racial nationalism. This chapter also draws from the study some conclusions about the successes and failures of SNCC and SASO.

Since the primary aim of this study is to trace some actual interactions or connections between SNCC and SASO in their struggle for black liberation, an understanding of social and political histories of black people in the two societies is necessary. Moreover, variations on common ideological themes or the divergent practical consequences of similarly conceived organizations can be explained only with reference to specific social, economic, political, and cultural racial policies enforced in each country. In both societies, members of the ruling class claimed that black people were intellectually and morally inferior, incapable of self-government, and therefore unfit to vote, hold office, and associate with whites on a basis of equality. This similar, if not identical, form of unjust treatment of blacks, enforced through Jim Crow and apartheid policies, permitted students in both countries to make persuasive analogies in their freedom struggle.

Clearly, Jim Crow and apartheid policies regulated every aspect of race relations in both the United States and South Africa during first two decades of the twentieth century. In the United States, segregation dated back to the 1896 *Plessy versus Ferguson* Supreme Court decision which legalized racial discrimination. In South Africa, it originated shortly after 1910, and from the beginning it referred mainly to proposals for controlling interactions between whites and Africans. The common element of both forms of segregation in these countries was the use of law and government action to

prevent any mixing of the races. Although South Africans may have borrowed the term from their American counter-parts, a close examination of the two modes of legalized discrimination—Jim Crow and apartheid—reveals some major differences on how they worked. Both, of course, were based on separatism, but the specific kinds of segregation that were stressed and regarded as crucial for maintaining white privilege and furthering white interests were not the same. Despite some differences in both ideology and practice, Jim Crow and apartheid shared a great deal of similarities. Through law and custom, discriminatory policies permeated all forms of public facilities, education, and political life.

Social segregation

Jim Crow laws had, between the 1890s and 1960s, effectively eliminated interracial contact in public places or facilities with the intent to exclude blacks from most accommodations available to whites.[3] Social segregation was enforced in taverns, inns, hotels, public conveyances, parks, hospitals, cemeteries, churches, trains, buses, libraries, theaters, and other public facilities.[4] For instance, Atlanta mandated Jim Crow Bibles in its courtrooms and prohibited African Americans and whites from using the

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[3] C. Van Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: McCann and Geoghegan, 1967), 67.

[4] George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and the South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 239.

same public facilities or even visiting the municipal zoo at the same time. Similarly, the lawmakers of Florida and North Carolina saw to it that white students would never touch textbooks used by African-Americans.[5]

Much ingenuity and effort also went into the separation of the races in their amusements, diversions, recreations, and sports. For example, the Separate Park Law of Georgia, adopted in 1905, appears to have been the first venture of a state legislature into this field, though city ordinances and local custom were quite active in pushing the African American out of the public parks. The same applied to the Atlanta ordinance of June 1940, which segregated Atlanta parks. The same city, in 1932, also prohibited amateur baseball clubs of different races from playing within two blocks of each other.[6] Louisiana was not an exception in this regard. Circuses and tent shows, including side shows, fell under a law adopted by Louisiana in 1914, which required separate entrances, exits, ticket windows, and ticket sellers that would be kept at least twenty feet apart. The same law was also applied in the city of Birmingham and stipulated that "any room, hall, theatre, picture house, auditorium, yard, court, ball park, or other indoor or outdoor place be distinctly separated by well-defined physical barriers."[7] Furthermore, in 1933, Texas prohibited Caucasians and Africans from boxing and wrestling together or even using the

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[5] Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 68.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

same sports equipment. Federal law also stepped in to hinder the circulation of films

showing interracial boxing. Four years later, an Arkansas law was passed, which

required segregation at all race tracks and "in seating, betting, and all other

accommodations."[8] In 1935, Oklahoma extended the white man's law to separate the

races while fishing or boating. A Birmingham ordinance got down to particulars, in

1930, by making it "unlawful for a Negro and white person to play together or in

company with each other" at dominoes or checkers.[9]

This discrimination in public facilities went on unabated for many years. Even in

the 1920s and 1930s there was no apparent tendency toward relaxation of it. For

example, in 1922, Mississippi passed a state-wide Jim Crow law that applied to taxicabs.

Jim Crow taxis were adopted by Jacksonville, Florida, in 1929, by Birmingham,

Alabama, in 1930, and by Atlanta, Georgia, in 1940.[10] For instance, the Atlanta law

required signs in an oil paint of contrasting color painted on the vehicle to indicate which

race it served, and further specified that there would be white drivers for carrying white

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[8] Leonard Stevens, *The Case of Integration versus Jim Crow* (New York: McCann and Geoghegan, 1967), 87.

[9] Ray Sprigle, *In the Land of Jim Crow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 176.

[10] Stevens, *The Case of Integration versus Jim Crow*, 76.

passengers and colored drivers for carrying colored passengers. During this period segregation was so commonly practiced that a Swedish writer, Gunnar Myrdal, observed that "it [segregation] is now becoming so complete that the white Southerner practically never sees a Negro except as his servant and in other standardized and formalized caste situation."[11] Myrdal's view carries substance given the fact that African Americans were brought to America for the sake of the white man's profit. They were kept in slavery for generations in the same interest.

Correspondingly, black South Africans faced serious discrimination in public accommodations and facilities. This social and cultural segregation was increased largely by administrative actions. For instance, post offices, were required to provide separate entrances for members of different races, and separate coaches for different races were provided on the Cape Town suburban railway system where facilities had previously been used in common.[12] This right of the government to require persons of different

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[11] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (London: Transactions Publishers, 1996), 40.

[12] J. D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1987), 199.

races to use separate amenities was successfully contested in courts by black people on the grounds that this could not be done unless the amenities supplied to the different groups were substantially equal. In response to this, the government passed the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, which decreed that separate amenities were inherently unequal. In addition, this legislation not only gave the government the power to require members of different races to use separate facilities, but also specifically "laid down that the facilities provided for the different groups need not be equal."[13] Perhaps more than any other apartheid measure, this law revealed the extent of the government's belief in inherent racial inequality that underlay the whole policy of apartheid.

Furthermore, in 1957, the government passed the State Aided Institutional Act, which granted it the power to enforce segregation in libraries and places of entertainment. Another law, the Native Laws Amendment Act, gave the government the power to prohibit the holding of classes, entertainment and even church services if they were attended by blacks in white areas.[14] It was in this general area that apartheid, in its first

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[13] Ibid.

[14] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers,"The Meaning of Separate Development in South Africa, Establishment of Bantustans and Denial of All Rights to Africans Outside the Reserves, 18 September 1963," box 40, reel 7, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

phase, was taken to the extreme, even absurd lengths. Sport was fully segregated and,

in particular, any interracial physical contest in which a black might defeat a white was

prohibited. Thus, even when a black South African, Jake Tuli, became Commonwealth

athletic champion, he was not allowed to compete against the whites in his home country.

In the pursuit of greater segregation of the races, not only benches in separate parks, but

also sections of South Africa's beaches were set aside for people of different colors. In

some areas, these were demarcated by wire fences. Furthermore, not only were black-

owned taxis forbidden to carry white passengers, but also ambulances for blacks could

not transport white patients even in an emergency situation. It was even seriously

proposed that blood from a member of one race should not be given to a member of

another race in blood transfusions.[15] Besides social segregation, African Americans and

black South Africans were politically constrained.

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[15] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "Force: Its Thrusts and Prognosis in South Africa, 16 July 1963," box 8 reel 51, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Political Disfranchisement

Political disfranchisement of African Americans was the most pernicious effect of institutional racism. In order to ensure that blacks were effectively disfranchised, the southern states were riddled with legal obstacles—poll taxes, literacy tests, and property qualifications—with the intent to keep black men and women from voting. Historian John Hope Franklin maintains that "a view prevailed that none but people of property and intelligence were entitled to suffrage."[16] Elsewhere throughout the South, various other measures were implemented which effectively restricted the vote. For example, in Louisiana in 1898, a new device, the "grandfather clause," was written into the constitution. This clause called for an addition to the permanent registration list of the names of all male persons whose fathers and grandfathers were qualified to vote on January 1, 1867. At that time, of course, no African American was qualified to vote in Louisiana. This was another ploy to deprive African Americans of the right to vote and extend voting privileges to poor white men. Thus, the restrictions imposed by this device (grandfather clause) were enormously effective in decimating African Americans' vote. In addition to the grandfather clause, Louisiana and the remaining states in the South, which included Florida, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas, also adopted the poll tax.[17] With its cumulative features and procedures so carefully devised to discourage payment, the poll-tax was esteemed, at first, by some of its proponents, as the most reliable means of curtailing the franchise—not only among African Americans but also among

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[16] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African American People.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 403.

[17] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rugters University Press, 1988), 102.

objectionable whites.[18] With reference to all these voting restrictions, Franklin asserts

that by the end of 1898 a pattern of constitutional disfranchisement for African

Americans had been completely drawn.

In subsequent years, other states followed the lead of Mississippi and

Louisiana."[19] Proving this was the fact that North Carolina adopted this poll tax law in

1900, Alabama in 1901, Virginia in 1902, Georgia in 1908, and Oklahoma in 1910.

Thus, by 1910 African Americans had been effectively disfranchised by constitutional

provisions in North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma.[20]

It is important to note that neither the attainment of all these voting requirements

by African Americans nor a combination of them would have ensured their right to

vote.[21] If African Americans, for example, did learn to read and write, or acquire

sufficient property, and remember to pay the poll tax and to keep the receipt on file, they

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[18] Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 86.

[19] Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 403.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

could even be tripped by the final hurdle devised for them—the white primary. [22]

Along with this progressively inspired primary system, the white supremacists adopted

the inspired party rules, local regulations, and in some cases, state laws excluding the

minority race from participation and thus converting the primary into a white man's club.

The statewide Democratic primary was adopted in South Carolina in 1896, Arkansas in

1897, Georgia in 1898, Florida and Tennessee in 1901, Alabama and Mississippi in 1902,

Kentucky and Texas in 1903, Louisiana in 1906, Oklahoma in 1907, Virginia in 1913,

and North Carolina in 1915. [23]

     In addition to legal measures to disfranchise blacks, extra-legal methods including

violence and harassment further prevented suffrage. Between 1890 and 1920, race riots

erupted throughout the South. Among the most violent was the Wilmington, North

Carolina Riot when a mob of four hundred white men led by a former congressman set

fire to buildings, killing and wounding many African Americans, chasing hundreds out of

town. [24] This racial violence, was, in most cases, caused by Black economic success and

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[22] Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 120.

[23] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 118.

[24] Franklin, *From Freedom to Slavery*, 26.

white resentment. As Franklin puts it "as blacks made progress in many walks of life, it became increasingly difficult for some white people to allege that they were naturally shiftless and incapable of advancement."[25] Apart from political disfranchisement, African Americans had to contend with a grossly inferior education, which limited their ability to compete with whites and attain a higher standard of living.

Educational Discrimination

Separate schools were doubtless one of the strongest props of white supremacy in the South. They certainly contributed to the perpetuation of a leadership that was devoted, not only to the idea of separate education, but also to the maintenance of economic and political inequalities between the white and black populations. In higher education, African American students were refused admittance to the "white" universities. Several landmark cases throughout the South were launched by attorneys seeking to desegregate educational institutions. A case in point was that of James Meredith in 1962, whose admission to the University of Mississippi culminated in serious riots and in the deaths of two men. Another riot erupted in February 6, 1956, at the University of Alabama when Miss Autherine Lucy was denied admission to graduate study.

Although educational discrimination was evident even before 1900, it only became a more serious cause of relative black disadvantage in the period 1900-1915 when the public school campaigns upgraded white schools and increased per pupil expenditures for white pupils while leaving the funding of black education unchanged or

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[25] Ibid.

actually reducing it.[26] John Hope Franklin maintains that nothing was more persistent

in the twentieth century than the disparity between the money spent for the education of

white children and that which was spent for the education of black children. In fact, in

many instances, the differential increased as time went on. For instance, in 1900, for

every $2 spent for the education of blacks in the South, $3 was spent on whites; but in

1930 $7 was spent for whites to every $2 spent on blacks. In 1935-1936 the current

expenditures per white pupil in ten Southern states averaged $13.09. In South Carolina in

1915 "the average white child of school age received twelve times as much from the

school fund as the average African American child," a disparity that doubled since

1900.[27] Another example was the case of the Alabama black belt county of Wilcox,

where total expenditures for teachers' salaries in 1890-1891 were $4, 397 for 2,482 white

children and $6,545 for 9,931 black pupils; by 1907-8, they had risen to $28,108 for

2,285 whites and actually declined to $3,940 for 10,745 blacks then attending school. [28]

Franklin also argues that differentials were even greater in the new educational services

such as transportation, visual aids, laboratory equipment, modern buildings, and the

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[26] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "Watts Report: The North and South have Problems, 20 April 1963," box 5, reel 57, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

[27] Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg, *Racial Crisis in America* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 185.

[28] Louis Harlan, *Separate and Unequal* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 268.

like.[29] In North Carolina, for example, where greater attention was consistently given to the education of African Americans, more money was spent in 1929-1930 for school trucks for white children than for new schools for black children.[30]

Given all these educational disparities and the fact that unequal education was such a major impediment to black economic and social advancement, it is not surprising that the struggle for integrated schools assumed such crucial importance in the 1950s. Although by that time there had been a reduction of the statistical gap, the South, as a whole, still provided patently inferior schools for blacks. It was clear that education was designed to relegate African Americans to a permanently inferior status. Evidently, the ultimate goal of this educational system was to enslave African Americans, exploit their labor, and check their educational advance.

Similarly, one significant aspect of the policy of apartheid was to place education under government control, segregate the educational system on the basis of race and tribe, and train the non-Whites for the inferior position assigned to them by the government policies.[31] A major step in this direction was taken in 1953 with the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act in terms of which African education was transferred from the provincial governments to the Central Government.[32] All African schools were required to be duly registered, and registration could be refused if the

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 265.

[31] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "International Seminar Against Apartheid, Discrimination in Education, 20-23 January 1963," box 9, reel 52, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

[32] J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1994), 299.

school was considered to be "not in the interest of the Bantu people or any section of such people, or is likely to be detrimental to the physical or moral welfare of the pupils."[33]

The purpose of this legislation, as its author, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs, explained, was to prevent Africans from acquiring education that would lead them to aspire to privileged positions in society.[34] What the new educational system emphasized was African vernacular language and the inculcation of basic skills. Furthermore, Afrikaans and English languages were made compulsory in the higher primary schools. Historian Tom Lodge notes that syllabi for primary schools outlined, in 1954, "stressed obedience, communal loyalty, ethnic and national diversity, the acceptance of allocated social roles, piety, and identification with rural culture."[35] Moreover, black school children were forced to memorize the names of their ethnic leaders. This was deliberately done in order to instill ethnic disunity among African people. In his speech on September 1953, the African National Congress activist, Nelson Mandela, maintained that Verwoerd was "brutally clear" in espousing the goal of Bantu education. According to Mandela, "the aim of Bantu education is to teach our children

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[33] Joseph Lelyveld, "Apartheid Creates Riddles in Bantu Education," *New York Times*, 26 November 1970, 14.

[34] Sheridan Johns R. Davis, *Mandela and Tambo and the African National Congress: The Struggle against Apartheid, 1948-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 99.

[35] Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 116.

that Africans are inferior to Europeans."[36] To a significant degree, the motive behind

Bantu Education was economic, specifically designed to safeguard whites from black

competition. This was evident in a much-quoted statement by Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, the

South African prime minister and arch-designer of apartheid from 1958-1966, that "there

is no place for the Bantu in European system above the level of certain forms of

labour."[37] According to him, Africans were destined to become farm laborers and

domestic servants, and thus it would be a futile exercise to give them the kind of literacy

education suitable for Europeans.

Discrimination was also enforced in South African graduate schools. This move

toward educational apartheid was taken to its logical conclusion with the introduction of

legislation designed to put an end to the situation in which some of the white universities,

mainly the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, admitted

black students to common university programs with whites. Instead, separate universities

were provided for Indian and Coloured students and for each of the main African ethnic

groups. To enforce this, the government passed the ironically named Extension of

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[36] Davis, *Mandela, and Tambo and the African National Congress*, 98.

[37] Mokubung Nkomo, *Student Culture and Student Activism: The Roots of Resistance* (London: Greenwood Publishers, 1984), 64.

University Education Act of 1959.[38] Universities created through this act included

university College of Zululand (for the Zulu and Swazis), University College of the North

(for the North-Sotho, South Sotho, Tsonga, Tswana and Venda ethnic groups, University

College of Durban-Westville for the Indians, and University College of Western Cape for

the Coloureds.[39]

The creation of these Bantu institutions by the government clearly indicated the

significance attached to the educational enterprise by the National Party. Moreover,

planning, introduction, and coordination of Bantu education at these universities were

systematic and ensured the Afrikaner orientation through an entrenched peculiar

structural and organizational arrangement, and by the profuse appointment of individuals

who identified with Afrikaner nationalism to staff and faculty positions at these black

institutions.[40]

Transformed into "State Ideological Apparatuses," these institutions followed the

model of the larger society in their racially determined hierarchical arrangements. They

determined the proper place of each ethnic group and sought to instill a consciousness

that corresponded with the arrangements of the social order.[41] Thus, instead of a free and

progressive education calculated to prepare an African for adult responsibilities as a fully

fledged citizen, Verwoerd's Bantu Education was calculated to indoctrinate Africans with

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 154.

