

The Life of Anne Braden, Part Two: a Life in the Movement

By Lynn Burnett

As Anne Braden crisscrossed the nation raising support to free her husband, the love of her life was unbeknownst to her locked away in solitary confinement. Although they wrote to each other often, Carl worried that Anne already had far too many burdens to bear, and therefore didn't reveal how difficult his circumstances truly were. Carl used his time in solitary to develop an ascetic quality in himself, composing and reflecting on ethical goals. Anne meanwhile cultivated a large, national network of supporters through her travels, writings and journalistic connections. Civil rights activists and labor organizers across the country understood that if the Bradens could be charged with being part of a Communist conspiracy simply for helping a Black family move into a White neighborhood, that they could be charged with subversion for their activities as well. Freeing Carl Braden thus became a major cause: although his bail was the highest in Kentucky's history, it was raised in seven months. Carl was released in the summer of 1955. Eight months later, the Supreme Court ruled that the state sedition laws that had been used to target the Bradens were unconstitutional. All charges were dropped. The prosecutor of the Bradens, Scott Hamilton, had hoped to rise to fame through building a sensational anti-Communist case. He instead found his career discredited. A few years later, he put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

Anne and Carl could not, however, simply return to their old lives. They were now highly public and ruthlessly demonized figures throughout the White South. In order to stay safe and be in a supportive environment, they moved into a Black neighborhood, where their children wouldn't have to see their parents being constantly ostracized. However, the very public nature of their demonization affected their ability to become involved in the civil rights movement as it began to ignite. Carl had been released just months before the Montgomery bus boycott began, and although the Bradens attended a few of the early meetings, their continuing legal battles and dire economic circumstances took all of their energy and prevented a high level of involvement. Once the case was dropped and the Bradens had more energy to put into the movement, they found that many civil rights activists were wary of associating with them. Even with the case dismissed, the Bradens were still widely viewed as Communist subversives, and the early civil rights movement was desperately trying to prove itself to have no such affiliations. The Bradens therefore developed a practice of playing behind-the-scenes roles and staying out of sight.

The SCEF: Rallying White Southern Support

In 1957, shortly after the Montgomery bus boycott ended, the Bradens joined the Southern Conference Education Fund, or SCEF. The SCEF was an organization dedicated to building White southern support for integration, and had thrown their full support behind the Bradens during their sedition trial. Its monthly newsletter, the *Southern Patriot*, was subscribed to by supporters of civil rights across the

nation. During Carl's incarceration, the *Patriot* had published articles by Anne and had helped her gain a national audience. The executive director, Jim Dombrowski, was a somewhat saintly theologian in Anne's eyes. He became a significant mentor to her, and a lifelong friend to Carl.

The SCEF was suffering in 1957. The *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court ruling of 1954, coupled with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, had led to a massive White backlash. In the context of this backlash, White southerners who had previously spoken in support of integration now felt forced into silence. Previously viewed as eccentrics, the cost of speaking out in an era in which segregation seemed seriously under threat now included character assassination, social isolation, economic retaliation, and physical threats. In this context, support for SCEF evaporated. The readership of the *Southern Patriot* plummeted. Dombrowski told Anne that "SCEF must expand or die." The Bradens became essential to keeping the organization alive.

The SCEF hired Anne and Carl to scour the South for potentially supportive Whites, and to find ways to help them step forward. In Anne's words, "I knew white people were there somewhere, and we had to get to them. A lot of the whites who had been active earlier in the South had been caught in the witch hunts and run out." The president of the SCEF, Aubrey Williams, put it this way: "I know there are more white people around the South that think like we do, but you have to get out and find them. They are not going to come to us. We need to go out and beat the bushes and find people, and that's what we want you and Carl to do." Aubrey also gave Anne a warning: "...this whole question of how you can get white people in the South to really deal with the issue of segregation has broken the hearts of most people who have tried. I just hope it doesn't break yours."

