

## **The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**

*1960–1966*

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Groups of primarily college students protested segregation laws in Southern communities. SNCC began with an \$800 grant from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). At a SCLC meeting, students were asked to discuss their experiences with racism. They also were asked to discuss measures people could take to remedy racism. The conference was at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1960. Many civil rights groups attended. Ella Baker, a director in the SCLC, began to support SNCC. She wanted to make it an independent organization.

Members of SNCC also confronted the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). They did not tolerate mistreatment of African Americans and whites that supported the blacks. In one instance, the KKK attacked whites and blacks on the Freedom Rides in the South. SNCC volunteers traveled to the South to protest this occurrence. They put themselves at high risk for an attack. President John F. Kennedy provided them with federal troops for protection. SNCC also organized voter registration efforts for African Americans. Bob Moses headed the first project. Whites attacked the black activists, and volunteers were injured and killed. Even with the aid of the Voter Education Project, hate groups and the KKK hampered SNCC's voter registration efforts.

SNCC then focused its attention on the March on Washington in 1963. African Americans believed the Kennedy administration had helped blacks to obtain jobs, but did not provide them protection while they were working. After the march, SNCC refocused its efforts on voting rights. In 1963, SNCC organized the first Freedom Ballot, a mock election to determine how many African Americans would vote if they were given the opportunity. The Mississippi Summer Project, or Freedom Summer, followed in 1964. SNCC helped African Americans in the South register to vote. However, Southern officials always rejected African-American voter applications. Tragedy struck when the KKK murdered SNCC volunteers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Freedom Schools also were established. SNCC workers taught children their rights as American citizens. Freedom Schools helped to prepare African-American children for the future. SNCC helped to establish the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Its goal was to gain representation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. However, the Johnson administration hampered MFDP's efforts. Alabama Governor George Wallace provided political support for President Johnson, and he opposed the MFDP's representation. At the convention, the police assaulted MFDP leader, Fannie Lou Harper and other members of the party as they attempted to be seated. Johnson offered the group two non-voting seats at the convention as a compromise. The MFDP rejected what they believed to be an insulting offer and chose not to participate in the

1964 Democratic National Convention. Many African Americans lost faith in the United States government.

To save face, President Johnson supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both were very broad in power, restating the legal equality of all American citizens regardless of race and establishing a legal framework to protect those rights. Both SNCC and the SCLC participated on a march to Montgomery, Alabama, where racial hate groups such as the KKK attacked the peaceful protesters. A faction of SNCC members was weary of the nonviolent protests Martin Luther King, Jr. advocated. Some believed African Americans needed to take power by any means necessary, or at least defend themselves against attacks. The 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles convinced many SNCC members that the time for nonviolent protest was over.

This led to a division in SNCC, with one side still holding true to the nonviolent forms of protests and the other advocating that blacks rise up against whites in the community who denied them their rights. Stokely Carmichael led the more militant African Americans. Carmichael became SNCC's leader in May 1966. Carmichael stated that violence was the only answer to overcome the oppression African Americans faced in the United States. He claimed violence was "as American as apple pie," and cited how quickly and often groups such as the KKK were willing to use violence against black people. He called for the emergence of Black Power in America. Carmichael eventually resigned from SNCC to join the Black Panther Party. This split caused SNCC to fade into obscurity.

**After completing the Guided Reading, answer the following questions. Be sure to include textual evidence to support your responses.**

- 1. What was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating **Committee** (SNCC)?**
- 2. How did members of SNCC confront the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)?**
- 3. What happened when African Americans first attempted voter registration in the South?**
- 4. What tragedy occurred during the Mississippi Summer Project?**
- 5. What was the goal of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)?**

**6. Why did some SNCC members question the effectiveness of nonviolent protest?**

**7. Who was the leader of SNCC's militant faction? What were his views on violence and oppression?**

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1. What was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)?

***The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. SNCC volunteers protested segregation laws in Southern communities.***

2. How did members of SNCC confront the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)?

***They did not tolerate mistreatment of African Americans and whites who supported African Americans. In one instance, the KKK attacked whites and blacks who were on the Freedom Rides in the South. SNCC volunteers traveled to the South to protest this attack. President John F. Kennedy provided them with protection by federal troops.***

3. What happened when African Americans first attempted voter registration in the South?

***Bob Moses headed the first project. Racial violence led to several injuries and some deaths. Even with the aid of the Voter Education Project, hate groups such as the KKK hampered SNCC's efforts; and voter registration programs were put on hold.***

4. What tragedy occurred during the Mississippi Summer Project?

***Tragedy struck during when the KKK murdered SNCC volunteers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman near Philadelphia, Mississippi.***

5. What was the goal of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)?

***MFDP's main goal was to gain representation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.***

6. Why did some SNCC members question the effectiveness of nonviolent protest?

***SNCC and the SCLC participated on a march to Montgomery, Alabama. Hate groups such as the KKK and the White Citizen Council attacked the peaceful protesters. By now, some members of SNCC were unsure nonviolent protest was effective.***

7. Who was the leader of SNCC's militant faction? What were his views on violence and oppression?

***Stokely Carmichael led the militant faction of SNCC. He became SNCC's leader in May 1966. Carmichael stated that violence was the only way to overcome the oppression African Americans faced. He believed African Americans should embrace Black Power. Carmichael eventually resigned from SNCC to join the Black Panther Party, and SNCC faded into obscurity.***