[40] Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism*, 64.

[41] Ibid.

a tribal and inferior education that would keep them in a position of perpetual subservience to whites. This new scheme for Bantu Education was designed to relegate Africans to a permanently inferior status.

While Jim Crow and Apartheid posed formidable obstacles to black freedom, in both cases, African Americans and South African blacks resisted. Black resistance to Jim Crow took many forms. From outright protests to establishment of their own institutions, blacks sought ways to circumvent the imposition of white control. For example, as early as 1899 there were instances of outright protest by black Americans. They fought Jim Crowism in public accommodations and segregated schooling. They also blocked the passage of rail and streetcar segregated laws by holding rallies, gathering petitions and memorials, and organizing committees to testify and lobby against the proposed bills. When their efforts failed, black leaders called for boycotts. When a new train terminal opened in Atlanta, for instance, and blacks found themselves ordered to a side entrance and a small waiting area, they sent a protest delegation to railroad officials and shunned the segregated lunchroom at the depot.[42] In the Southern cities, blacks mounted dramatic demonstrations against Jim Crow streetcars. These conveyances had become common in the South during the 1880s, and from 1891 to 1906, as whites extended segregation to streetcars, blacks organized boycotts in over 25 Southern cities. In order to make their boycotts effective, blacks organized their alternative means of travel. They walked, rode in their own vans, wagons, and carriages, or used the services of black hackmen who reduced their rates for the protesters. Blacks even set up their own transit companies in

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[42] Harvard Sitkof, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 165.

Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, and in Savannah, Chattanooga, and Nashville,

although these lasted briefly. The boycotts defeated Jim Crow in Atlanta, Augusta, and

Savannah, Georgia, in the 1890s and in Montgomery and Mobile, Alabama, and

Jacksonville, Florida in the early 1900s.[43] However, success was only temporary because

within a few months, or at best a few years, the streetcars in each city were again

segregated. Thus, blacks boycotts to deal a severe blow to Jim Crowism ended in failure.

This, however, did not mean the end of their struggle.

Perhaps one example of resistance is evidenced by the Mississippi Federation of

Colored Women's Clubs and the Committee of One Hundred. Both were race uplift

organizations in the state of Mississippi, which fused black self-help and prudent social

agitation; both found new ways to manipulate white self-interest to black advantage.[44]

The oldest of these, the federation, a product of the reform-conscious Progressive Era,

was organized in 1903 by the wives of the state's business, professional, and religious

leaders at a meeting of Jackson's Phillis Wheatley Club.[45] The organization flourished

for a time, published its own newspaper, the Woman's Herald (1907-1913), and then

foundered during the early stages of Migration. Reorganized in 1920 by women from

twenty-one local clubs, the federation thereafter played a useful role in the life of the

black community. By 1921 there were fifty-six affiliates. When the organization

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 10.

[45] Floyd Barbour, *The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power* (New York: Collier Books, 1969), 132.

convened for an annual meeting at Piney Woods School in 1923, delegates from

seventy-three clubs attended. Other federations included the Ladies Club of Okolona, the

Mother's Club of Ocean Springs, the Woman's Christian Union of Vicksburg, the

Willing Workers' Sewing Club of Itta Bena. These organizations quietly challenged

white supremacy through strategies of black self-help and prudent social agitation.

Similar such organizations emerged in other Southern communities. It was also through

the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP) that blacks resumed their challenge of the 1896 *Plessey v Ferguson* Court's

ruling. Formally established in 1909, the NAACP denounced all segregation and

discrimination and sought full equality for blacks.[46] During World War I, the NAACP

significantly directed its campaign against lynching and lawsuits over voting rights,

residential segregation, and the right of blacks for a fair trial. After the war, particularly

between 1919 and the early 1920s, the NAACP did not make a tremendous progress in its

challenge of Jim Crowism. This lack of progress could also be attributed to the Great

Depression of 1929. With its budget of almost $100, 000 by 1922, the NAACP found

itself with only $10, 000 after the depression.[47] As a result, the association narrowed its

focus to segregated schools and transportation. For example, the organization protested

against the Greyhound company over reports that some bus drivers in the North were

segregating blacks or refusing them passage altogether.

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[46] Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 143.

[47] Barbour, *The American Negro Revolution*, 132.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the NAACP filed a series of federal lawsuits against segregation, which culminated with a momentous Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board* of Education in 1954. In these suits the NAACP aimed, not simply to show that southern and border states had not lived up to the legal standard of providing separate but equal facilities, but that the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which set this legal standard, in the first place, was unconstitutional. Although the *Brown v. Board* of Education Court's ruling did not bring about complete racial equality, it gave blacks hope for the future. It, above all, launched the struggle for black equality in the subsequent decades of the 20th century. A year later, in 1955, the modern civil rights movement gained momentum when African Americans boycotted local buses in Montgomery, Alabama after years of discriminatory treatment. The success of the 381-day boycott laid the foundation for direct action initiatives across the South. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was not alone in venturing to apply nonviolent direct action to racial problems in the 1940s. The labor leader, A. Philip Randolph, for example, had based his March on Washington Movement of 1941 on the principles of what he called nonviolent, good-will direct action, and in 1943, during the waning months of the movement, he called on Southern blacks to boycott Jim Crow carriers.[48] Howard University students sat in segregated Washington restaurants in 1943, and students from Savannah State College in Georgia staged a demonstration against Jim Crow on city buses in 1944. Blacks in Columbia, South Carolina organized at least one

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[48] Ibid.

anti-Jim Crow Sunday early in 1946 during which they boycotted segregated movie theaters and buses for the day.

One other notable event that was a direct challenge to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision was the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, which resulted from Rosa Parks' refusal to give her seat to a white person. This one-year boycott marked the beginning of the demise of Jim Crowism and the separate-but-equal doctrine. Practically, it was the lever that at last forced Montgomery's leaders to give up segregated buses, one of the most conspicuous, irritating, and demeaning forms of Jim Crow. Besides bringing forth a leader of national stature in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (S.C.L.C.), this 381-day boycott was an important psychological victory because it shattered notions that blacks would not unite around a cause or support black leaders. It also destroyed the idea that Jim Crowism was invincible, and gave blacks a sense of power and self-determination. More important, the boycott focused unprecedented attention on the philosophy of nonviolent resistance, which foreshadowed the southern direct action campaigns of the 1960s.

Thus, the civil rights demonstrations of the 1940s and 1950s, which were organized and strongly supported by CORE, NAACP and other civil rights groups, laid a foundation for student activism of the 1960s. Of greater significance was the fact that students who participated in these marches had a feeling, rare in the late fifties, that a mass civil rights movement was a possibility. Hence, all these activities—the marches, sit-ins, attempts to desegregate public accommodations and schools, and other forms of nonviolent direct action of the late fifties precipitated the black freedom struggle of the 1960s. One very important aspect of this struggle was the student movement. In

February 1960, the first student sit-in was initiated by four black students at a

Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Soon thereafter, sit-ins

spread throughout the South as college students replicated the North Carolina model.

This was, of course, the first mobilization of Southern black students and, in this sense, a

breakthrough in American student activism.

CHAPTER 2

SNCC AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS IN THE U.S., 1960-1970

The early 1960's marked a significant shift in the development of student activism in the southern United States. While some accounts portray the sixties' student activists as restless and irresponsible rebels, others emphasize their deepening sense of social responsibility as students and citizens, and still others indicate that they were impatient with the slow, gradual pace of social change.[1] In whatever light they are viewed, the 1960's students remarkably differed from students of earlier generations. This did not mean that students of the 1940s and 1950s were a "silent generation." It does, however, mean that student activism was taken to a higher level in the 1960s. The sixties' students demonstrated more independent action and also made it clear that they would no longer be "silent nor quiet." They, indeed, represented a generational break with the past as they began to question everything, protest what they disliked, and involve themselves in society's fundamental problems. They were prepared to take risks. They risked their lives to go to jail, to engage in marches, and demonstrations. Historian Philip Albach is mistaken to assert that "the thrust of the student community in the 1960s changed from an aggressive apoliticism to a concern with social and political affairs and

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[1] Philip G. Altbach, *Student Politics in America: A Historical Analysis* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1974), 218.

and an underlying dissatisfaction with the direction of American society."[2] However, this

view does not take into account the fact that many of the 1940s and 1950s students came

from liberal families who were likely to support their sons' or daughters' involvement in

social and political issues. Moreover, there were strong associations between student

groups and the Communist party throughout the 1950s. These groups included the

Student Peace Union (SPU), Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID), Socialist

Youth League, and others. Although their activism was at a low ebb, and their political

consciousness limited, the fifties' students were not characterized by apathy. For

instance, the most influential elements of the activist movement during the early fifties

were the liberal student groups who set the tone for the political culture on campus.

However, unlike in the fifties, students of the sixties were more politically conscious, and

challenged the politics of an older generation whom they had come to distrust.

Moreover, these students believed that no one was prepared to listen to their grievances,

so they felt compelled to shout, unleash rage, and show themselves clutched in a crisis

against authority. It was quite clear that, in some instances, young people and their

parents disagreed over their priorities. SNCC activist, Worth Long, explained:

> Black students were saying enough is enough to their parents. In the
> beginning they did not know what they wanted. What they only wanted
> was a modest desire to drink coffee sitting down. One should also analyze
> the behavior of these students critically. Their action was not merely a
> rebellion against parental authority, but a desire to challenge segregation
> in the past. Like our parents, we knew and understood the cruelty of Jim
> Crow.[3]

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Worth Long, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 29 February 2000.

Long's view was reinforced by historian Clayborne Carson that students' "separate

identity and their alienation fostered opposition to adult society."[4]

It should be borne in mind that in their challenge to impersonal institutions, the

students were not alone. They drew inspiration and sustenance from events on the

African continent, in the black diaspora and the Third World. In both South Africa and

the southern United States, for example, students came to stress the unique aspect of the

black struggle in their respective countries and on the African continent. It was,

therefore, this focus on racial domination that formed an ideological bond between

students in the southern United States and South Africa. It was also in these countries,

that students, with very few formal links, drew upon one another for inspiration and

support for their domestic struggles.

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[4] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle with SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 17.

[5] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "SNCC Conferences, 19 October 1960," box 6, reel 56, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

In the case of the United States, this student activism began on February 1, 1960, when four black freshmen students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College were denied four cups of coffee at a segregated Greensboro lunch counter.[5] In explaining the motive behind these students' behavior, SNCC activist, Constance Curry, emphasized that:

> At the beginning, it had nothing to do with what later became an organization because it began when four black students went down and sat at the "white only" lunch counter in Greensboro restaurant. What they were doing was making the point that they should be served. These students were, you know, arrested. It was a sort of a phenomenon because here, well-dressed college students, for the first time in that period of time, were asking, you know, questioning the laws of segregation. There were, indeed, laws that white and black people couldn't eat together, we couldn't go to school together, we couldn't ride bus together. Indeed, everything was totally segregated by law in the South. Then, there was a meeting at Shaw University, which was called by, basically, Ella Baker to get students from various campuses together to discuss what was meant and how we should involve other students. That's how the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was formed.[6]

The action on the part of these students ushered in a wave of sit-ins from black campuses across the South. Their action provided a momentum for a decade of civil rights activism undertaken by blacks and sympathetic whites whose methods became more militant as their goals broadened.[7] It was under the special guidance of civil rights

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[6] Constance Curry, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 15 March 1999.

[7] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "SNCC Conferences, 17 April 1960," box 7, reel 58, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

activist Ella Baker that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed at a conference of student leaders that was convened in Raleigh, North Carolina, on April 15-17, 1960.

Born in December 13, 1903, in Norfolk, Virginia, Ella Baker played a key role in civil rights activism. She strongly believed in the importance of organizing people to formulate their own questions, to define their problems, and to find their solutions, and throughout her life she worked to set masses of people in motion.[8] Her most significant contribution to the civil rights struggle was the founding of SNCC, the cutting edge of the 1960's movement for civil rights. Baker strongly believed that young people needed time to stand together and declare themselves a force to be reckoned with. According to her, youngsters had to make their own decisions, make their own mistakes.[9] Moreover, she felt that the young people had a great deal to offer. The young people were confident that there was something new about their movement, that it was innovative and successful to a far greater extent, achieving results more rapidly than earlier attempts had done. She also held firmly to the concept of group-centered leadership rather than a leadership-centered group, and grappled with the civil rights leaders of her day to make this paramount. In order to ensure this, Baker encouraged acceptance of students as legitimate participants in social change in America. This inclination toward group-centered rather

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[8] Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1998), xviii.

[9] Ibid.

than toward a leader-centered group organization was refreshing, indeed, to young men

and women who were faced with the frustrations and disillusionment of the struggle.[10] In

his book, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, SNCC activist James Forman maintains

that "without Ella there would be no story of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee."[11] This was further reinforced by activist, Constance Curry, when she

expounded on what a central force Baker was to the students:

> Well, Ella was just a phenomenal person that SNCC would not have come
> about without her, because she was one who encouraged students not to be
> bothered by other groups; to be true to what we were trying to do. She
> was, a sort of, a mentor for many, many, many, many people. She always
> would spend time with these young people, personally advising them on
> their personal problems. We also used to have discussions all the time
> whether nonviolence was a way of life or just a strategy because we
> couldn't win in a violent situation, you know. These were long
> discussions and, you know, Ella would just let people, sort of, find their
> way to what they were doing without dictating to them. She believed that
> everyone was a leader. She did not believe in the top-down, you know. I
> mean a situation where a leader just decides what should be done. She
> believed that everyone should be listened to.[12]

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[10] James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (London: University of Washington Press, 1985), 225.

[11] Constance Curry, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 29 March 1999.

[12] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "SNCC Conferences, 15 April 1960," Archives and Special Collections, box 8, reel 51, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

In view of the foregoing, it was clear that Ella Baker was the driving force behind the creation of SNCC. According to its constitution, SNCC was to function as a channel of coordination and communication for the student protest movement. In their commitment to civil disobedience and grassroots organizing, this "beloved community," as SNCC members called themselves, elected Marion Barry as its first chairperson. They also established an office in Atlanta, soon to be staffed by James Forman, Julian Bond, and Jane Stembridge. There were also other blacks such as Robert Moses and Don Harris from the North who abandoned their studies to join SNCC. And there were whites from the North and South, including Bob Zellner, Casey Hayden, and Ralph Allen. It was at the first organizing conference that SNCC drafted its "Statement of Purpose." Crafted largely by members of the Nashville movement, the manifesto displayed the organization's commitment to nonviolence. An excerpt from a statement of purpose adopted by the students at the Raleigh conference reflected the initial methods and goals of their action:

> 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. Nonviolence as a form of Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a
> social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor
> represents the crucial first step towards such a society.[13]

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[13] The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "A Guide to Microfilm Edition, 1982," Archives and Special Collections, p.1, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

The use of nonviolence meant that students would picket, sit-in, ride buses and use facilities that were segregated, but they would not resist when heckled, attacked or arrested. Nonviolence strategy was also consciously conceived of by many as a pragmatic weapon applicable to the problem of segregation, and was consistent with Christian religious training. Here the goal of conscience of the students represented, not only the traditional Christian morality of the nation, but also the well-known and basic American social and political principles of equal rights and freedom of choice. Further, as historian Howard Zinn has pointed out, "nonviolence was a constant reminder to a violent world that we have the devilish capacity to invent the noblest of reasons for mass slaughter."[14]

Although Biblical and Christian teachings and the tradition of Gandhi and civil disobedience were incorporated into their ideology as formulated by Martin Luther King Junior and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), SNCC activists were generally not pacifists. At the same time, the philosophy of nonviolence was used as a strategy to minimize offense to the white community. One other advantage of nonviolence was that it helped the adolescent to maintain super-ego control over angry impulses while simultaneously internalizing an ego-ideal of love and respect for all human beings including the enemy, which in turn enhances the sense of identity and self-esteem.[15]

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[14] Howard Zinn, *SNCC New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 224.

[15] Joel Loken, *Student Alienation and Dissent* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall, 1973), 129.

Though SNCC was no paragon of organized efficiency, its members lived their politics by avoiding hierarchy and seeking unanimity in decision making. This was even emphasized by Baker that "every young person in SNCC had something to give, thus helping them learn to respect each other."[16] Further, Baker believed that students had to rely on their own economic resources. This was different from many previous student groups, which tended, in the past, to consider students a secondary element in the process to bring about socio-economic changes. This emphasis on "students' independence" also provided student activists with a greater feeling of self-confidence and the idea that they were part of the historical movement.

In order to understand the growth of student activism in SNCC, one must take into cognizance the fact that SNCC was the product of the political turmoil of the violent fifties. Fundamentally, therefore, SNCC was a phoenix of hope that rose from the ashes of the fifties. From the beginning, SNCC was more than an organization; it was a social and political movement of young people who envisioned a better world for themselves and their people and were single-mindedly determined to take risks in order to make their dreams a reality. This risk-taking manifested itself in various phases through which SNCC evolved.