And so, to use Anne's words, the Bradens became "travelling agitators." As they travelled, they found that many sympathetic White Southerners were older, had been active in the pre-McCarthy, New Deal era, and now felt a sense of isolation and futility as White Southerners became more reactionary. However, this older generation also had a racially paternalistic attitude and a belief in "gradual" racial progress that was unacceptable to the new generation of racial justice activists, and especially to African Americans during the civil rights years. Although it was dismaying to discover that these were often the most progressive White Southerners, SCEF went to work providing them with a desperately needed support network and a hard-to-find extended community by creating mailing lists and regional gatherings. It was also critical for White Southern supporters of integration to develop connections with local Black leadership, which the regional gatherings served to do as well. These gatherings emerged as critical spaces in a segregated landscape: it was here that many African Americans encountered the first White people they had ever met who were committed to racial justice; and where many White people had their first opportunities to hear Black people speak frankly about race relations and what they needed from their potential White allies.

Although often frustrated even by those White southerners who supported integration, Anne was simultaneously empowered by building ties with this primarily older generation. Many of them had experienced waves of racial progress and repression throughout their lives, and they provided Anne with a deepened sense of southern social justice history and an empowering sense of being part of a lineage. Virginia Durr played this role for Anne more than anyone else. A generation older than Anne, Virginia was a White Southern aristocrat whose husband, Clifford Durr, had worked in the Roosevelt administration during the New Deal. The couple lived in Montgomery, and Clifford had played an important background role in the Montgomery bus boycott by offering expert legal advice and mentorship to the Black lawyers who represented Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and others.

Even with their economic and social privilege and proximity to power, the Durrs still experienced intense isolation as White Southern supporters of the civil rights movement. Virginia – someone who loved throwing fancy salons and dinner parties, and who now deeply missed being able to do – combatted her isolation partly by keeping up a voluminous correspondence with like-minded Whites across the nation. Writing to a friend in the fall of 1959, Virginia said, “I have made a new friend, Anne Braden... Who sees life in Alabama as I do, but with even deeper insight, much deeper I think. She is a lovely and charming and gentle person with a brilliant mind and is such a comfort to me.” A few months later, she wrote: “Anne Braden is arriving here on Sunday to stay with me, and Mrs. Martin Luther King is having a big female party for her.” And another letter days later: “Anne Braden has been here recently and she is a perfect darling and I love her and I think she is a very good writer too. After she was gone, the Attorney General came out with a huge warning to all the people of Alabama to beware of her as she was so dangerous.” Virginia and Anne soon became fast friends.

Virginia told Anne stories about how White people in Montgomery who dared to consider integration were hounded: they were constantly followed as they drove; they received threatening phone calls; and their names, phone numbers and businesses were published in the papers. The story of Juliette Morgan had an especially strong impact on Anne: after expressing her support for the civil rights movement, Morgan found herself berated by her friends and family. Everyone distanced themselves from her, and even those who supported her position refused to reach out for fear of retaliation themselves. After a few years of intense isolation, Morgan took her own life. In a letter to Virginia Durr, Anne reflected: “I could so easily have been Juliette Morgan... There was so much in her early life that was just like mine.” If Anne hadn’t gone away to college and discovered fellow thinkers and mentors; if she had expressed such views without having any supportive community; despair might have completely consumed her as well. Anne wrote that being attacked on a daily basis was difficult, but even worse was living in a world where everyone around you constantly told you that you were wrong. In such an environment, it was only having a community of support that allowed a potential

White antiracist to not succumb to doubting their own convictions and understandings, and wondering if perhaps they were wrong after all.

The Southern Patriot

When the Bradens joined the SCEF, Carl did most of the travelling at first while Anne stayed home with the children and worked to revive the SCEF's *Southern Patriot*. As the new editor, Anne essentially turned the monthly newsletter into a report about what she felt were the most important developments in race relations that month. To facilitate this goal, she subscribed to Black newspapers from across the nation, in order to keep up with events in various localities. She then used her role as writer and editor to interview and thereby build connections with key figures in local movements. Whenever Anne wrote about local actions, she made sure that the community received extra copies of the paper, because she knew that it made people feel more empowered when they saw that their actions were newsworthy.