During SNCC's formative years, students directed much of their efforts toward organizing communities and coordinating the effort to break down the shackles of

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[16] Ibid., 154.

segregation in the southern states. This was carried out through sit-ins and freedom rides, which attracted both national attention and sympathy. In their struggle for racial equality, they placed emphasis on the philosophy of nonviolence. Their struggle was very complex, and it extended not only to the racist South but also to the liberal North, where *de facto* housing and school desegregation was endemic.[17] Students also felt that it was increasingly significant to shift the focus of SNCC from the campus to the ghettos and rural areas in order to involve more blacks in the struggle.

By 1961, SNCC began to play a more dynamic role and many southern students began to think of it as the organization that had the responsibility for shaping the student movement in the years ahead. Thus, the organization's primary function gradually shifted from coordination to agitation. For instance, SNCC did not hesitate to move from the limited goal of desegregating public facilities to objectives more threatening to southern white power, which included organizing local projects and promoting voter registration drives.

Efforts to achieve political equality and overcome racial oppression originated, in 1961, in McComb, Mississippi, when SNCC activist Robert Moses entered the state under the auspices of SNCC in order to conduct a voter registration of black residents.[18]

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[17] John Lewis, "Southern Negro Students Termed Angry Youth," *Washington Post*, 6 March 1960, 9.

[18] Neil R. McMillen, "Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Protest in the 1960s," *Journal of Southern History* 43 (August 1977): 357-58.

A native of Harlem, who received his Master's degree in philosophy from Harvard University, Moses, gave up his job as a mathematics teacher, in New York, to join the civil rights movement. He was sent to recruit students from the Deep South for SNCC meeting in the fall of 1961. On that field trip, he talked with Amzie Moore of Cleveland, Mississippi, one of those individuals who had survived and defied tyranny in Mississippi. Amzie Moore felt that a campaign to register black voters could break the isolation of black Mississippians, replace the brokenness with a fighting spirit, and even possibly win local political voice. He convinced Moses of this and, together, they laid plans for a voter registration drive to begin that summer. Arriving in Cleveland, Mississippi, Moses found it impossible to get the project off the ground owing to the unavailability of location, equipment, and funds. Meanwhile, a man named C.C. Bryrant—head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter in Pike County, where McComb is located—learnt of the proposed registration project and wrote to Moses, inviting him to come to McComb to start a similar project.[19] Amzie Moore and Moses traveled to McComb and found that it had better facilities.[20]

There were, of course, various reasons why Moses and other activists including Moore, focused on Mississippi. First, Mississippi stood as the living embodiment of the

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[19] Dough MacAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 224.

[20] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 225.

potential for inhumanity and injustice inherent in the American system. It stood as a mute testimony to the changeless quality of the "southern way of life." [21] Nowhere were racial restrictions on voter registration more zealously applied than in Mississippi. [22] The absence in Mississippi of the type of mass civil rights protest that had occurred in other Deep South states testified to the cruelty of the system.

Further, the quality of life for Mississippi blacks was also abysmal. In 1960, for instance, infant mortality rates continued to run two times higher than the rate of the Mississippi whites and nearly 250 percent higher than the national average of whites. Two thirds of 207,611 housing units occupied by blacks were dilapidated. This grim litany of impoverishment and political inequality was maintained well into the 1960s through a combination of wholesale black disfranchisement and white violence. Among such SNCC workers who were killed was Herbert Lee, the first black from McComb, Mississippi, who attempted to register to vote.

That Bob Moses and other SNCC workers ventured to the heart of Mississippi to initiate a freedom struggle was hardly surprising. Convinced of their collective potency, Moses and other SNCC workers found Mississippi a monument to the political and economic impotence of most of its citizenry. With the help of Amzie Moore, Moses

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[21] Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 189.

[22] Ibid., 26.

established the voter registration campaign in McComb, Mississippi, which was considered too risky or dangerous even by other civil rights organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Arriving in McComb in July 1961, Moses persuaded black residents to provide housing for student voter registration workers for the month of August, and also encouraged black students affiliated with SNCC to join him. First to arrive were Reginald Robinson, who had previously worked on a voter registration project run by SNCC's branch in Baltimore, and John Hardy, a freedom rider from Nashville who had just completed a jail term in Parchman Penitentiary. The three opened a voter registration school to train black McComb residents to take Mississippi's literacy test for voters.[23]

Literally, Moses and these two SNCC workers walked door-to-door during August of 1961 in their attempt to convince black residents of McComb that "we meant business, that is, that we were serious, that we were only not young, but that we were

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[23] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 47.

people who were responsible."[24] Moses and practically all of the local blacks who had

worked closely with him temporarily ended SNCC's first voter registration project.

Although the McComb experience was a setback for Moses, in particular, and SNCC, in

general, it provided a basis for later, more successful projects in the Deep South. For

instance, the incident motivated about a dozen of student activists to drop out of college

to go to McComb to work for SNCC. No longer was SNCC composed of part-time

student protesters representing their local movements on the Coordinating Committee.

Instead, a group of students now identified themselves as full-time SNCC field

secretaries and functioned as spearheads of militant racial struggle in the Deep South.

The height of SNCC's activism came three years later with the Mississippi

Summer Project (1964), which focused on voter registration, the establishment of

freedom schools and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Literally, hundreds

of volunteers, many of them northern black and white students, streamed into Mississippi

to coordinate and participate in voter registration projects and the formation of civilian

institutions such as freedom schools and community centers. The Summer Project was

sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), which consisted of

CORE, SCLC, and SNCC. The goal of the project was to force either Mississippi

officials to change their policies or the federal government to intervene on behalf of the

constitutional rights of all its citizens. As indicated by James Forman, the Summer

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[24] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 425.

Project had another goal besides showing the rest of the United States what really went on in Mississippi. As he put it the project "aimed to develop and strengthen a homegrown freedom movement that will survive after the 1,000 visitors leave."[25] Most SNCC workers assumed that these two goals were compatible. However, their residual belief in the efficacy of the strategy of appealing to powerful institutions through individual commitment and sacrifice was combined with a growing awareness that new black-controlled institutions were necessary both in Mississippi and in the nation.

Voter registration was the core of the Summer Project since the majority of the state's Black residents still remained disfranchised. The state Democratic Party was effectively closed to blacks. As the Director of the Summer Project, Bob Moses, explained:

> Mississippi has been called "The closed Society. It is closed, it is locked. We think the key is the vote. Any change, and possibility for dissidence and opposition, depends first on a political breakthrough.[26]

Following this political disfranchisement, SNCC volunteers became involved in two parallel tasks, which included persuading blacks to attempt to register as official voters and as "freedom registering" voters on behalf of MFDP. Freedom registration forms could be filled out at the applicant's home, while official registration meant a trip to the courthouse. The fact that about 17,000 blacks traveled to the courthouse attested

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[25] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 186.

[26] MacAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 120.

not only to a limited success of voter registration, but also to the persistence of the volunteers and their extraordinary courage to register people. Moreover, the lonely trips to the courthouse proved to be a major step toward democratization of voting in Mississippi and throughout the South. The many instances of delay, obstruction, and harassment of the applicants were duly recorded by the volunteers, thus providing the evidence for several important voter discrimination lawsuits.

SNCC also spearheaded the establishment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) at a meeting convened in Jackson on April 26, 1964. Basically, MFDP was designed as a vehicle to challenge the regular party at the national Democratic Convention, to be held in August in Atlantic City, New Jersey. As Bob Moses asserted, "the objective was to create separate registration requirements so that all black residents would be able to demonstrate their desire to participate in the political process."[27] Four MFDP candidates qualified for the Democratic primary on June 2. These included Victoria Gray, a Hattiesburg civil rights worker, who was chosen to oppose Senator John Stennis, and SNCC worker Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, who was selected as a congressional candidate. Following the primary, they obtained and filled the necessary number of signatures to be placed on the November ballot as independents. In spite of this, the Mississippi State Board of Elections rejected these petitions. Their failure to challenge the Democratic party was a blow to SNCC/MFDP leadership.

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[27] Steven Lawson, "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Rise and Fall of a Redemptive Organization," *Journal of Negro History*, 67 (Spring 1982): 64.

Besides voter registration and the founding of MFDP, SNCC also developed plans for the creation of Freedom Schools. This idea for Freedom schools was conceived by the SNCC worker Charles Cobb in the fall of 1963. There were several factors that necessitated the creation of these schools. Among such factors was Mississippi's separate but clearly unequal education system. For instance, in 1964 state educational expenditures averaged $81.66 per white student and $21.77 for each black student.[28] The fact that Mississippi was without a mandatory education law underscored the lack of importance accorded public education. Further, state-selected textbooks glorified the southern way of life and made no mention of significant black achievements by black Americans. In some districts, school superintendents even forbade the history of the Reconstruction period from being taught in the black schools.[29] Thus, Freedom Schools were created to counter these iniquities and insidious political messages inherent in the system. As the chief architect of the Freedom Schools, Charlie Cobb, explained, their goal was to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives, and ultimately new directions for action.[30] Cobb further maintained that blacks in Mississippi would have to overcome the accommodationist tradition that was a product of white oppression. As he argued:

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[28] Peter Levy, *Documentary History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 149.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 198.

> Here, an idea of your own is a subversion that must be squelched, for each
> bit of intellectual initiative represents the threat of a probe into the why of
> denial. Learning here means only learning to stay in your place. Your
> place is to be satisfied—a good nigger.[31]

Directed by Staughton Lynd, a young history professor at Spelman College, and staffed by experienced and novice teachers, Freedom Schools taught the three R's and material relevant to the students' experiences, particularly African American history. Selection of teachers in these schools was carefully done. Thus, only realistic, responsible flexible, patriotic, and understanding people, "only people who were willing to listen and also accept other people for what they were without trying to change them" were allowed to teach in freedom schools.[32] With all these criteria, it becomes clear that not everyone was allowed to teach in freedom schools.

The basic curriculum for these schools emphasized four main topic areas, which included remedial education, leadership development, contemporary issues, and nonacademic curriculum. Among the basic courses that were offered under leadership development included courses in the history and philosophy of the movement, current events, and black history. Course offerings also included specialized classes in French, science, dance, and debate. Finally, a variety of recreation and cultural activities served to round up the Freedom School program. Among the most notable of these activities were the establishment of student-run newspapers on several projects and the writing and performing of an original play by the students in the Holly Springs project.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Levy, *Documentary History*, 197.

Through the study of black history, students began to have a true sense of themselves as a people who could produce heroes. By comparing the Freedom Schools with the regular schools, they began to become articulate about what was wrong in the regular schools and the way things should be instead.

The Summer Project also succeeded in establishing nearly fifty Freedom Schools throughout the state and about the same number of community centers. The volunteers taught blacks to articulate their needs and discontent, and also assisted in the creation of future basis for political power. They encouraged the emergence of new young leaders, like Johnny Johnston, who later became the mayor of Whitehall, and helped African Americans in Mississippi to understand both their society and the mechanisms of change.[33] Their dedication inspired others and generated a long-lasting activism. As Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer remarked:

> There was no real civil rights movement in the Negro community in Mississippi before the 1964 Summer Project. There were people that wanted change, but they had not dared to come out and try to do something. But after the summer, Negro people in Delta began moving. People who had never before tried, though they had always been anxious to do something, began moving.[34]

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[33] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 298.

[34] Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer: Civil Rights Worker's Personal Account of the Historic Mississippi Summer Project of 1964* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), 126.

One could deduce from Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer's remarks that the Summer project garnered national attention on the extent of racial oppression in Mississippi. The nine hundred volunteers, many of them the sons and daughters of prominent politicians, doctors, and lawyers, brought the Mississippi Freedom Summer front-page coverage.[35] At the end of Project, COFO was able to add six hundred African Americans to the registration lists.

Clearly, the Freedom school model got lost in the desire to do something bigger, something that would have more impact sooner.[36] By the end of 1964, youngsters were losing their impatience with the pace of change. Racial tensions within SNCC surfaced during the previous summer. For its part, SNCC emerged from the summer project as an organization in crisis. At the same time, however, Payne does recognize that it was as the result of the Summer Project that the monolithic structure of white supremacy in Mississippi began to crack. White Citizens' Councils were beginning to lose influence. The state began to purge klan members from the highway patrol. Further the state began to investigate bombings and arsons.

Like Payne, MacAdam maintains that although Freedom Summer had been the most ambitious and arguably the most successful campaign in SNCC's history, it had also aggravated tensions and conflicts that had been building within the organization for several years. The result of the crisis was a stalemate between competing factions and

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[35] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 162.

[36] Ibid.

the effective suspension of the main philosophic tenets on which SNCC had always operated. This included the tenet of interracialism. Thus, the summer marked the end of SNCC's efforts to encourage white participation.[37] Clayborne Carson argues that the Summer Project strengthened SNCC's ties with the growing white student left. He further asserts that these students "returned home greatly influenced by their experiences in Mississippi" and brought a measure of SNCC's radicalism into the student rights and antiwar movements.[38] Carson's argument is quite understandable because summer volunteers left Mississippi politically radicalized and intent on carrying on the fight in the North. This, in turn, triggered a sharp increase in student activism. It was, however, the separatist trend within SNCC that restricted access to the movement at precisely the time more and more white students were seeking to play an active role.

The summer also had an important impact on the country as a whole. After all, the volunteers were not the only ones to go to the South that summer. Essentially, the entire country had visited Mississippi courtesy of the national news media.

In spite of the aforesaid achievements, SNCC activists felt that the wheel of change was agonizingly slow. Spurred by the defeat of the MFDP challenge and the slow progress generated by voter education and freedom schools, SNCC workers began to seek allies beyond their borders for ideological insights. It was Ella Baker who proposed

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[37] Grant, Freedom Bound, 97.

[38] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 195.

that part of SNCC's education program be devoted to discussion of events in the former colonial countries. Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that what began as a domestic civil-rights movement turned into a global struggle for freedom struggle. This unexpected turn of events to internationalize their struggle came in the fall of 1964 when SNCC accepted an invitation from Harry Belafonte, long-time supporter of SNCC, to send a delegation to Africa. Moreover, SNCC workers had been inspired by the example of the newly independent nations. On many occasions, they linked their struggle with the African nationalist movements and appealed to Africans for support of their civil rights efforts. For instance, in December 1963, a group of staff members met with Odinga Odinga, the Kenyan leader, on his brief visit in Atlanta, Georgia. The African tour, which began on September 11, 1964, had a profound impact on the SNCC delegation, composed of James Forman, John Lewis, Bob and Dona Moses, Prathia Hall, Julian Bond, Ruby Doris Robinson, Bill Hansen, Donald Harris, Matthew Jones, and Fannie Lou Hamer. As guests of the government of Guinea, a former French colony that had determined to remain politically independent of the West, these delegates were able to see American society from a new perspective. Guinean President Sekou Toure, a proponent of African socialism and of nonalignment in the Cold War, encouraged them to take a broad view of the goals of their struggle, stating that there was a close relationship between what SNCC did in the United States and what happened in Africa. The delegates were further impressed by their observations of daily life in a nation dominated by blacks. As Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer recalled, "I saw black men flying the airplanes, driving buses, sitting behind big desks in the bank and just doing everything

that I was used to seeing white people do."[39] SNCC representatives, in becoming aware

of how their own struggle was perceived by Africans, discovered that the United States

government had far more control than they ever imagined. Julian Bond expressed dismay

about the misleading information provided by American information offices in Africa,

"there were all these pictures of Negroes doing things, Negro judges, Negro policemen,

and if you did not know anything about America, like Africans would not, you would

think these were really commonplace things. That is the worst kind of deceit."[40] After

this delegation returned to the United States, Lewis and Harris visited Liberia, Ghana,

Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Egypt. Their meetings with African student leaders and

Afro-American expatriates convinced them that SNCC should establish permanent ties

with Africans. [41] While in Zambia for that nation's independence ceremonies, they

talked with African revolutionaries who, according to their subsequent report, also "knew

the insides of many jails and loneliness of being separated from family and friends." [42]

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[39] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 287.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 192.

[42] Ibid.

The African revolutionaries told delegates that they wanted closer contacts with SNCC. One brother said let us join hands so we can all be free together. Although this African tour tremendously contributed to SNCC's increasing awareness of the international implications of its struggle, pressing internal problems prevented the organization from following up, at once, on its contacts in Africa. Despite the tour's lack of tangible results, it strengthened the emotional bonds that SNCC workers had long felt toward Africa

Internalization of SNCC's struggle was also emphasized by Ella Baker who strongly maintained that SNCC was also significantly inspired and influenced by the South African Sharpeville massacre of, March 1960's, during which the South African police fired into the crowd of eight thousand blacks who were staging a peaceful march against pass laws, killing 69 black people and leaving 180 wounded.[43] According to Baker, this incident, together with the additional impact of black youngsters of the rising independence of black people in Africa and other parts of the world, spurred SNCC's political struggle.

However, enthusiasm for African revolutionary ideas was soon tempered by a realization of the enormous difficulties to be faced at home. By 1966, SNCC went through a transitional phase during which its leaders and workers entertained serious doubts about the direction of the movement they had, in large part, inspired. During this period, students were faced with a number of crucial questions about how to advance the struggle for racial equality. First, SNCC activists questioned whether the strategy they had followed could achieve the fundamental social changes they viewed as necessary.

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[43] Ibid.

Second, staff members debated whether southern black people could achieve lasting improvement in their lives while continuing to rely on appeals of white support and federal intervention, and whether SNCC could continue to expand the black struggle while remaining tied to the rhetoric of interracialism and nonviolence direct action. Third, they questioned whether their remaining goals could best be achieved through continued confrontation with existing institutions or through the building of alternative institutions controlled by the poor and powerless.

The answers SNCC formulated to these questions largely determined the course that the civil rights movement would take during the latter 1960. With the election of Stokely Carmichael as the new chairperson of SNCC in May 1966, SNCC entered into another phase, which was characterized by members' efforts to resolve their differences by addressing the need for black power. Black power, according to Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, "means that black people must assert their own definitions, reclaim their roots, their history, their culture, their pride; to create their own sense of community and togetherness."[44] In brief, African Americans should not be ashamed of their blackness, their origin, and everything African. It was only after people had psychologically liberated or redefined themselves that they would effectively deal with the problems of racism in America

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[44] Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 37.

With regard to the political and economic primary goals of black power, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton argued that "the goal is not a mere paternalistic welfare aid. It is our hope that the day may soon come when black people will reject federal funds because they have understood that the programs are geared to pacification rather than to genuine solutions."[45] Thus, the real goal of black power was the inclusion of black people at all levels of decision-making. This had to begin in the ghettos where ordinary people would attempt to gain control over the institutions that were supposed to serve them: the schools, the police, stores, the rental housing. Moreover, most of the people lived in the ghettos.

It is, thus, understandable why black students in SNCC sought to correct the misunderstanding that surrounded their overwhelming bravado and sloganeering during the Memphis to Jackson March in 1966. These students maintained that by black power they meant a sense of group solidarity and morale within a self-conscious movement toward real political and economic power ensconced in strong, Negro-led political organizations, productive Negro business enterprises, and a healthy, independent Negro cultural institutions.[46] Hamilton maintained that it was through the stepped-up efforts of black power advocates and others, that more and more African American students developed a strong pride and positive self-image from identification with their heritage

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Charles Hamilton, "What Do Students Want: The Advocate of Black Power Defines it," *Newsweek*, 10 February 1966, 11., R. John Salter, "In Struggle with SNCC and the Black Awakening," *The American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 11., David Satter, "Black Power," *Chicago Defender*, 25 March 1967, 17.

and other major contributions to American culture. For example, many U.S. colleges and Universities initiated black programs, the purpose of which was to make educational institutions speak to the needs of the poor, that is, structure the curriculum so that it educates and frees a black mind to deal with the system.

Clearly, SNCC infused in black people a notion that there was something of value in the African American community. Clearly, black power brought serious changes among black students. Natural hair styles were prominent in the ghetto. As one student put it "we still have parties and things, but the whole atmosphere for blacks—even at a student party—is about being black."[47]

With this new mood, it is understandable why African American students, in their attempt to overcome dependency mentality, denounced the integration orientation of the old civil rights coalition and called for a new strategy based on black control of the organizations, institutions, and resources of the black community. Among the most vital aspects of the new SNCC mood was the proliferation of black student organizations on white campuses—one way to preserve African American identity in an overwhelmingly white student body. Emphasis was on black pride, black dignity, and self-determination

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[47] Manfred Halpern, "Black Power and Community Change: An Assessment," *Journal of Black Studies* 3 (March 1977): 263.

in the black community. These were, according to SNCC activists, preconditions for their own ultimate liberation from racial oppression.

The emergence of Black Power and the departure of whites from the organization was caused in part by a realization by blacks that the achievement of racial equality was a very difficult task and the masses of black people had to be mobilized in order to obtain the desired goals. In effect, "white members of SNCC were simply told their service was no longer desired."[48] For SNCC activists, the expulsion of whites from the organization was seen as an essential step forward confronting the crucial issue of racial identity. Black leadership of the black struggle was put forward, not only as necessary to assure mass support, but also as a vital element in the creation of a new African consciousness. Nearly every black student interviewed at Wayne State University and University of Michigan, regardless of his degree of militancy, expressed an attitude of self-reliance. Hence, SNCC's separatism was based on its belief in black people determining their own destinies—in other words, black power independent of white power.

The issue of the exclusion of whites from SNCC and the rejection of the whole idea of integration and coalition politics was highly blown out of proportion by white liberals and some of the SNCC activists who dubbed it racism in reverse. For most white people and for many middle-class African Americans, such a split would continue to generate deep anxieties and apprehensions between blacks and whites. It was basically

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[48] Dan Hulbert, "Civil Rights Group turned to Militancy," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 19 March 2000, A.8. Also Charles Hamilton, "A New Look," *Chicago Defender*, 25 June 1966, 8.

considerations of tactics regarding the role and the future of whites and compulsions of a

more subtle moral nature that contributed to the divided mind of many members of

SNCC. It is a well-known fact that African American students were struggling against

race prejudice and discrimination. However, could they, in good conscience, and given

the Christian ideals many had been taught to cherish, think of turning the tables on whites

and of creating an order in which a white skin would automatically single out an

individual as a target of suspicion and abuse?

Whatever response one may give to the preceding question, the crux of the

matter was that, by this time, a significant number of black students in SNCC spurned the

idea of integration and coalition student politics because these students were acutely

aware of the cultural differences between white and black people. Constance Curry, a

white female SNCC activist, captures this mood so well when she recalled:

> I was actually not with SNCC anymore when Black Power started, but my
> reading of it was that black leadership felt that, you know, there should be
> empowerment of people and no longer willing to rely on the white power
> or money. When you think even the civil rights movement of the 1960s,
> how little has changed, you know, the corporations and the white men in
> this country still own and rule everything. So, Black Power was part of
> the necessary strategy. To me, it was just sort of normal evolution into
> empowerment of black people. Black people have to have their own
> leadership. It didn't mean Stokely and other Black Power people still
> didn't work with white people or care about each other. It was just part of
> a movement, a change in movement strategy. A lot of people think it was
> a big mistake to kick out white people, you know, but to me it was just a
> historical evolution.[49]

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[49] Constance Curry, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 15 March 1999.

Carmichael also made it clear that SNCC "would not fire its white organizers, but "if they want to organize, they can organize white people. Negroes will organize Negroes."[50] The proposition advanced here was that it was only after African Americans had pulled themselves together as a community, that they would meet the representatives of other races on a footing of equality and cooperate in specific actions where each group had a similar goal, recognizing that it was unrealistic to expect a complete community of interests.

While some members of the ruling class simply viewed Black Power as a domestic movement, SNCC workers increasingly saw it as a part of a general fight of the oppressed against the oppressors all over the world. It was Carmichael who popularized this organization's new separatist view and emphasis on building black-controlled institutions to the outside world. During his four-month tour of the Third World nations, which included Vietnam, Cuba, and Tanzania, Carmichael portrayed Afro-American urban rebellions as part of the international socialist movement and also suggested that they were essentially reactions to racial oppression. These tours also illustrated one of the many forms SNCC's radicalism could take in the arena of international politics. Increasingly convinced that racial violence in the United States was moving toward a stage of revolutionary struggle, Carmichael, like Lewis, Forman and other SNCC activists, sought inspiration from African revolutionaries who had forcefully and sometimes successfully resisted European domination.

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[50] Carmichael and *Hamilton, Black Power*, 137.

During his controversial visit to Cuba in 1967, Carmichael was warmly received by Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, who even persuaded the Cuban people to support SNCC's struggle in the United States, and the Cuban press ensured that Carmichael's statements received wide coverage. Castro also announced that "revolutionary movements all over the world "must give Stokely their utmost support as protection against the repression of the imperialists, so that it will be very clear that any crime committed against the leader will have serious repercussions throughout the world."[51] This statement was a reaction of Castro to Congressional demands for Carmichael's imprisonment when he returned to the United States from Cuba. Clearly, the emergence of Black Power in June 1966 was not only an American, but an international development.

SNCC's attempt to internationalize its struggle tremendously contributed to its condemnation by media across the nation. However, there were a few leftist journalists such as I.F Stone and long- time SNCC supporter Anne Braden who were reassured by SNCC's new course of action.[52] Stone, for instance, wrote in his self-published weekly that "a certain amount of black nationalism is inevitable among Negroes; they cannot reach equality without the restoration of pride in themselves as Negroes."[53] He added that such pride could not be achieved unless blacks learned to fight for themselves, not

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[51] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 275.

[52] I.F. Stone, "Why they Cry Black Power," *Stone's Weekly*, 19 September 1966, 5.

[53] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 205.

just as wards of white men, no matter how sympathetic. This implied that cooperation

was not possible without loss of identity.

However, such sympathetic coverage of SNCC by leftist journalists did little to

restore the image of the organization, which was already tarnished by the press. The

pressure was so intent that by 1968, the two most important positions within SNCC—

those of chairman and secretary—were eliminated. [54] The organization lost the vital

leadership of James Foreman, who had resigned as executive secretary in 1966 to become

head of SNCC's new International Affairs Commission in New York. The election of the

militant H. Rap Brown as chairman further divided SNCC.

Faced with lack of effective leadership, political divisiveness, internal dissension,

Federal of Bureau Investigation harassment, economic hardship, SNCC ceased

functioning as an organization by 1970. In his memoir, *Walking with the Wind*, John

Lewis asserted that "it was strange to watch from a distance as SNCC shrunk and

withered. Conflicts over philosophy and methods were rippling it apart. Although SNCC

deteriorated as an organization, its contribution toward awakening a student conscience

cannot be overlooked.[55] The organization drew attention to a tragic Vietnamese war and

forced Americans to see the truth about it; the black liberation movement was an

inspiration to women to take a stand for their own liberation, new civil rights legislation

was enacted. Above all, although SNCC was just a spike in the wheel of the civil rights

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[54] Ralph McGill, "The Story of Two Snicks," *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, 9 September 1966, 11.

[55] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 299.

movement, this organization managed to force the federal government to effect

fundamental changes. The idea that students could not lead the freedom struggle was

also challenged. In summation, SNCC played a significant role toward achieving

equality for African American people.

CHAPTER 3

SASO AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE, 1968-1977

While specifically influenced by socio-economic and political conditions in South

Africa, the creation of the South African Student Organization (SASO) was also inspired

by radical movements throughout the world. Thus, SASO was one of the few student

organizations that identified with blacks in Africa and the African Diaspora by

internationalizing its domestic struggle against racial oppression. However, SASO was

largely inspired by SNCC. Although some SASO spokespersons such as Steve Biko

disclaimed any associations with SNCC and its Black Power variant, there was some

actual borrowing of black political thought and ideology in the two organizations.

Interestingly enough, Kgotso Seatlholo, SASO's vice-president in the early 1970s,

maintained that in the debates that ensured in SASO's meetings, "some activists

identified themselves with the policy of SNCC's moral idealism, while others with

Carmichael's Black Power."[1] This was reinforced by another SASO activist Mandla

Langa when he recalled:

> The SASO group had twelve of the tapes of Stokely's speeches.
> Compared to Martin Luther King, we felt that Stokely's preachings were
> much more gutsy, much more in tandem with what we were thinking and

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[1] Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 230.

feeling. They were also very influential in some of the plays we wrote and played. The Black Power group would present a situation to an audience, which could have several endings, and then they would call upon the audience to debate the end and then act it out for them.[2]

Mandla also recalled that "there was a resonance with the kind of cultural awakening expressed by the Black Power activists" and "consciously or unconsciously there was a lot of borrowing, which is why you find the political expressions of that time became very derivative."[3] Barney Pityana, like Mandla, also indicated that "he recalls how a man in the United States consulate made much of the relevant American literature available while another source was a Lutheran bookshop which unobtrusively sold banned books."[4]

The SASO Manifesto of 1970 also made it succinctly clear that comparisons between the United States and South Africa in SASO leadership meetings were popular exercises. Repeating almost verbatim a famous phrase from Carmichael and Hamilton's book *Black Power*, the SASO Manifesto of 1970 accepted the premise that before black people should integrate, they must first close their ranks in opposition to racism. A member of the SASO executive commented on a training seminar held in September of 1970:

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[2] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibilty: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* Movement (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1192), 201.

[3] Barney Pityana, "African American Influences on Black Consciousness Movement" in *African Perspectives on South Africa: A Collection of Speeches, Articles and Documents*, ed. Hendrik Van der Merwe (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1978), 99.

[4] Ibid., 108.

One group was asked to study the significance of the statement "before entering the open society, we must first close our ranks." This statement underlies the Black Power philosophy of people like Charles Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael. This particular group made the observation that an open society in this country can only be created by blacks, and as long as whites are in power, they shall seek to make it closed in one way or the other. We then defined what we meant by an open society…The group ended up by stating that the original statement should read "before creating an open society we must first close our ranks." The difference between the two statements is that in the first statement, the Afro-Americans accept that they will never be in a position to change the system in America, and thus adopt the approach that if you can't beat them, join them—but join them from a position of strength; whereas implicit in the latter statement is a hope to establish a completely new system at some stage…Purely from the consideration of who we are, we realize that it is we who must be allowing others to participate in our system. We must not be the ones to be invited to participate in somebody else's system in our own private yard.[5]

This emerging appreciation of the uniqueness of the American situation seemed to have sharpened the analytical thrust of SASO.

Particularly influential in lending both content and mood to the ideology of SASO was need to recognize self-serving definitions of good and evil; the desirability of destroying pretense and polarizing racial conflict as a preclude to radical change; the rejection of gradualistic solutions designed by the powerful to perpetuate their control and blunt the anger of the oppressed; a mistrust of bourgeois blacks anxious to step in the shoes of the exploiter; a mistrust of liberals who professed to be sympathetic to the course of liberation—all these features of Carmichael and Hamilton's analysis also enter into the writings of SASO leaders on Black Consciousness. It was therefore not surprising to find in SASO's formulations on culture and consciousness, all which were

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[5] Harry Nengwekhulu, "SASO Policy Manifesto" in *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, ed. Gail Gerhart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 276.

vividly spelled out lengthily in SASO policy papers and articles in the SASO *Newsletter*,

that the reinforcing effect of literature and political writings of these American writers

was evident and often explicitly acknowledged. SASO activist Mamphela Ramphele

maintained that Biko was largely inspired by the writings of Carmichael and Hamilton.

To say that Biko was influenced by Carmichael and Hamilton is not to deny other

factors that played a significant role on Biko and other activists' lives, including the

South African political movements, the early religious breakaways of the 1890s; the

Ethiopian movement; the foundation of the ANC; and the history of the Industrial

Conciliation Workers' Union, its operation, its growth and death; John Mbiti's

Introduction to Religion, Frantz Fanon's, and *Wretched of the Earth*. For the purpose of

leadership training, Biko extensively studied these movements and books.

However, it was Hamilton and Carmichael's influence that was more pronounced

in his writings. For instance, Carmichael and Hamilton repudiated the premise of liberal

theology—that exclusive black political approaches were racist and just deplorable as

exclusive white approaches. This was the "morality argument" which had succeeded in

preventing blacks from determining their own responses to white racism. Carmichael

and Hamilton expressed this in print that:

> Some observers have labeled those who advocate Black Power as racists;
> they have said that the call for self-identification and self-determination is
> "racism in reverse" or "black superiority." This is a deliberate lie.
> Racism is not merely exclusion on the basis of race but exclusion for the
> purpose of subjugating or maintaining subjugation. The goal of racists is
> to keep black people at the bottom, arbitrarily and dictatorially, as they
> have done in this country for over three hundred years.[6]

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[6] Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 47.

Interesting enough, Biko rejected the liberal view that SASO was a racist organization. He wrote in August 1970 that "does a rejection of artificial racial mixing mean that I am a racist."[7] He further explained that "not only have whites been guilty of being on the offensive," but also against everything a black person intended to initiate.[8] Thus, Biko, like Carmichael and Hamilton, argued that it was absurd that any move by black students to break the silence and build themselves was dubbed racism in reverse by white racists. As he explained:

> What of the claim that the blacks are becoming racist? This is a favorite pastime of frustrated liberals who feel their trusteeship ground being washed off under their feet. When the blacks announce that the time has come for them to do things for themselves and all by themselves all white liberals shout murder! "Hey, you can't do that. You being a racist. You are falling into their trap. But those who know define racism as discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation. In other words, one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate.[9]

Another issue that featured in SASO Policy papers was Carmichael-Hamilton view on integration or assimilation. These writers were totally opposed to what they termed "token" or one-way street integration, which would only benefit a handful of Southern black children who get into white schools at a great expense, and to ignore the ninety-four per cent who were left in unimproved all-black schools.[10] Like these writers, Biko argued that:

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[7] Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 279.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Frank Talk, "Black Souls White Skin," in *I Write What I Like*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1978), 20.

[10] Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 54.