Anne made a special effort to highlight White actions, partly so that Black people could recognize that White support was in fact a possibility and a potential game-changer, and partly because antiracist White Southerners usually felt isolated, invisible, and demoralized. In Anne's words, "If whites were doing anything, we said so. Once they saw something in print [and realized] it was significant enough for somebody to notice it, that made it more likely that they could keep struggling." The Bradens were critical of the leftist press that wrote endlessly about the White backlash to civil rights, but focused almost no attention on those Whites who were standing up for racial justice. Without those stories to inspire potentially supportive White people to stand up; the feeling of futility was strengthened. Anne's journalism was an excellent example of how good reporting could bring new people into the struggle, and could keep those struggles alive.

It also kept people alive... literally. For example, when leading Birmingham activists Fred and Ruby Shuttlesworth tried to enroll their children in an all-White school; Fred was severely beaten and Ruby was stabbed. Fred Shuttlesworth commented, "if it had not been for Carl and Anne Braden, I'm sure I would have been dead." Instead, he lived to facilitate the famed 1963 showdown, when high-pressure fire hoses and attack dogs were loosed upon Black students. In the years leading up to that, it was often the Bradens who got the news out about the violence the Shuttlesworths faced; the Bradens who could tap into their national media network and make sure that what was happening to Black people in Birmingham was getting media attention in the North, even when papers in the South refused to report on it. Like many others, Fred felt that without Anne shining her journalistic light on the violence he faced, he would have been relegated to a darkness in which he could have been killed and few would have ever known or cared. Anne's powerful and honest portrayals of Black freedom fighters and civil rights actions made the *Southern Patriot* essential reading for anyone interested in the movement. She tripled the amount of subscriptions in just two years.

Building Ties with Black Freedom Fighters

As the Bradens sought to organize Whites, they simultaneously worked to deepen their ties with Black civil rights leaders. Fred Shuttlesworth became their first major supporter. In Shuttlesworth's words, "white people were the missing link" in bringing meaningful racial change to the South. Like the Bradens and the SCEF, Shuttlesworth believed that White Southerners needed a support system to break through their isolation. He believed that the anticommunist hysteria was being used to silence potentially supportive White voices, and that finding White allies necessitated fighting the political repression they faced, which would allow them to speak up. Anne's first meeting with Shuttlesworth was at a hotel, where he was temporarily living after White supremacists had bombed his home. When they got in a cab together to go visit his church, Shuttlesworth whispered to her with a twinkle in his eye: "You know this is illegal? We aren't supposed to be riding in a cab together." She immediately loved his mischievous and courageous spirit. Shuttlesworth joined the SCEF board and became the most important early link between SCEF and the Black freedom struggle. E.D. Nixon, the brilliant organizer from Montgomery and Rosa Parks' primary political partner, soon joined as well.

In September of 1957, Anne met Martin Luther King himself, at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Founded in 1932, Highlander was originally a training ground for labor organizers before switching its focus to racial justice in the early 1950s. The school's co-founder, Myles Horton, was raised in an impoverished White sharecropping family in Tennessee, and originally envisioned the school as a place of self-empowerment for the Appalachian poor... a place that would help them discover the means to combat the injustices they faced in life. Horton emphasized the importance of anticipating movements and laying the groundwork for their success. Anticipating the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling a year in advance – as well as the subsequent escalation both of the civil rights struggle and the White backlash – he began shifting the orientation of the school towards racial justice. Highlander thus became a unique Southern space, bringing people of all races together to discuss the intertwining problems of poverty and racism.

During his visit to Highlander, King expressed that he needed a ride to a Baptist convention he was attending in Louisville; where Anne happened to live. She offered him a ride, and they entered into a long, meandering conversation as they drove through the twisting mountain roads of eastern Tennessee and into Kentucky. Martin later told his wife Coretta that he was blown away by Anne: he had never before imagined that a White southern woman could so thoroughly break from her past. She was a symbol of possibility; a living, breathing example of southern whiteness liberated from the shackles of prejudice. Martin dove into her writings and wrote to her that he was deeply moved by them. Anne and Carl befriended Martin and Coretta over the next few years, and the Bradens would sometimes stay at the King's home in Atlanta during their travels across the South. As Martin's prominence rose, enemies of the movement often pointed to his connection with the Bradens as proof that he associated with and was influenced by communists. His

own advisors worried that his association with people widely believed to be subversives would damage the reputations both of King and of the movement, and urged Martin to break his ties with the Bradens. He refused.