> The type of integration white people talk about is…artificial because the people forming the integrated complex have been extracted from various societies with their in-built complexes of superiority and inferiority and these continue to manifest themselves even in the nonracial setup of the integrated complex. As a result, integration so achieved is a one-way course with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks listening.[11]

The influence of these writers on the language of SASO also came clearly in the popularity of the slogans such as "Black is Beautiful" in SASO literature. Mamphela Ramphele asserts that:

> While at the University of Natal, I shed the wig I used to wear whenever I felt I needed to look respectable. The black is beautiful slogan of the time had its desired impact on all of us. Some of us switched over to the use of our African names instead of the slave names we had hitherto used.[12]

Mamphela further maintained that the slogan "Black is Beautiful" spoke to many blacks, whose self-doubt and depreciation of their blackness had dominated their lives.[13] In the same vein, Barney Pityana clearly indicated that SASO was philosophically inspired by Carmichael and Hamilton. As he remarks:

> These writers expressed the humiliation as well as the dignity of the colonized and the power of the powerless. Their main concerns dealt with the psychology of oppression and the exorcising of colonial humiliation. Of particular interest was the fact that their movement raised consciousness about the extent of bleaching, creaming and straightening hair, at great cost, to fit unattainable white images of beauty. Above all, black power restored to us a sense of self-appreciation and self-acceptance. Indeed in the early stages of the movement in Natal, there

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[11] Aelred Stubbs, ed., *I Write What I Like* (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1978), 55.

[12] A.P. Hunter, "Split-site Black Campuses Bring Bitter Criticism," in *South Africa from Soweto to Uitenhage: The Political Economy of the South African Revolution*, ed. Bernard Magubane (Johannesburg: Ravaness Press, 1986), 176. Also Mamphela Ramphele, *A Life* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1995), 57.

[13] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 217.

were reports that some African men had beaten African women who had straightened their hair, or used bleaching creams. One indicator of the success of Black Power in this area was the vastly reduced advertising and sale of bleaching creams in South Africa.[14]

It should be noted that SASO emerged out of the political vacuum that existed after the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) by the South African government in 1960. During this period, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), the student organization that represented both black and white students, was one of the remaining vehicles for multiracial political activity in South Africa. NUSAS following was concentrated in the four English-medium universities of Witwatersrand, Cape Town, Durban and Rhodes, the first three of which accepted black students. The efforts of African student representative councils at the African universities of Turfloop, Ngoye and Fort Hare to affiliate to NUSAS resulted in clashes between them and the university authorities between 1960 and 1967. Consequently, black youths became disenchanted with NUSAS's white leadership and political representation in matters that affected them and the rest of the community. [15]

There were, of course, other various reasons for acute feelings of frustration, isolation, and alienation among black students. First, white student leaders had become less politically outspoken and more concerned with the preservation of academic

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[14] Louis Mitchell, "Steve Biko: South Africa's Modern Symbol," *The Crisis*, 20 April 1978, 9.

[15] George Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 299. Also Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 322.

freedoms which most black students did not, in any way, enjoy. Secondly, the number of

African students on the segregated campuses had quadrupled since 1960s; these then

represented the majority of African students and thus NUSAS's predominantly white

leadership was unable to reflect their particular concerns. Even if it had been sensitive to

the needs of this constituency, NUSAS was, in any case, prohibited from operating on

African campuses in 1967. Finally, there were ideological stimuli which helped to

distance black students from whites, especially the American derived "Black Theology,"

which predominated segregated campuses in 1967.[16] Most SASO activists were inspired

by the writings of a theologian James Cone and other African-Americans on black

theology. Cone defined Black Theology as:

> A historical reality, born in the struggle for freedom in which an oppressed
> people recognize that they were not created to be seized, bartered, deeded,
> and auctioned...The significance of this theology lies in the conviction
> that the content of the Christian gospel is liberation, so that any talk about
> God that fails to take seriously the righteousness of God as revealed in the
> liberation of the weak and downtrodden is not Christian language. Black
> Theology is thus a theology of liberation.[17]

Commenting on the impact of Cone to the South African black struggle, Pityana

said that "we feel what Cone really says in our bones."[18] In addition, Biko applauded

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[16] Joseph Lelyveld, "Apartheid Creates Riddles in Bantu Education," *New York Times*, 15 December 1976, 12.

[17] James Cone and S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 165.

[18] Barney Pityana, "Black Consciousness in South Africa," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Motlhabi Mokgethi (Johannesburg, University Christianity Movement, 1972), 223.

black theology for relating the Christian faith to the black man's suffering. He saw it as a

vehicle through which black problems could be solved and their God-created being

restored. That was why he could write of Black theology as a theology seeking "to relate

God and Christ once more to the black man and to his daily problems; a theology that

seeks to bring God to the black man and the reality of his situation.[19] Furthermore,

SASO activist Bonganjalo Goba gave an account of how Cone influenced their thinking.

He asserted that:

> As we wrestled with the challenge of Black Consciousness, we were really
> influenced by the writings of James Cone. We discovered in his
> theological hermeneutic a fresh approach in engaging in the liberation
> struggle. I can remember how Cone's ideas dominated our Black theology
> seminar at Wilgesspruit in 1970 and became a useful basis for developing
> a Black theology arising out of the South African context.[20]

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[19] Gerthart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 297.

[20] Bonganjalo Goba, "Black Consciousness Movement: its Impact on Black Theology," *Journal of Religious Thought* 2 (Fall 1975): 211.

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Desmond Tutu also emphasized how in their struggle, the South African students,

in general, and black students, in particular, were motivated by the accomplishments of

black Americans whose influence also stimulated the creation of South African Black

theology. In his own words:

> In Southern Africa, black theology was inspired by its North American
> counterpart, which existed for so long implicitly in the Negro Spirituals
> that gave heart to black slaves in the heavy days of their bondage and
> which became more articulate and explicit during the civil rights
> campaign.[21]

Although South Africans drew much theological insights from Black Theology of

the United States, their black theology had its own distinctive character, and as such,

exhibited peculiar African characteristics. However, there were, within SASO, a host of

individuals who displayed a virulent militancy reminiscent of Cone. Biko's close friend,

Aubrey Mokoape, urged at a BPC meeting in 1972:

> Brothers and sisters, I think these words have been spoken by no less
> authority than the Rev. Baartman, who felt that the white man has become
> subhuman, that the white man has become a devil, that the white man has
> become a beast and that he can only be helped by one thing, by quite
> quickly removing him.[22]

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[21] Dwight Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 276.

[22] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 225.

Biko himself wrote that:

> Clearly black people cannot respect White people, at least not in this country. There is such an obvious aura of immorality and naked cruelty in all that is done in the name of white people that no Black man, no matter how intimidated, can ever be made to respect White society. Underneath our fear is naked hatred. Whiteness is a concept that needs to be despised, hated, destroyed and replaced by an aspiration with more human contact in it. The secret determination in the innermost minds of most Blacks is to kick Whites off those comfortable garden chairs and claim them for himself.[23]

An incident in 1967 served to underline for black NUSAS members the futility of participation in white liberal institutions. At NUSAS's annual conference at Rhodes university in 1967, university authorities insisted that African delegates use segregated social facilities. The following year, 1968, black students involved in NUSAS's began to discuss the establishment of an all-black movement. This culminated in the formation of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) under Steve Biko in a conference convened at Turfloop, the northern part of South Africa, in July 1969. Among SASO's early prominent members were Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro, Tom Manthata, Aubrey Mokoena, Harry Nengwenkhulu, Fanyana Mazibuko, Ramphela Mamphela, Barney Pityana, Thandisiwe Mazibuko, Malusi Mpumlwana, and many others. To these young men and women, Biko was the embodiment of the new mood of assertiveness so evident among youth in many parts of the country; a representative of youth culture and its activism. He encouraged consensus decision making among his colleagues and instilled in them the culture of fearlessness. His particular leadership style stemmed from his capacity for astute political insight coupled with his faith. He felt that anyone could

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[23] Stubbs, ed., *I Write What I Like*, 72.

grow, learn, and participate once challenged with meaningful ideas, which would then lead to a meaningful life.

The formation of SASO culminated in an overriding fear among some students, especially those who were associated with NUSAS, that any form of division in student ranks along racial lines amounted to tacit conformity to the policy of apartheid. This feeling was particularly strong among former NUSAS members at Fort Hare and University of Natal at Wentworth where the liberal tradition of non-racialism was a dominant ideological perspective. The debate on the formation of SASO as an independent black organization, dubbed by some as second class apartheid, was clearly reflected in the report of the Turfloop conference of July 1969. It was summed up as follows:

> Any move that tends to divide the student population into separate laagers on the basis of colour is in a way a tacit submission to having been defeated and apparently seems in agreement with apartheid. In a racially sensitive country like ours, provisions for racially exclusive bodies tend to build up resentment and to widen the gap that exists between races, and the student community should resist all attempts to fall into this temptation. Any formulation of a purely non-white body shall be subject to a lot of scrutiny, and so the chances of the organisation lasting are very little.[24]

In order to facilitate and promote coordination, communication, and activism between themselves and other students, SASO founders aimed, among other things, "to heighten the degree of contact not only among non-white students but also among the rest of the population; to boost the morale of the nonwhite students, to heighten their own

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[24] Mokubung Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism in Black South African Universities: The Roots of Resistance* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 127. Also Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 268.

confidence in themselves and to contribute largely to the direction of thought taken by the various institutions on social, political and other current topics.[25]

These aims were a clear sign that the black student community had lost faith in their white counterparts and were thus withdrawing from the open white society.

In its preamble to the constitution adopted in 1970, SASO expressed its belief in one national student organization. However, SASO members were aware that at the time it was impossible for students in black universities to participate effectively in a national organization, especially in light of the racial laws that debarred multi-racial organizations. Rationalizing the organization's restrictive racial membership, the SASO policy Manifesto of 1970 stated:

> SASO is a Black student organization working for the liberation of the Black man first from psychological oppression by himself through induced inferiority complex and secondly from physical oppression accruing out of living in white racist society... SASO upholds the concept of Black Consciousness and the drive towards Black awareness as the most logical and significant means of ridling ourselves of the shackles that bind us to perpetual servitude.[26]

In view of the foregoing, SASO regarded itself as a vehicle for a set of values and assumed that upholding the concept of black consciousness was the most logical and significant means of eradicating oppression. Psychological liberation, therefore, could

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[25] Stubbs, ed., *I Write What I Like,* 14.

[26] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 209.

expedite the subjective prerequisites needed for black liberation. This was what Biko referred to as "a prefigurative approach to politics."[27] In other words, in order for emancipatory politics to achieve a social transformation, new values and practices would have to be engendered among people. This prefigurative view of politics was consistent with Biko's contention that politics "has an undeniable psychological dimension. Even though it can be argued that the "conscientization" of masses remains integral to the process of liberation," it was owing to this idealism that SASO attracted a large following among black students and grew quickly in its early years.[28] Such a prefigured view of politics was evident in SASO's definition of black consciousness:

> Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life. The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity. The black man must build his own value system, see himself as self-defined and not defined by others. The concept of Black Consciousness implies the awareness of the black people of the power they wield as a group, both economically and politically and hence group cohesion and solidarity are important facts of Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness will always be enhanced by the totality of involvement of the oppressed people, hence the message of Black Consciousness has to be spread to reach all sections of the Black community.[29]

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[27] Frank Talk, "SASO Policy Manifesto," in *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, ed. Gail Gerthart (Berkely: University of California Press, 1978), 297.

[28] Anthony W. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 47.

[29] Stubbs, ed., *I Write What Like*, 62.

According to SASO's philosophy of black consciousness, black people had to

develop the attitude that would enable them to overcome feelings of inferiority. Further,

blacks had to demonstrate that they had dignity like any other human being and they were

capable of doing anything that any human being was able to do, anything that a white

person was able to do. Biko further maintained that the African problem had always been

dependency, fear and a resigned apathy about the future, but at no time had these

problems been more pronounced than in the 1960s. According to him, Africans were

oppressed under Smuts government, but they were still men. Men of the 1960s had lost

all their humanity, and were reduced into mere objects by those in power. Biko wrote:

> But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced
> to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white world power
> structure…in the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent
> condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as
> he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatience call…His
> heart yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame
> himself for not having been 'educated' enough to warrant such luxury.[30]

The problems of self-identity and cultural emasculation were of relevance only to

those who were most affected by white cultural domination, that the concerns of Black

Consciousness were in the light of the daily struggle for existence of working-class

movement's importance. Pityana, argues "the main thing was to get black people to

articulate their own struggle and reject the white establishment from prescribing to

people."[31] Moreover, SASO activists strongly believed that black people's low self-

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[30] Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 325.

[31] Arnold Milliard, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 218.

esteem had major political implications as it fostered political disunity, allowed ethnic

leaders and other moderates to usurp the role of spokespersons for the black masses, and

encouraged a dependence on white leadership. Conversely, a heightened sense of racial

awareness would encourage greater solidarity and mobilize mass commitment to the

process of liberation.

When one closely examines the language in SASO literature, one realizes that it

reflects some dynamics of gender in the organization. Such language, with its emphasis

on masculine terminology such as "manhood," and "emasculation" is indicative of the

general constraints on women's participation in public and political processes in general,

and their representation in leadership roles in SASO, in particular. Moreover, by the late

1960s, student politics were dominated by male students. SASO itself was viewed as "a

man's world" in which women were relegated to subsidiary roles. Any woman who

wanted to participate in this "world" was intimidated by men "who were used to having

their way."[32] The following incident by Ramphela illustrates the point:

> The socialization I underwent at the time also included learning to survive
> in a male-dominated environment without falling prey to it. Disaffiliation
> from the largely white National Union of South African Students
> (NUSAS) was a hotly debated issue on Natal Medical campus. Ben
> Ngubane, a respected senior student leader, had been the most formidable
> opponent of such move. He thus felt personally defeated when the motion
> of disaffiliation was finally carried at the University of Natal. I put my
> foot in it by making reference to the motion during a social evening.
> Ngubane promptly told me to shut up, because I understood little about
> politics, and that he would not tolerate any disrespect from little girls like

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[32] Ibid.

me. What a shock! Biko diffused the situation in some way, but the basic issue of little girls challenging seniors was left unchallenged.[33]

This incident was just but one of the many incidents of men who undermined women, both at the social and at the political levels. Biko himself was no exception to this influence. His relationship with his wife was quite reflective of this. His approach to her as his wife remained "what is perhaps best described as traditional, with the expectancy of a role-model wife who was supposed to understand and accept whatever her husband chose to do."[34]

Sexism, indeed, reared its head at many levels of SASO meetings. For example, the responsibility for catering, cleaning up and other entertainment functions tended to fall on women participants, be it at national conferences, workshops, or elsewhere. In those cases where the top leadership was sensitive to gender discrimination and allocated duties regardless of gender, males feigned incompetence, and women would then have to take over the entire nurturing responsibility, thus positively reinforcing the feigned incompetence of the men. Mamphela explained:

> On one occasion when Barney Pityana and I were responsible for a workshop, we confronted the men and insisted on their rightful share in domestic chores. This did not help at all. Men were still reluctant to help.[35]

Interestingly enough, Desmond Tutu remarked during a visit to Zanempilo Community Health Center that "it is absurd to see our young men and women still

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[33] Mamphela Ramphele, *A Life* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 67.

[34] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 61.

[35] Ramphele, *A Life*, 109.

holding on to notions of traditional gender roles."[36] This remark by Tutu sparked a lively debate among SASO activists, with Tutu relating his experiences in London and the "joy of participating in all domestic chores, including nappy washing!"[37]

However, one has to view SASO male activists as products of their environment. Their treatment of women in the organization was in line with the South African society that was holding on to the notions of traditional gender roles. Thus, it was difficult to persuade these young men, who lived in a society so used to traditional gender roles, to accommodate women as equals in their struggle to bring about change.

Although women's involvement in SASO leadership roles was limited, it must be acknowledged that there were some who had the ability to make important contributions and were accepted fully as colleagues by men. For example, Mrs Kgware, the first president of the Black People's Convention, which was a political wing of SASO, was treated with respect. Her maturity and ability to reach out both young and old were particularly appreciated. Another notable example was Vuyelwa Mashalaba, the only woman SASO activist who participated in debates with men, though the majority of

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 219.

women just watched even though interested. What actually enabled her were self-confidence, eloquence, dedication, and ability to withstand men's intimidation.

By 1972, SASO went through a transitional phase during which its members became more action-oriented. In fact, the event that signaled the beginning of a trend away from a purely cultural idealism to political involvement was a speech by Onkgopotse Tiro, leader of SASO campus chapter, delivered at a graduation ceremony of the University of the North in 1972. To his audience, both parents and government officials, Tiro asserted:

> The price of freedom is blood, toil and tears…History has taught us that a group in power has never voluntarily relinquished its position. It has always been forced to do so. No black man has landed in trouble for fighting for what is legally his. It is a shame that white students are being given vacation jobs at the university when there are students (black) who could not get their results due to outstanding fees. This clearly indicates a contradiction between the government declared policy of African development and control of their own institutions and the realities within the institutions. A white member of the university has been given the meat contract to supply a university—a Black university. Those who amorphously support the policy may say that there are no Black people to supply it. My questions to them are: Why are they not able to supply the university? What is the cause? Is it not conveniently done that they are not in a position to supply these commodities?[38]

The state reaction to this speech was harsh. Expelled from the University after his speech, Tiro was killed in 1974 in Botswana by a parcel bomb. Nevertheless, his remarks illustrated the widely held perceptions among African students of the incongruity between their education and the opportunity structure within and without the learning environment. At micro-level, the university reflected lack of employment opportunities

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[38] Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism*, 129.

for African students in society. During vacations at home, for instance, many students experienced difficulties in their attempts to find vacation or temporary jobs. Worse still, prospective white employers viewed educated blacks with grave suspicion and could not countenance the idea of being confronted by politicized and unionized workers. This hostile attitude became more generalized as SASO hit the headlines from 1972 onwards. From this time, black graduates found it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to secure satisfactory employment in the private sector. Most found that they could only find work as teachers, nurses, social workers or government employees. This state of affairs also reflected the curriculum designed for black students in these institutions. There was hardly learning that honestly related to students' future employment prospects. Thus, the discrimination and powerlessness generated by apartheid policy were responsible for a spirit of revolt among young black men and women. As a result, they rejected the university, their homelands and their ethnic classification. The motive behind this negative attitude was expressed by the Snyman Commission, which was appointed by the government to investigate conditions within African universities. As the commission asserted:

> The university does not bring any real happiness to most of the Black students. The university does not give them that carefree life which it gives to white students. Although the white students do worry about their studies, their lives are carefree in the sense that they are not yet called upon to shoulder adult responsibilities. The university sets up inner conflicts in Black students—makes them feel unsure of themselves. The university wrenches them away from the things that gave them a sense of security, and neither their community nor they themselves have the adaptability to resolve this conflict and to come to terms with it.[39]

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[39] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, "Education and Discrimination: Toward a World Policy for South Africa, 10-17 April 1964," box 4, reel 40, Archives and Special Collections, Atlanta University Center, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia. Also Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism*, 122.

SASO's desire to identify and be involved in black community development projects was thus hardly surprising. This move forcefully illustrated the sense of social dislocation which students felt from being at socially isolated institutions. To engage in effective political action, SASO formed the Black People's Convention (BPC) at Orlando West meeting in December 1971. According to Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, then a SASO adherent, the pressures to move beyond student concerns were constant:

> The foundation was initially laid in the student ranks but we became increasingly caught up in larger issues such as theology, community development. We moved increasingly into the political sphere. We tried to lay the foundation for effective political action so that people could feel aggrieved and be energized by it.[40]

BPC's executive committee included Drake Koka, Mthuli Shezi, Sach Cooper, Rev. A Manyathula, and Mrs. M. Kgware. With the formation of this organization, SASO could no longer restrict itself to its constituency of the small population of black university students. Basically, BPC was SASO's "political movement" with a set of aims more action oriented than those adopted by its parent body. Under the leadership of Mrs. M. Kgware, BPC aimed for the liberation of black people from psychological and physical oppression and the implementation of literacy campaigns, health projects, and cultural activity. The promotion of these projects by BPC was seen as consistent with the central focus on black self-image. Thus, like SASO, BPC placed emphasis on ideas to effect change. At the same time, however, BPC differed from its parent body because it realized that ideas alone could not bring about change. Unlike SASO, which placed a

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[40] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 40.

high premium on the role of students, BPC argued that the black working class rather than students, should form the vanguard of the struggle.

The projects undertaken by BPC and SASO were in the fields of health, education, leadership training, publications, home industries and child-care. These projects were funded by the South African Council of Churches, Special Project for Christian Action in Society, Christian Institute, the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, and other church groups all over South Africa. Likewise welfare agencies such as Child Welfare Society and the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People also played a meaningful role in SASO's development work. Indeed, the period between 1969 and 1971 was marked by experimentation with community projects in and around Durban by students from the University of Natal. Projects ranged in type from assisting the impoverished squatters of New Farm near Phoenix settlement, building more durable dwelling structures and providing clean water, to health work carried out on weekends at Mahatma Gandhi Clinic in Phoenix. However, the main problem that faced the organizers during this period was the total lack of experience and knowledge about how to organize the student volunteers, train them in what they were to do, and help them plan their work, execute it and evaluate it on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, SASO and BPC were able to achieve a certain measure of success with its projects. A breakthrough seemed imminent when each household agreed to contribute an amount of R2 for the provision of clean tap water, and the SASO head office promised to subsidize whatever shortfall in funds the project encountered. However, matters went awry when a group of white students under the leadership of Richard Turner, a political scientist and lecturer at the University of Natal, entered the same community at about the same time. Turner was

motivated by his commitment to a socialist future, and saw involvement in Phoenix as a practical way of engaging students in the process of transformation. His group offered to provide all the money required for the clean water project, sapping the community's motivation for self-help, which SASO activists had been at pains to nurture. It was as though the poverty of the New Farm residents offered a scarce resource, accessible to Natal University activists, for which they competed to test their ideals of community development. On the contrary, it could be argued that more harm was done by raising the expectations of the residents, and dampening their own initiative in the task of upgrading their squatter settlement. Thus, neither SASO nor Turner's involvement in this area improved the lives of ordinary people. This created confusion and disappointment in the ranks of SASO. But more significantly, it reinforced SASO fears of white domination. Their interference could be viewed as a refusal by whites to accept that blacks could do things on their own.

Also added to the list of SASO and BPC projects was the development of Dudu village, which was situated on the South Coast of Natal. Included in the project were a literacy campaign, a health facility for preventive health care, and agricultural support for the largely peasant community. Mr. Nkosazana Dlamini, SASO's adherent, was appointed the local contact person and project coordinator. Before this project was launched, a reasonably careful assessment of needs, identification of priorities, and formulation of appropriate strategies for action were undertaken. This approach was the outcome of the positive input of the leadership-training program, which Anne Hope, a member of the lay catholic sisterhood working on Witwatersrand at the time, had conducted for some leading members of SASO. It also reflected the experience and

lessons learned from the mistakes of earlier projects. Similar to earlier projects, SASO

organizers still faced some problems. Those involved did not anticipate the sheer effort

required to consult adequately with the community. Transport costs and time involved

were much higher than the limited student resources could carry. There was also an

inadequate recognition of the limited contribution which students could make, given their

progress. [41]

In December 1971, SASO activists were involved in the development of the

Wintervelt area. According to Mamphela Ramphela, there were about twelve students,

including herself, who were involved in the project. These students spent part of their

fieldwork time assisting at the nearby Mabopane private clinic, which provided antenatal

care and facilities for the delivery of expectant women. Ramphele recalls the situation:

> Our primary work was to get to know the area of Wintervelt, a huge
> squatter area near Pretoria. Particular attention was paid to its geographic
> scope, population size, demographic details such as employment,
> education, available amenities, common health problems, and quality and
> quantity of health care facilities. [42]

Seemingly, SASO activists were motivated by the level of poverty in Wintervelt

area, and exploitation of the poorest people. For instance, alternative healers of dubious

qualifications were exploiting the ignorance and desperation of the poor with the

connivance of some of the prominent medical practitioners in the area. Ramphela

captures the situation so well:

> We came, across a homeopath who was running a health center that
> included a maternity ward. He also treated children with various ailments
> including kwashiorkor (a protein deficiency state). His explanation of the

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ramphele, *A Life*, 115.

cause of kwashiorkor was that children were possessed by a snake, which inflated them with a bad spirit, making their bodies swell up. When questioned about his training for the work he was doing, he claimed that he had completed a degree in obstetrics at the University of the North. No such degree existed then or exists now at that university. His work in that community was afforded legal protection by a local general practitioner, in whose name his premises were registered.[43]

It was clear that health projects were to be pioneered if SASO was to have an impact on the lives of the very poor in the field of health. The result was Zanempilo Community Health Center built in 1974 to provide affordable, accessible and appropriate health care for people in the rural districts of King William's Town. Services offered at this health care center included consultations and treatment of various diseases; referrals to local hospitals for those requiring further medical help; antenatal care and delivery of uncomplicated cases.[44]

According to Biko, SASO's projects were undertaken in order to instill a sense of dignity and pride within the black man. Blacks benefited from seeing other blacks carrying out these projects. Previously, it had always been whites who offered charity. Now blacks were helping themselves. Biko wrote that "our role was a simple one: to assist in the upliftment of the Black community and to help Black people...to diagnose their problems and to participate in their solutions."[45] He further explained that self-help projects removed the defeatist attitude that good comes only from whites. This, he asserted, helps in the building-up process.[46] Thus, community projects in addition to

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility*, 127.

[45] Stubbs, ed. *I Write What I Like*, 56.

[46] Ibid.

fostering self-reliance were to build a sense of oneness between leaders and masses without which any future resistance would be unattainable.

Although SASO had succeeded in shaping the language, debates, and ideas of black people throughout the country, the organization faced serious ideological tensions even before the uprising of 1976. Such tension reflected differences in the experience and interests of SASO and BPC, which had been formed precisely for the purpose of expanding SASO beyond student ranks. The students in SASO "were by their very nature more adventurous, analytic, more interested in reading, open-minded and less arrested in their thinking, if only because there are constantly new faces."[47] Those in BPC were "more mature, established, in touch with funders and had more at stake, in some cases having jobs in the BCP."[48] Aubrey Mokoena, SASO adherent, suggested that the disagreements between the leaders of these two organizations in 1975 was an early indication of how the movement would split after 1976.[49] Early disagreements in SASO were raised most publicly by Diliza Mji, president of SASO in 1975. Mji's father who was president of the Transvaal ANC Youth League in the 1950s, had created considerable controversy as an early advocate of class analysis, establishing a family tradition of sorts maintained by his son. In retrospect, some SASO stalwarts had argued that the younger Mji's family allegiance to the ANC was well known and that Mji had

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[47] Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 79.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Milliard, *Biko*, 165.

grown in prominence to try either to divide black consciousness movement or move it

toward the ANC by urging the use of class analysis, much as his father did. During

SASO's eighth General Student Council, held in Mafeking in early 1976, Mji launched a

rhetorical attack on SASO's exclusive focus on race. In his presidential meeting, he

pressed for:

> The need…to look at our struggle not only in terms of color interests but also in terms of class…Apartheid as an exploitative system is part of a bigger whole, capitalism. Having taken into account the socio-economic factors affecting any person involved in a struggle for change, then it is logical to expect that group action is more effective than individual actions. Group action means organization of the people having common values and aspirations. We are aware that times have changed, therefore having a greater need to be more organized than before.[50]

Mji warned further his audience against basing an opposition movement on the

leadership of his elite audience of black students who "will not want to change the system

because of your own class interests."[51] Such a view contradicted SASO's basic

assumption of unity among all blacks as victims of oppression. He contended instead

that all blacks had diverse interests and that the opposition should embrace those with

common values of resistance.[52] That this critique came from SASO's president—the first

organization to spread black consciousness ideology—made it more startling. Arguably,

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[50] Hendrik van der Merwe, *African Perspectives on South Africa: A Collection of Speeches, Articles and Documents* (Stanford: Hoover institute, 1979), 99.

[51] Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 77.

[52] Ibid.

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this proposal to graft class analysis onto SASO's ideology was meant to reduce SASO's

preoccupation with shaping racial identity and to encourage active mass organization.

The fact that Mji's proposal was met with a muted response by other SASO members,

suggested receptivity to the idea. Although Biko himself had ridiculed class analysis

back in 1971, in 1976 his primary concern about adopting it was apparently more

strategic than ideological. Mji reports that after his speech, "Steve asked to see us. He

expressed his disquiet, arguing that we are not ready to confront the anti-communist

sentiment and that Durban is red."[53] Besides Mji's influence, the experience of the

Durban strikes in 1973 had convinced Biko and other SASO leaders that black

consciousness should include class analysis and work more closely with the newly

formed unions.

The issue of class analysis was not the only cause of debates and disagreement

within SASO in the years leading up to 1976. SASO's exclusion of whites from the

liberation struggle was also questioned. Some critics maintained that SASO' s

assumptions of exclusive black unity was characterized by contradictions. For instance,

while SASO viewed itself as an exclusive black organization, it worked quietly with

white clergy men such as Naude Beyers, who remained true to the organization's

convictions. It was not, however, until the 1976 unrest had subsided and SASO

leadership had regained control of their movement from the activist youth in the

townships that the implications of this white involvement could be fully discussed. Even

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[53] Van der Merwe, *African Perspectives on South Africa*, 198.

presidents, the SASO permanent organizer, the secretary general, the director of publications, and three former presidents. The resilience of the black community, in general, and black organization, in particular, in the face of such cruelty and harassment was a story of survival. In response to the government's banning and house arrest of SASO leaders in 1973, Gerthart maintained that in fact "the entire leadership of SASO was crushed, of course."[56]

While SASO faced formidable obstacles in reaching for a mass audience directly or indirectly, the organization was clearly more successful in communicating the subtle nuances of its message inside the walls of academic and religious institutions than beyond black society in general. Seminary students were among the earliest and most ardent proponents of SASO ideology of black consciousness and its particular application within the church under the rubric of black theology. Black clergy were instrumental in organizing the widely publicized Black Renaissance Convention, an important all-in conference, which brought together a cross-section of black leaders and intellectuals at St. Peter's Seminary at Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, in December 1974. Links also grew between SASO and the African Independent Churches Association, while new pressures from black clergy within the main white-led churches accelerated a limited redistribution of authority between the races within some denominational hierarchies. As a group and individually, African ministers also had the potential power to influence relatively large numbers of ordinary people.

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[56] Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 294.

Recognizing the threat posed by the new spirit of nationalism among black churchmen generally, the government moved in 1974-1975 to destroy one of the most intense centers of black consciousness thinking, Federal Theology Seminary in Alice, which was ruthlessly dispossessed of its land and buildings on the pretext that these were needed for the expansion of neighboring Fort Hare University.

More important than any effect on blacks of an older generation, however, was the impact of SASO on the 1969-1972 generation of university rebels. Almost from the founding of SASO at the university level, efforts were made to recruit support from these younger students. By early 1972, city branches of SASO catering students in high schools and non-university institutions were either in existence in areas such as Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth, Umtata, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and Springs. The diffusion of SASO mood to the high school generation was given tremendous impetus in mid-1972 by the campus revolts that followed the expulsion of Tiro from the University of the North. Thus, to the high school students, SASO leaders became heroes who had been bloodied in an actual clash with white authority. One consequence by the end of 1972 was an upsurge in political consciousness among high school students, leading to the formation of a welter of political youth organizations across the country. These organizations included the South African Students' Movement, formed in Soweto high schools, a federation of youth clubs in Natal, the Transvaal, and the eastern and western Cape. All these groups initiated the Soweto uprising of 1976, which partly resulted from the government's attempt to introduce a new policy whereby Afrikaans language was to be used as a medium of instruction in African schools. That the language issue became the spark of this major uprising was further evidence of the

influence of SASO, which had inspired resistance against the state for imposing

debilitating foreign ideas and culture on black students. Harry Nengwekhulu does not

exaggerate when he states:

> The black consciousness movement instilled in the Soweto youth a pride
> and self-confidence to defy the government's new educational policies.
> The uprising started in Soweto because of the diffusion of black
> consciousness there: the kind of leadership there was more radical than the
> leadership throughout the whole country...The uprising started in Soweto,
> not because these people were more oppressed there but because the South
> African Student Movement, which operated hand in glove with SASO,
> was centered there.[57]

SASO's influence could also be attributed to the fact that its press coverage was

extensive. While reporting on SASO's statements and actions was not always accurate,

no amount of distortion was able to conceal the fact that the spokesmen of SASO were

highly courageous individuals willing to speak their minds without fear. The widespread

use among students of the clenched-fist Black Power salute in early 1976, which was

common in the U.S. in late 1960s, served to underline this new culture of fearlessness in

a nonverbal language that even the most politically uneducated or illiterate person could

understand. Thus, the government's hostile attitude toward SASO activists did not

completely render the organization powerless. However heavy the price they paid in

death, imprisonment, bans and exile, SASO founders' revolutionary spirit still remained

intact. It was the same spirit that later inspired organizations such as the Azanian People

Organization and the Congress of the South African Students to launch violent

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[57] Mokgethi Motlhabi, *Challenge to Apartheid : Toward a Moral National Resistance* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1988), 57.

confrontation with white South Africa in early 1980s. This was a formidable task,

indeed.

CHAPTER 4

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SNCC AND SASO

A comparative analysis between SNCC and SASO suggests that these

organizations had a symbiotic relationship. The two student organizations had, with very

few formal links, drawn upon each other for inspiration, in their domestic struggles to

achieve racial equality and freedom. For instance, the mass media, particularly television,

student-to-student sympathies, and increased student travels, actually made black South

African and American students realize that student dissent in their countries had much in

common. These students were conscious about each other, understood each other, and

supported each other. One former SNCC activist Worth Long recalled:

> In the late 1960s students from all over Africa, South Africa, Ghana,
> Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Zambia met with their fellow brothers in the
> United States to discuss their political struggle. It was in this kind of
> relationship that a strong bond developed between these students. They
> sympathized with each other, and devised strategies on how to advance the
> struggle.[1]

This black internationalism emphasized by Long was reinforced by historian Clayborne

Carson. As he captures the mood so well:

> At a conference held in Athens, Ohio, a few weeks before the initial
> Greensboro sit-in of 1960, hundreds of southern black students listened,
> discussed and evidently thought a great deal as militant African
> nationalists 'stole the show' with predictions of a 'new order.' Even the
> most unintellectual black students were envious of the African
> independence movement and vaguely moved by it.[2]

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[1] Worth Long, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 29 February 2000.

[2] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 16.