As Anne deepened her ties with Martin Luther King, she also built a strong friendship with Ella Baker... the director of King's new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC.) Anne had met Ella briefly in 1955, during her travels to gain support to overthrow Carl's sedition charge, but the two women had not stayed in touch. Those were the months leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott. At the time, Ella Baker was based in New York, working closely with Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison in an organization called *In Friendship*, which focused on fundraising for civil rights actions as they erupted in the South. The hope was that with outside support, one of these actions would grow into a movement – which of course happened in Montgomery. *In Friendship* provided crucial outside support for the boycott, during the first months before it gained national attention. Like her colleagues Rustin and Levison, Baker helped to create the SCLC after the boycott ended, with the hope that the organization could help facilitate “many Montgomerys” throughout the South. As a master organizer, Baker became the director of the almost entirely male, ministerial organization. King hesitated to hire her, knowing that the other members expected the director to be a man: but Rustin and Levison – who had both become highly trusted advisors to King during the boycott – told him that if he was serious about the SCLC, there was only one person for the job. Baker would subsequently become a fierce critic of the misogyny she encountered amongst King and his colleagues, as well as of the homophobia King's colleagues showed towards Rustin.

Baker also famously critiqued King's charismatic leadership style, which she believed drew energy away from the development of the kind of grassroots leadership that actually empowered communities and sustained movements. When the sit-ins erupted in 1960, Ella Baker saw a golden opportunity to build an organization that focused on developing many leaders at the local level: it was she who hosted the famous gathering that brought together student leaders from many cities across many states; leading to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Baker left the SCLC soon afterwards to take on a background mentorship role, supporting the students in building what soon became the most important civil rights organization in terms of grassroots leadership: SNCC.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

By the time the sit-ins erupted, Anne Braden and Ella Baker had become very close, sometimes even retreating to a wooded cabin together to sip whisky, discuss life, and allow their thoughts to settle and coalesce so they could re-enter the movement at a higher level and stay with it for the long-haul. Ella wrote to Anne about her high hopes for the student gathering, which brought together 200 student leaders from 12 southern states. Anne and Ella were of the same mind regarding the students: in Anne's words, it was important to “go easy on the advice and heavy on the

assistance,” in order to gain their trust and allow them to cultivate their own ideas and actions and fully step into leadership. Anne had just had a new baby and was unable to attend the historic gathering from which SNCC emerged; if she had attended she would have been one of only a dozen Whites.

Anne was, however, able to attend SNCC’s second mass meeting, in October of 1960; during which she stayed in Martin and Coretta’s home. In the words of her biographer Catherine Fosl, Braden struck many of the students as a kind of “renegade southern lady”: she was soft-spoken and ladylike; she always wore dresses and was well put together... and yet she possessed a fierce flame of resistance. Although on the surface she appeared a respectable southern lady to the core, she also totally defied gender norms by travelling alone, throwing herself into passionate public debates, and standing up to powerful men. Once, while at a strategy session in the King families home, Anne demanded that Coretta be included: Martin was surprised, but he immediately acquiesced. Her respectable-yet-independent-and-rebellious persona was attractive to many young female freedom fighters – both Black and White – and Anne quickly became a role model for many of them. In the words of the White Southern Freedom Rider Joan Browning, Anne “showed me that one could be a loyal Southerner and a respectable woman while fighting for social justice. The fact that Anne was Southern to the bone and had that wonderful slow Southern speech helped me redefine myself.” The fact that the Bradens clearly had the respect of luminaries like Shuttlesworth, King, and Baker also deeply impressed the students, and helped them reconceptualize the role of Whites in the Black freedom struggle.