Although SASO identified with all radical movements in the diaspora and the

Third World, its strong identification and most pronounced characteristics were shared

primarily with SNCC. It was almost inevitable that the two most historically significant

organizations would draw sustenance from one another. Evidently, there were various

similarities between these student organizations.

First, SNCC and SASO were connected historically in one sense. Both

organizations were inspired, though in a different way, by the same prototype—Mahatma

Gandhi's use of militant nonviolence in the struggle for Indian independence. SNCC

made much of the Gandhian example and tried to apply the spirit and discipline of

satyagraha or "soul force" to nonviolent protests in the American South.[3] What SNCC's

activists actually did was to weave together the black folk Christianity with the Gandhian

conception of nonviolent resistance to empower a cause that both inspired its followers

and disarmed the opposition of many whites. As SNCC's statement of purpose, which

was permeated with Gandhian rhetoric and philosophy indicated, religious belief and

emotion directly and largely inspired and animated African American students to an

extent that could not be paralleled in South Africa.

Similarly, SASO was avowedly nonconfrontational toward whites, and nonviolent

in its effort to construct an alternative set of values rather than a more material

"counterforce" to domination. As Saths Cooper, one of the nine found guilty, explained,

"none of our official documents talked of nonviolence since we did not appear to be

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[3] George Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 273.

against the activities of the exiles."[4] However, the fact that there was no specific

rejection of violence in the documents of SASO and BPC probably meant that they

wanted to keep the option open.[5] In addresses to black audiences at the University of

Natal in 1972, for example, Biko emphasized the importance of revering African heroes

who fought against white conquest.[6] Moreover, his identification with James Cone and

Frantz Fanon, who explicitly advocated the use of any means necessary to destroy their

oppressors, tended to support the view that Biko was in favor of an armed struggle.

Further, other BPC leaders, including Aubrey Mokoape, urged that "we have only one

road, and that road is total unadulterated revolution."[7] Thus, SASO's nonviolence was

the first step to violent confrontation. As Biko put it, "we believe that there is a way of

getting across to where we want to go through peaceful means."[8]

Although both organizations pursued nonviolence, a close examination of

SNCC's nonviolence reveals some striking features. For instance, SNCC's nonviolence

policy had a soul-stirring quality, both for its practitioners and for many white observers,

that the more obviously conditional and pragmatic SASO's nonviolence normally failed

to project. SASO's initial avoidance of violence was a useful strategy to avoid direct

confrontation with the white people and to minimize state repression. Moreover, the use

[4] Anthony Marx, *Lessons of Struggle South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990* (New York:Oxford University Press, 1992), 75.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Donald Woods, *Biko* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), 47.

[7] Ibid., 46.

[8] Aelred Stubbs, ed., *Biko I Write What I Like* (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1978), 67.

of force would, perhaps, be inconsistent with the organization's basic ideological

consideration that "the limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom

they oppress."[9] For the same reason, it was, at first, considered an unlikely method that

could be used to persuade whites to abandon their power. Instead, whites' power would

be lost as soon as blacks had asserted their unwillingness to abide by it, regardless of the

intentions of those in power, or the balance of material forces controlled by the state and

its opponents. The only consistent justification for using violence would have been

Frantz Fanon's suggestion that "active aggression undermines the psychology of

submission," an argument that SASO initially ignored.[10] Thus, SASO's emphasis on

change through ideas reflected the organization's disregard or rejection not only of

Fanon's view of violence, but also of the tradition of Marxist thought. According to

Frank Chikane who as a student had been an early advocate of SASO—the absence of

class analysis was due in part to the fact that "we never saw books on Marx at the

universities."[11]

This initial lack of confrontational, violent, or anti-capitalist rhetoric by SASO,

though proved divisive, served, in the short term, the organization's purposes. The

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[9] Thomas Ranuga, "Frantz Fanon and Black Consciousness Movement in Azania," *Phylon* 47 (Fall 1986): 80.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 76.

avoidance of violence distinguished SASO from its exiled predecessors such as the ANC and PAC, and also lulled the state into a policy of benign neglect. [12]   The authorities' lack of concern about SASO, at first, may have been reinforced by the racist assumption that a movement without whites could never pose a serious threat to the state, and that the exclusion of whites would further divide the opposition. Expressing this state's attitude, Fanyana Mazibuko, SASO activist, contends, however, that the state was not just neglectful, but was actually supportive of the emergence of SASO and its Black Consciousness ideology as "consistent with its own separate development policies" and as an expression of a less confrontational, aspiring black middle class.[13] However, the resulting absence of early state attacks on SASO adherents created suspicions among the rapidly radicalizing students, though these were resolved as the students became more familiar with and aggressive toward SASO. In the meantime, between 1969 and 1971, the state's early inaction had given SASO the space it needed to develop.

Another similarity between SNCC and SASO was their emphasis on Black Power and Black Consciousness. SNCC emerged out of a student constituency buoyed in its numbers and expectations to achieve racial equality. As students, this group was inclined

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[12] Mokubung Nkomo, *Student Culture and Student Activism in Black South African* Universities: *The Roots of Resistance* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 122.

[13] Ibid., 268.

to be attracted to ideas and to be concerned mainly with the discrimination they suffered.

For example, in the mid 1960s, SNCC formulated and embraced an ideology—Black

Power—that stressed the importance of changing values, self-image, and psychology to

undermine the idea of ascribed inferiority, as compared with a more concrete form of

active confrontation aimed directly at altering material conditions. In their text, *Black*

Power: *The Politics of Liberation in America*, Charles Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael

said:

> The social and psychological effects on black people of all their degrading
> experiences are also very clear. From the time black people were
> introduced into this country, their condition has fostered human indignity
> and the denial of respect. Born into this society today, black people begin
> to doubt themselves, their worth as human beings. Self-respect becomes
> almost impossible.[14]

This is further reinforced by historian Kenneth Clark in his book *Dark Ghetto* when he

argues that "the preoccupation of many Negroes with hair straighteners, skin bleachers,

and the like illustrates this tragic aspect of American racial prejudice—Negroes have

come to believe in their own inferiority."[15] Thus, in order to achieve racial equality,

African Americans had to redefine themselves, set forth new values and goals, and

organize around them. In their books *Racial Crisis in America*, historians Lewis Killian

and Charles Grigg clearly express this view:

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[14] Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 39.

[15] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 64.

At the present time, the problem of race demands that the Negro foreswear his identity as a Negro. But for the lasting solution, the meaning of American must lose its implicit racial modifier, "white." Even without biological amalgamation, integration requires a sincere acceptance by all Americans that it is just as good to be a black American as to be a white American. Here is the crux of the problem of race relations—the redefinition of the sense of group position so that the status advantage of the white man is no longer an advantage, so that an American may acknowledge his Negro ancestry without apologizing for it…They [black people] live in a society in which to be unconditionally "American" is to be white, and to be black is a misfortune.[16]

SNCC's goal was psychological liberation as a necessary precondition for activism and liberation. This ideology was crystallized in the need to reshape racial identity by using that identity to revitalize mass opposition. Carmichael and Hamilton argue that "only when black people fully develop this sense of community, of themselves, can they begin to deal effectively with the problems of racism in this country. This is what we mean by a new consciousness; this is the vital first step."[17]

Correspondingly, SASO advocated that blacks' ideas about themselves could and must be changed before the material circumstances of oppression shaping those ideas could be addressed. Even more boldly, many SASO adherents believed that a change of self-concept was a prior condition to a change in material conditions. Ideas were considered sufficient means for reinvigorating and maintaining opposition, with even the

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[16] Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg, *Racial Crisis in America* (New York: Pretince-Hall, 1964), 108.

[17] Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 39.

more mundane tasks of community action described in terms of spreading consciousness

rather than more concrete forms of organization. SASO Manifesto of 1970 stated that:

> The black man must be liberated first from psychological oppression arising out of inferiority complex and, secondly, from physical oppression accruing out of living in a white racist society. Psychological liberation would create black solidarity and bargaining strength for the pursuance of its ultimate goal, which was, in short, political liberation.[18]

A greater weight placed on using material incentives and resources as a basis for

mobilization was seen by many in SASO as opening up the possibility of being mollified

with compromises and reforms. The goal of changing blacks' self-image was seen as the

initial step for ultimate political liberation. This concentration on ideas, described

alternatively as consistent with "African tradition" or as extreme naivety, remained

fundamental to SASO, thereby weakening interest in any prior planning when the state

would again fall back on the use of force throughout the 1970s. It is, however, difficult

to determine with certainty, whether this seemingly unrealistic conception of what was

possible in South Africa without violent confrontation reflected the honest beliefs of

Steve Biko and the founders of SASO or was it, on the contrary, an expedient cover for

the political organization of blacks under the watchful eyes of a government intensely

fearful of the revolutionary potential of African majority.

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[18] Barney Pityana, "SASO Policy Manifesto," in *African Perspectives in South Africa: A Collection of Speeches, Articles and Documents*, ed. Hendrik van der Merwe (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 120.

SASO's Policy Manifesto of 1970 featured the free appropriation of Black Power ideas and slogans, which strongly suggested that there were significant similarities in the situation of black people in the two societies and comparable solutions to their problems. Repeating almost verbatim a famous phrase from Carmichael and Hamilton's book *Black Power*, the SASO Manifesto accepted the premise that before black people should integrate, they must first close ranks in opposition to racism. This was proved, in 1970, by a member of the SASO executive who commented on a training seminar held in September of that year. He asserted:

> One group was asked to study the significance of the statement 'before entering the open society, we must first close our ranks.' This statement underlies the Black Power philosophy of people like Charles Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael. This particular group made the observation that an open society in this country can only be created by blacks, and as long as whites are in power, they shall seek to make it closed in one way or the other. We then defined what we meant by an open society...The group ended up by stating that the original statement should read "before creating an open society we must first close our ranks." The difference between the two statements is that in the first statement, the Afro-Americans accept that they will never be in a position to change the system in America, and thus adopt the approach that if you can't beat them, join them—but join them from a position of strength; whereas implicit in the latter statement is a hope to establish a completely new system at some stage...[19]

The preceding view was also reiterated by the SASO Newsletter of 1971 which observed that, although white liberals had their own role to play in opposition to apartheid, the role of black students was different. As it put it:

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[19] Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 276.

> We'll have, we believe, to close our ranks before entering the open
> society, not because we are racialists, as some will charge, but because our
> sympathetic white countrymen, sincere and well-meaning though they
> may be, have been rendered by circumstances unable to view the problem
> from the Black man's viewpoint.[20]

Furthermore, Mamphela Ramphele maintains that they were greatly influenced by

various writers including Frantz Fanon and Carmichael. In her own words:

> We used to have prties on weekends at which we drank beer and sat
> around in smoke-filled room of one of the members of the group, talking
> politics, listening to Malcolm's speeches on tape, discussing Stokely and
> Fanon's banned books which were secretly circulated amongst friends,
> sharing jokes, and also singing.[21]

In spite of this influence, Steve Biko, in his 1971 paper at the conference on

Student Perspectives on South Africa, discussed at some length the relationship of

SASO's Black Consciousness and Black Power and argued that the influence of the latter

on the former had been exaggerated. A more important impetus, he claimed, was the

attainment of independence by so many African states in so short a time.[22] The fact that

American terminology was used to express SASO activists' thoughts was, according to

Biko, merely because all new ideas seemed to get extensive publicity in the United

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[20] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1991), 289.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Arnold Milliard, *Black Consciousness in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), 86.

States. Years later, when the government brought SASO leaders to trial for celebrating

the victory of FRELIMO in Mozambique, Biko was called to the stand and questioned

closely about the origins of SASO. In answer to a question on the relationship of SASO

to Black Power, Biko asserted:

> I think the end result of Black Power is fundamentally different from the
> goal of SASO's Black Consciousness in this country, that is, Black
> Power…is the preparation of a group for participation in an already
> established society, a society which is essentially a majority society, and
> Black Power therefore in the States operates as a minority philosophy.
> Like you have Jewish power, Italian power, Irish power, and so on in the
> United States.[23]

Biko's understanding of Black power, which was probably derived mainly from

Carmichael and Hamilton's book, was actually a fairly accurate perception of the concept

that had survived the suppression and decline of the more radical movements. But in

distinguishing between the operation of Black Power within the context of a potentially

benign American ethnic pluralism and the implied claims of Black Consciousness as a

"majority philosophy" in an undemocratic South Africa, Biko shied away from drawing

the conclusion to which his logic pointed—that reform, persuasion, and peaceful

pressure, which might work in the United States, had little chance in South Africa.

Despite this, Biko was, indeed, influenced by SNCC and Black Power movements.

While Black Power was certainly a key contributing factor in the formulation of

SASO's ideology, the actual socio-economic experiences of apartheid in its uniqueness,

formed the basic context of its development. Historian John Kane-Berman writes that

"although influenced by American black power movement and writers like Frantz Fanon,

SASO's ideology of black consciousness is an indigenous phenomenon. It has grown in response to the situation to which black people have been relegated by white racism."[24] To say therefore, that SASO's ideology was purely imported would be to assign, not only much too little importance to the socio-economic conditions generated by apartheid, but also the experiences and political intuition of the organization's founders. At the same time, however, the influence of SNCC and its Black Power variant on the language and slant of SASO's ideology must be recognized and acknowledged if the developments of the late 1960s and early 1970s are to be understood in the total context of the black South African intellectual history.

Moreover, in South Africa, most events and ideological debates in America were filtered through the white press and radio in the process of being reported, with inevitable distortions; but by the late 1960s, some of the writings of activists such as Carmichael and James Forman became available in book form, sold openly in shops or brought into the country in small quantities by travelers. It was in particular the writings of Carmichael and James Forman, which began to inspire the interest and admiration of SASO activists and South African intellectuals in general. Thus, when SASO began to search for ideological reinforcement, some of its activists had already encountered these American writings. It should, however, be noted that although the reading of the literary works of Carmichael and James Foreman by SASO activists was clearly a stimulus, the adaptation of these African American concepts and slogans was selective rather than

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[23] Ibid., 278.
[24] John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981), 102.

wholesale, and the ideas appropriated were often reinterpreted to fit the South African

conditions. Historian Gail Gerhart corrects the record when she states that "never had

such deliberate and thorough-going effort been made to borrow and selectively adapt

foreign ideas in order to influence mass thinking."[25] In other words, SASO was neither a

carbon copy of SNCC nor its Black Power.

SASO's advocacy of self-help and "conscientization"—with clear concrete

program for political resistance—resembled the stance of SNCC activists in the United

States. Before the advent of Black Power in 1966, SNCC was engaged in programs such

as voter registration and freedom schools for the purpose of instilling pride and self-

esteem in order to advance the cause of freedom struggle. Similarly, SASO activists

seemed to be saying that for the time being black people should devote themselves

mainly to building their self-esteem. Very significantly, this emphasis on community

organizations and self-help projects, which was common to both organizations, had

empowering consequences. Black people were assured that they could do things on their

own. In South Africa, the communal resistance of the 1980s had, to some extent, its

origin in SASO's community organizing of the previous decade. In the United States, the

election of African Americans in increasing numbers to federal, state, and local offices

was the result, not simply of voting rights legislation, but also of Black Power's call for

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[25] Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 276.

mobilizing the vote behind black candidates and causes. On balance, therefore, both organizations had healthy and liberating consequences.

SASO and SNCC had a great deal in common, beyond the sharing of slogans such as "Black is beautiful." Initially, both organizations were closely allied with white student groups, and were active in multiracial politics. One issue that ultimately arose from this multiracial politics was the role of whites in Black self-determination. Parallel debates in both organizations developed as to whether black movements should welcome or exclude white who professed to be friendly to the cause of liberation. In both organizations, the rejection of alliances with white liberals and radicals was based on a conviction that the whites in such relationships tended to assume authority and behave paternalistically, thus preventing blacks from overcoming their inferiority feelings.[26]

In addition to such similarities in ideology and ethos, the leadership of the two movements came from similarly situated social groups—what might be described as the educated elite of a subordinated color caste. Dr. Prathia Hall-Wynn, a former SNCC activist, asserted that most of SNCC leaders "were sons and daughters of middle class families."[27] In the same vein, studies of the social composition of SASO through the 1960s have shown conclusively that the organization was dominated by members of the educated and economically privileged.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Prathia Hall-Wynn, "Faith Communities in the Civil Rights Struggle" (speech delivered at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, on 28 February 2000).

Generational difference was yet another commonality shared by both organizations. Student activism on the part of these young men and women was a challenge to adult politics, and against the status quo whom they were suspect. Moreover, the students believed that no one was prepared to listen to their grievances, so they felt compelled to shout, unleash rage, and show themselves clutched in a crisis against authority. As one Stanford student said, "we want so badly to have an impact on the society in which we live."[28] Speaking at Clark Atlanta University on February 28, 2000, Rev. Prathia Hall-Wynn maintained that "parents wanted us to go to college, they were afraid that we gonna be killed."[29]

Similarly, the formation of SASO, in 1969, marked a generational break with the past. Unlike many of their predecessors who formed the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), most of the SASO militants in the late 1960s and early 1970s were prepared to take risks and challenge both the parents and the government. Moreover, these young activists were products of the locations and townships created by racism. Many of these students managed to acquire university entrance largely through the efforts of their own labor during school vacations when they worked in factories and

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[28] Carson, *In Struggle SNCC*, 17.