Many SNCC students came to know Anne through her personal interviews with them, as she documented this new phase of the movement in detail. Whereas the mainstream press focused on the sensationalism of mass arrests and White supremacist brutality, the *Southern Patriot* reported the intimate stories of how students conceptualized, built, and sustained a movement... from their own perspective, and through their own voices. In the famed SNCC organizer Julian Bond’s words, “Anne helped to define who we were to the *Patriot* audience and to a broader audience as well. That was very helpful to us because it was the definition we held of ourselves as this vanguard challenging not just the segregation system but older organizations too, like the NAACP.”

Anne and Carl were also critical in teaching media skills to SNCC members. They introduced them to their vast media connections... to the 320 news outlets the Bradens were connected to, including religious, labor, agricultural, student, liberal and left publications. These connections helped SNCC get their stories out. The SNCC students also had little experience with fundraising; once again, the Braden network proved crucial. In Julian Bond’s words, the Bradens “widened our list of political and fundraising contacts and exposed us to journalists and writers whom we didn’t know about.” Once the violent drama of the Freedom Rides broke out in the spring of 1961, the images of burning buses turned SNCC into a household name

that was capable of raising far more funds than the Bradens and the SCEF. The Bradens, however, were crucial in the first year of the organization's existence.

Anne's primary goal with SNCC was to build White Southern student leadership and support. At Anne's urging, SCEF set aside funds for a new staff position at SNCC. The position was for a White student, whose task would be to travel the South, organizing other White students on college campuses. It was a dangerous job – in fact, it would take Anne a full year to find someone to fill the position. She finally found her man in Bob Zellner, a working-class college student and former street fighter who had been raised by a reformed Klansman. Zellner had been run out of town for his support of civil rights and felt he had little to lose: he thus reported to SNCC headquarters in Atlanta in September, 1961. Going onto White campuses where his message was not welcomed, he had to find ways to function in secret. Realizing that he needed to prove himself to dubious members of SNCC, he often put his body on the line and repeatedly risked his life, taking many brutal beatings to protect his Black comrades. In doing so, Zellner built a deep camaraderie with his fellow SNCC organizers. This protégé of Anne Braden was the very last White person to leave SNCC when it became an all-Black organization in the late sixties: some Black Power militants in the organization argued that he alone should be allowed to stay, but Zellner left of his own accord. He had, however, only held the White student organizing position for two years; his friend Sam Shirah had then taken over. Shirah had more success than Zellner: by 1963, following the brutal Freedom Rides and infamous footage from Birmingham, it became easier to mobilize White Southern students. They became a small but noticeable presence amongst civil rights workers.

Continuing Attacks

During this entire time, the Bradens had remained under attack. When they emerged as regional organizers for integration through their work with SCEF, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) – which equated civil rights work with a communistic undermining of the proper order of society – turned its gaze on the Bradens with a vengeance. In the summer of 1958, HUAC issued subpoenas to twenty leading White labor and civil rights organizers, which of course included Anne and Carl. After the Supreme Court rolled back some of the restrictions it had placed on anticommunist prosecutions just two years earlier, Carl was sentenced to a year in prison, in the winter of 1959. His appeal went to the Supreme Court, where it was rejected in February 1961. In a symbolic gesture, Carl presented himself to the federal authorities to serve out his year on International Workers Day, May 1. On May 4, the first Freedom Ride left Washington, D.C. Fred Shuttlesworth called Anne – whose own trial had been postponed, and was never returned to – hoping that she could help round up more Freedom Riders; she almost thought of going herself but there was no one else to care for the children.