[29] Prathia Hall-Wynn, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, GA., 29 February 2000.

even in mines.[30] It was through this situation that "studying lost any trace of the self-directed activity that it may once have been because it has become a form of labor."[31] In fact, there are a number of comments that give a glimpse both of the disillusionment of youth with their parents and their parents' lack of awareness thereof. A sixteen-year-old girl who testified before the Cillie Commission, which investigated causes of student unrest, in Cape Town said:

> When were born, we found our fathers struggling under the yoke of oppression…We the youth of South Africa, reject the subservience heritage that has been handed down to us…We cannot accept, as our fathers did, the whole system of apartheid.[32]

A similar observation was made in a letter to the South African newspaper *The World*:

> Our parents are prepared to suffer under the white man's rule. They have been living for years under these laws and they have become immune to them. They agree to them whether they are right or wrong. They refuse to cooperate with the new generation when they plead with them for cooperation. Parents claim students are bringing trouble, just because they are used to 'yes baas' to everything the white man says. Our parents lack unity and believe in the ethnic group laws that the white man is imposing on us. The future generation has no more confidence in them any more

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[30] Barney Pityana and others, eds., *Bounds of Possibilities*, 209.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 22.

because they have not objected to the unfavourable laws, thus the yoke automatically falls on the future generation.[33]

Thus students felt that they were fighting battles which should have been fought by their parents. Aggrey Klaaste, editor of *Weekend World,* berated his own generation (parents) in similar terms. His words, which were quoted in many newspapers throughout the country during the police raids in October and November 1976, deserve some lengthy quoting here:

> It may be that we have become so shell-shocked that nothing seems to touch us to the raw…So many parents these days are taking very calmly the horrid fact that their sons and daughters have fled the country. If parents do not shrug their shoulders with indifference when their sons and daughters are arrested, they do something very similar…They sigh wearily they shake their heads—and they trudge off to that miserable job, traveling in those miserable trains, as if the whole world was a bed of roses. I am able to trace this attitude to the early 1970. Early this year when the clouds of discontent were building ominously in our school-yards, we shook our heads and clicked our collective tongue. Then the kids boycotted classes. Still we shook our collective head lethargically and hummed our collective disquiet. Then the boycotts began to spread. The reaction was the same from the whole world of adulthood…The scenario began to worsen. We were frightened. We were shocked. But all we did was despair…This lens moves to the graveyards and this time some adults are in the line of fire. What a moan there was in Soweto! What a tearing out of hair and collective gnashing of teeth there was! And that was all. This time they were picking up our babies right in our homes. Oh what a clicking of tongues there was this time! So many frightened mothers and fathers dashing out in their cars to hide their children. My language spells it out very clearly—'Singa, magwala ' (we are cowards).[34]

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

Clearly, Klaaste seemed to ignore the fact that these parents were trying to protect their children. Some of them had tried and been defeated. Further, parents understood the ruthlessness of the apartheid's government and thus wanted to save their children's lives even if it meant condemning them to an inferior life. Moreover, the students were not parents. They could not understand the burden of parenthood under apartheid. In addition, the very structure of apartheid created unbearable conditions which promoted this generational conflict. Parents, due to the Group Areas Act, had to travel long distances from their workplaces. As a result, they left only in the morning and returned late in the evening, thus leaving their children too much time alone—without parental guidance and influence.[35] When children saw their parents, they, indeed, saw tired, depressed and oppressed people struggling under the weight of apartheid. They saw fathers and mothers who were inadequately paid, humiliated by authorities and cowed into acquiescence. This was hardly the environment in which to engender respect. For the U.S., students also saw their parents as submissive, but there was much more interaction between them.

One could safely argue that the formation of SASO and its subsequent protest activities was a challenge to both the authority of parents and the government. Steven Mufson, former journalist of *The New Republic* and *Business Week*, captures the mood so well when he asserts that black political leaders of the 1950s had demonstrated impatience and courage, but never the unadulterated rage that these youth possessed.

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[35] Ibid., 113.

Young students actually demonstrated that never again would they be as obedient as they were before.

Similarities in the ideological and social character of SNCC and SASO did not preclude significant structural differences between them, to say nothing as yet of the obvious contrast in situations. The most significant structural difference between SASO and SNCC was that, while the latter, which was initiated by college students in the South, was sustained by strong organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Christian Leadership Congress (SCLC), and various institutions at the community level, the former, for the most part, was strictly confined to the universities and did not have a large following among non-academic people. The one area SASO achieved something like mass involvement was in the cities of Eastern Cape where, as historian Tom Lodge has shown, it was able to build on the firm base provided by a local history of local mobilization and protest activity.[36] However, SASO did not have a network of movement centers like SNCC to buttress nonviolent campaigns in South Africa. Where such centers existed in South Africa, they were usually tied to labor

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[36] Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 324.

organizations and trade unions, as was the case with the Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU) created in 1972, through which students wanted to bring workers into SASO's fold. SASO members responded to this initiative with skepticism that uneducated workers would be receptive to the abstract ideas of Black Consciousness nor did they appreciate BAWU's explicit focus on class over race and its anticapitalist implications. Indeed they regarded the workers' organization as inconsistent with SASO's rejection of class analysis and with specific efforts to attract black entrepreneurs into SASO and to encourage black self-reliance in business through "Buy Black" campaigns.

Much as the Black Community Projects had set out to provide pilot projects rather than direct services, BAWU's efforts to organize workers remained more symbolic rather than substantive. Whereas class analysis implied organizing workers to confront their employers and the state, BAWU was avowedly nonconfrontational and became directly involved in only one of the hundreds of strikes held between 1972 and 1976.[37] Wage demands, generally the unions' basic "bread and butter" issue, were largely ignored. Instead BAWU concentrated on trying "to get rid of mental inferiority with emphasis on seminars and education on rights," which was more consistent with SASO's focus. In spite of this ideologically inspired constraint, as well as its lack of experience in organizing workers, BAWU succeeded in gaining more than one thousand dues-paying members.

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[37] Barney Pityana and others, *Bounds of Possibility*, 116.

In the case of SNCC, it was the grassroots people, black churches, and black colleges that sustained local activism. Since every southern city had black churches and many had some kind of higher educational colleges for blacks, such an institutional matrix for community protest was widely available, whereas black unions in South Africa were only established in only a few black townships of the 1960s. Furthermore, black South African townships of the 1960s were quite different from southern black urban communities. Their populations, which included a large number of transients and illegal residents, were less socially stable and significantly poorer; there were fewer well-established cultural or religious institutions; there was a proportionately much smaller middle class and relatively little black entrepreneurship or business activity.[38]

Besides differing structurally, the two student organizations also diverged with regard to their view of consciousness. The idealist view that consciousness precedes praxis was more clearly and insistently affirmed in SASO than in SNCC—at least in the early and classic formulations of SASO's black consciousness philosophy. The very difference in the names generally assigned to their ideologies, Black Power and Black Consciousness, suggests a muted philosophical difference. In SNCC, the growth of black pride and a positive sense of identity was not divorced conceptually in most formulations from the actual exercise of black power. Awareness of a positive black identity was indeed a precondition for community organization and the application of political pressure, but consciousness was expected to be translated quickly into forceful action,

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[38] Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism*, 129.

and the exercise of power, in turn, was supposed to be essential for the full development of consciousness.

With SASO's ideology, however, consciousness was divorced more sharply from political power. This could be attributed to the fact that black South Africans had few resources they could mobilize. It was also the reason that the South African government remained convinced that the organization was a purely intellectual and cultural one which was not actually proposing any kind of political resistance. The Snyman Commission, which was appointed by the government to investigate, reported:

> SASO has some positive features. The idea that the Black man should help himself, that students should go out and serve their own people, that the Black man should build his future by his own efforts, is surely not wrong and is compatible with the approach of the whites. The Black man has after all been encouraged to be himself, to be proud of what is his own and not to be a Black White. If he now in fact develops some pride, there is no need for alarm.[39]

Clearly, therefore, SASO was regarded by the South African government as a healthy development and given the same recognition as its ethnically defined counterparts (NUSAS for the English-speaking and the Afrikaanse Studentebond for the Afrikaans-speaking students).

Another notable difference was the division of these organizations into two factions, namely, the separatist nationalists and ethnic pluralists. The pluralists such as John Lewis of SNCC and others were likely to believe that integration and mobilization

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[39] Ibid., 95.

of blacks as a pressure group could reform America's liberal capitalist system; the

separatists such as Carmichael wanted to secede from it culturally and, if possible,

physically. For some, cultural autonomy was crucial, almost an end in itself; for others it

was a diversion from the politics of making a revolution against American capitalism.

Carmichael and Hamilton write:

> It is absolutely essential that black people know their history, that they
> know their heritage. Too long have they been kept in submission by being
> told that they had no culture, no manifest heritage, before they landed on
> the slave auction blocks in this country. If black people are to know
> themselves as a vibrant, valiant people, they must know their roots. With
> this will come a clearer notion of the role black Americans can play in this
> world.[40]

SASO, by contrast, was relatively unified in policy and leadership. However,

SASO was not entirely monolithic; differences were developing even before the Soweto

crisis in 1976 between those who were beginning to perceive that apartheid also had a

profound class dimension.[41] For instance, early disagreements in SASO were raised

most publicly, if not for the first time, by Diliza Mji, president of SASO in 1975. Mji's

father, president of the Transvaal ANC Youth League in the 1950s, had himself created

considerable controversy as an early advocate of class analysis, establishing a family

tradition of sorts maintained by his son. However, Diliza Mji argued that his interest in

issues of class was not preordained, but instead was the result of his own readings at the

time in the Marxixt/Leninist tradition, popular discussion of FRELIMO's nonracial

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[40] Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 39.

[41] *Marx, Lessons of Struggle*, 76.

position in Mozambique, and observation of the 1973 strikes in his hometown in Durban, which raised "certain questions we could not answer" within SASO framework. Mji's rhetorical attack on SASO's exclusive focus on race was launched in early 1976. In his presidential address to this meeting, Mji asserted:

> The need...to look at our struggle not only in terms of color interests but also in terms of class...Apartheid as an exploitative system is part of a bigger whole, capitalism. Having taken into account the socio-economic factors affecting any person involved in a struggle for change, then it is logical to expect a group action is more effective than individual actions. Group action means organization of the people having common values and aspirations. We are aware that times have changed, therefore having a greater need to be more organized than before.[42]

In spite of this, there were no dramatic schisms or major disagreements within the organization before its suppression in 1977. This difference reflects the contrast between protest in a liberal democracy with constitutional protection of civil liberties and in a state that permitted some freedom of speech to its white citizens but tried to maintain totalitarian control over black expression.

One other important difference between SNCC and SASO was in media and press coverage. In the United States, for example, SNCC and Black Power advocates had many forums; they were interviewed on television and radio, wrote articles for prominent liberal journals, had their utterances reported (sometimes accurately) in daily newspapers, and published their books with major commercial publishers. Thus, the chance to write and speak freely invited a diversity of views about how best to respond to the post-civil rights predicament of blacks and provided ample opportunity for ideological and tactical

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[42] Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 175.

disagreements. However, this did not mean that SNCC' path to racial equality was a bed of roses. SNCC, like any other civil rights group, was a victim of FBI and police harassment, "dirty tricks," and even murderous attacks. These assaults occurred after the organization had worked out and promulgated its voter education drives in areas such as Mississippi in 1964.

SASO, by contrast, received relatively little attention from the white South African press and the international media. The possibly decisive effects of contrasting press or media treatment suggests that differences in the nature of the organizations may tell us less about why they ultimately succeeded or failed than we are likely to learn from examining their external circumstances—what they were up against.[43] SASO adherents also knew from the beginning that advocacy of violence or even militant nonviolence would lead to immediate proscription. The organization, as a result, had to walk a tightrope between accommodation to the regime and revolutionary assertion; this balancing act limited the scope of discourse and action. Part of the explanation why SASO relied so heavily on churches and church-sponsored organizations as a vehicle for its message was that religious expression was less closely monitored than other forms. For instance, antiracist white ministers like the Methodist Basil Moore, the renegade Dutch Reform *predikant* (church minister) Beyers Naude, the Anglican priest Aelred Stubbs were strong supporters and major facilitators of SASO. Moreover, the ban on cooperation with white liberals did not extend to radical clergymen who saw SASO's

[43] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 272.

ideology of black consciousness as a religious move to purge the church of the sin of white supremacy.

A student organization such as SASO was easier to repress than the more decentralized SNCC. The South African government was, with ease, able to hobble SASO by banning or arresting its top leaders, including Steve Biko. In the American South in the 1960s, it was difficult for the federal government to suppress all of SNCC's grassroots activities in toto.

From a more conventional and pragmatic point of view, however, SNCC was a greater success than SASO. SNCC succeeded in overcoming legalized segregation by appealing to a similar, color-blind ideology of human rights that it shared with white Americans to constitute a working coalition in 1964 and 1965. However, the organization's failure to move beyond formal rights to substantive equality provoked the Black Power reaction. This Black Power version, especially in its political manifestation, clearly increased the ability of blacks to advance their own interests and defend themselves against racism.

SASO, by contrast, failed to exert sufficient pressure to make apartheid unworkable. It failed in practical terms because the white minority government of the 1970s was unwilling to allow blacks to acquire the kind of bargaining power that might bring genuine reform, and had the strength and ruthlessness to prevent it. Consequently, the organization was unable to move decisively beyond the repeal of apartheid in order to achieve the goal of equal opportunities for blacks and whites. Moreover, SASO's ideology was eclipsed by Charterism, not because the African National Congress could

offer the necessary strategic advantages, but also because the international pressure,

which the liberation struggle needed to help make the government receptive to basic

change, could not readily be brought to bear on behalf of the organization that seemed to

be espousing black chauvinism.

However, SASO was not without political consequences. The circulation of its

ideas beyond the colleges and universities to the high school students of Soweto helped to

set off the revolt of 1976 during which students revolted against the government because

it required them to have instruction in the hated oppressor language of Afrikaans. [44]

Although the uprising centered on the language issue, there were various grievances with

Bantu education, which included poor instruction, overcrowded schools, inadequate

funding for African education, and limited employment opportunities after graduation.[45]

Historian Hirson Baruch writes that:

> The widespread opposition to the new regulation, which brought together
> conservatives and radicals, teachers and taught, indicated that the many
> strands of opposition—based on very different premises—were uniting
> against something more than instruction over language.[46]

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Milliard, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 108.

[46] Hirson Baruch, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution* (London: Zed Press, 1979), 145.

When asked about the success of SASO, Biko summed it up in one word, "Soweto!" Though the causal relationship between SASO and the Soweto uprising was not clearcut, it was believed that SASO's philosophy of black consciousness instilled in the Soweto youth a pride and self-confidence to dare defy the government's new educational policies. Nengwekhulu puts this clearly that "the uprising started in Soweto because of the diffusion of black consciousness there: the kind of leadership there was more radical than the leadership throughout the whole country."[47]

Both SNCC and SASO also strongly believed that blacks were held in subjugation not merely by force but by their own sense of impotence and inferiority. Consequently, the primary task of these organizations was to conscientize black people, which meant giving them a sense of pride or a belief in their own strength and worthiness. The goal was mental liberation as a necessary and possibly sufficient precondition for physical liberation. Only in this way could the psychologically debilitating effects of white domination be overcome.

In conclusion, black power, ideology versus praxis; the need to recognize self-serving definitions of good and evil; the desirability of destroying pretense and polarizing racial conflict as a preclude to radical change; the rejection of integration and its gradualistic solutions designed by the powerful to perpetuate their control and blunt anger of the oppressed; a mistrust of the liberals anxious to step in the shoes of the exploiter; the pursuance of Gandhian nonviolence policy to force fundamental changes in

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[47] Mufson, *Fighting Years*, 22.

America—all these features of SNCC and its Black Power variant enter into the writings of SASO activists. This clearly indicates that there was a mutual awareness and cross-fertilization of ideas between SASO and SNCC. This ideological congruence stemmed from various sources.

Firstly, Jim Crow and apartheid policies were the root cause of alienation and discontent among American and South African students. In both societies, the protesters were denied the suffrage, and were able to argue that their struggle to exert pressure was justified by their lack of access to forms of political expression. Secondly, black students in both societies were politically spurred by the struggle of Africans throughout the world against colonization, disfranchisement, and segregation of people designated as black. Consequently, black students identified with and inspired one another. SNCC delegations' tour to Africa, and Biko and SASO activists' support for FRELIMO independence celebrations in Mozambique in 1975 were concrete testimony of this black internationalism.

Although SNCC and SASO shared many similarities, these organizations were not identical. Instead, they were like two trains running parallel to each other for freedom. Moreover, there were few formal linkages and cross oaths between these organizations. Nevertheless, the students became conscious of each other's problems and sympathized with each other. It was inevitable that the two most historically significant organizations would draw sustenance from one another.

That these students influenced each other was surprising given the fact that the contexts in which they operated were, in some ways, different. As the educator Mokubung Nkomo puts "it is quite remarkable that phenomena so distant geographically could have so similar philosophical outlooks and rhetoric."[48]

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[48] Nkomo, *Student Culture and Activism*, 175.

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