Thus, as the Freedom Rides were going on, Anne once again tried to mount support to free her husband. The first person she turned to was Martin Luther King. He had,

of course, heard of Carl's imprisonment, and when Anne came to visit he asked her how he could help. Anne asked Martin if he would be willing to develop a petition to free Carl, given that a petition coming from him would gather far more support. It was a lot to ask for: Martin's stature had grown by this time, and taking such a public stance of support for a "subversive" figure could harm his ability to cultivate a relationship with President Kennedy and with major funders. Martin told her that he would have to think on it. In the following days he seemed to avoid and ignore her calls, which he usually returned promptly. He finally called Anne back and said that he had to pray a lot over this question: he worried that it might hurt the movement, but he knew it was the right thing to do. Martin not only signed the petition, he invited Anne to give a lecture on nonviolent resistance at SCLC's annual convention. Anne knew that Martin could have found better speakers on the subject than she, and thought that it was his way of showing some of his colleagues that he wouldn't be influenced by their constant warnings to sever his ties with so-called subversives. Opponents of the civil rights movement circulated photos of Anne speaking for the SCLC across the South to prove that King had communist affiliations... an outcome that King was surely aware of in advance. In deciding to so seriously and publicly honor Braden, he had gone against the advice of virtually everyone in his organization.

Freedom Summer

In 1963, SNCC shifted its energies in Mississippi away from the nonviolent resistance embodied by the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, and towards voter registration. With 96 percent of Black Mississippians unregistered and facing barriers that were impossible to surmount, SNCC developed an ingenious strategy: in order to dramatize their exclusion from democracy, Black Mississippians would hold their very own – unofficial but symbolic – Freedom Vote. They would create their own political platform, run their own candidates, and cast their own votes from officially monitored booths located in the safe spaces of Black churches, in Black communities. SNCC representatives would then attend the Democratic National Convention, where they would present these votes as evidence of their exclusion from democracy... and they would use this as pressure to unseat some of the segregationist candidates, and to gain their own seats.

Building up this entire democratic infrastructure on their own was a phenomenal undertaking, and the truth was that by 1963 many SNCC workers were burnt out. They had been in the trenches for a few years, facing violence, and often watching their friends get killed. They had experienced a lot of trauma and needed outside support if they were going to continue. By this time in the movement, many White students in the North were mobilizing, and SNCC called on them to head south and support the Freedom Vote. They also knew that having White students from universities like Yale and Stanford would lead the Justice Department to send FBI agents to monitor White supremacist retaliation to the Freedom Vote... something they didn't feel obligated to do when it was Black life under assault. Everyone also knew that some of these White students would be killed, and that when they were, it

would draw massive outside attention to their cause, and with it pressure for federal intervention... something that no amount of Black death had ever accomplished.

The freedom votes were cast in the summer of 1964: The Mississippi Freedom Summer. As White students from the North flooded into Mississippi to support the effort, the state saw its most violent year since Reconstruction: there were at least six murders of civil rights workers, 80 reported (and far more unreported) beatings; 65 buildings bombed; and over 1000 arrests of civil rights workers by police officers enforcing Mississippi's White supremacist traditions. Most infamously, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered after barely 24 hours in Mississippi; and it was only the fact that two of them were White that drew intense national scrutiny during the excruciatingly long search for their bodies. Although understanding that White deaths would lead to a national outcry had been part of SNCC's strategy, once those deaths actually came to pass, it was incredibly painful for Black SNCC workers to witness how different the response was compared to their many Black comrades who had been killed... and whose deaths had remained invisible. This bitter reality – combined with the fact that many of these White students harbored their own unconscious racial and class prejudices despite their high level of commitment – was an early factor in pushing SNCC towards becoming an all-Black organization two years later.

During this time, SNCC members escalated their discussions about how Whites could best support the civil rights movement, and the notion that White allies should focus their energies on organizing White communities began to predominate. Serious change would only happen if White people – the vast majority of Americans, and the group that held by far the most political and economic power – changed their racial beliefs and attitudes, and began actively supporting racial justice. James Foreman – one of the great visionary leaders of SNCC – said that such a change would be truly revolutionary, and that White SNCC supporters were in the best position to play this role. Foreman also believed that young White allies needed more opportunities to take on leadership roles, and that it would be easier for them to do so as organizers of White communities.

Such ideas had long shaped Anne's own stance: in 1951, after giving a series of speeches at Black churches, she was told by an important civil rights leader that the Black community already understood what she was talking about: what she needed to do was talk with Whites. Anne's focus on developing White support for racial justice had been what had drawn civil rights luminaries like Fred Shuttlesworth to her in the first place: as he had said when they first began working together, "Whites were the missing link." Despite Anne's agreement with SNCC's gradually shifting understanding of the role of White supporters, she was disturbed by the idea of racial separation: while she believed that Whites should focus on generating White support, she also believed that they needed to be in deep relationship with Black communities and organizations in order to do so with any degree of success. If White supporters of racial justice were segregated from Black communities, it

would far too easy for them to perpetuate unconscious racial prejudices and take inappropriate actions. It was through relationship, more than anything else, that prejudice was broken down and mutual understanding, trust, and solidarity was developed. Anne, however, did not equate Black Power with racial separation... as did almost all other White journalists. She properly understood Black Power as Black self-empowerment, and was one of the few White journalists in the nation who helped to translate an accurate interpretation of Black Power to a White audience.

Many White SNCC organizers took the message to organize White communities very seriously, and when SNCC became an all-Black organization, many of them flooded into SCEF. During this time, SCEF started the Southern Mountain Project in Appalachia to organize poor Whites. However, the young members who had just left SNCC offended the local sensibilities with their long hair, casual interactions, and revolutionary rhetoric. When Black SNCC students had gone down into the Mississippi Delta to organize sharecroppers, they had also learned to dress and talk and socialize like sharecroppers in order to connect and build trust. The White students in Appalachia failed to do the same with the White communities they sought to organize.

Anne also noted that these White organizers often faced a “reentry problem.” In her words, “This happened to whites who’d been in Mississippi, where every white face was an enemy. They just didn’t like white people! You can’t organize people if you don’t like them.” Unlike Anne and other White Southern supporters, many of these students from the North didn’t grasp how difficult it was for White Southerners to liberate themselves from the traditional prejudices they had been saturated in all their lives. They lacked the ability to be compassionate and to empathize and connect with them as human beings. They also often embraced dogmatic political beliefs that split hairs: as these new organizers flooded into the SCEF, it fell prey to vicious infighting and quickly disintegrated. The Bradens abandoned the organization before its total collapse, as did its executive director James Dombrowski and Fred Shuttlesworth, who had done so much to connect SCEF with the heart and soul of the Black freedom struggle. The fact that a decades old organization that had been under constant attack by powerful government forces was so quickly undone from squabbling on the inside would pain Anne for the rest of her life.

In the late 60s, as local politicians sought to draw attention to themselves, they ranted about running the Bradens out of Kentucky and even passed out anti-Braden bumper stickers at political rallies. Once again, the couple was arrested on sedition charges. This time, however, the court was packed with supporters. When the judge asked, “are you now, or have you ever been a Communist,” the room erupted in laughter. The charges of communism had by that time become a bad joke from a notorious era of civil liberties infringements, even if segregationists continued to cling to it. In Anne’s words, “I realized at that moment that the 1950s were finally

over.” State sedition laws were finally – and permanently this time – declared unconstitutional. The Bradens would never again face legal attack for their activism.

Although the days of McCarthyism were finally over for the Bradens, the FBI counterintelligence programs originally established to target communists now turned its full-force against the Black freedom struggle. Anne felt that Black freedom fighters in the late 60s faced far more government repression than had ever existed in the McCarthy era. Entire communities were wiretapped, infiltrated, and given disinformation that turned them against one another. Anne now used what she had learned from her battles with McCarthyism to attack the repression that Black freedom fighters faced. When Angela Davis was infamously incarcerated, Ella Baker introduced Anne to Angela’s mother, and Anne turned her journalistic expertise towards the effort to free Angela... who Anne soon became something of a mentor to. As the Klan rose again in the mid-70s, embracing the old White Citizens Council Rhetoric that it was White people who were truly being oppressed by neighborhood and school desegregation, Anne mentored that generation. When the horrors of mass incarceration rose in the 1980s and 1990s, Anne mentored that generation. Until the day she died in 2006, Anne could often be found sitting cross-legged on the floor, talking with each new generation of freedom fighters throughout the night... always trying to push them further, so that they could meet the new obstacles that each passing decade brought with it.

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