THE BALLOT AND THE BULLET
A Comparative Analysis
of Armed Resistance in
the Civil Rights Movement

AKINYELE O. UMOJA
Georgia State University

The June 1966 March Against Fear from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi represented a significant shift in the character and balance of forces in the southern civil rights movement. During a late night meeting in a Memphis church, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chairman Stokely Carmichael argued that White participation in the march be de-emphasized. Carmichael also proposed that armed security be provided by the Deacons for Defense and Justice, a Louisiana-based paramilitary organization. Floyd McKissick, the chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), supported Carmichael's positions. Martin Luther King, Jr., the chairman of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, continued to argue for the practice of nonviolence and a multiracial emphasis in civil rights marches. Finally, though expressing reservations, King conceded to Carmichael's proposals to maintain unity in the march and the movement. The involvement and association of the Deacons with the march signified a shift in the civil rights movement, which had been popularly projected as a "nonviolent movement." Beginning with the sit-in movement of 1960 and the Freedom Rides of 1961, CORE and SNCC were two of the principal organizations committed to eliminating segregation in the South through nonviolent passive resistance. By 1966, both organizations had endorsed armed self-defense as a legitimate and viable tactic in the struggle to achieve civil and human rights (Hampton & Fayer, 1990; Sellers, 1990). Many CORE and SNCC

activists in the deep southern and border states were armed by the mid-1960s, and had rejected nonviolence as a philosophy and the principal method of the civil rights movement.

The primary purpose of this research article is to examine the factors that contributed to the transformation of CORE and SNCC philosophy and strategy in the 1960s from nonviolence to one of embracing armed self-defense as a legitimate method in the pursuit of human rights. Both organizations accepted nonviolence as a philosophy at their inception but adopted more flexible tactics, including armed resistance, as the freedom movement developed in the 1960s. At the same time, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) maintained its adherence to nonviolence, never embracing armed self-defense as a tactic to defend political confrontations and other forms of activism. This article will also concern itself with what factors distinguish the transformation of SNCC and CORE from the adherence to nonviolence by SCLC.

This article will assert that different class orientations, leadership paradigms, organizing styles, and also the changing cultural climate were responsible for transforming the attitudes of SNCC and CORE's national leadership. Those factors contributed to transforming the views of leaders of SNCC and CORE leadership, many who had been committed to nonviolent direct action and had rejected all forms of armed resistance. These factors also nurtured the emergence of new social groups and ideological currents within the organizations. Particularly after 1963, many new participants with SNCC and CORE rejected nonviolence and embraced armed self-defense. A secondary and underlying focus of this article is to broaden the perception of the modern civil rights movement in the United States. The civil rights movement, particularly in the South, is often characterized as a nonviolent struggle. The use of armed self-defense, retaliatory violence, and other forms of armed resistance by civil rights activists and their supporters is often not acknowledged by scholars and the mass media. The modern civil rights movement was a social movement for basic citizenship and human rights employing many tactics, and although perhaps nonviolent direct action was more common, armed self-defense and other forms of armed resistance were at times employed as well.

MOVEMENT LITERATURE AND
THE DISTINGUISHING FACTORS OF DIFFERENCE

Much of the movement literature has attributed differences between SNCC, CORE, and SCLC to different factors. Among those factors that have been cited are class and generational differences in the leadership of the organizations and varied methodologies of organizing. Piven and Cloward (1979) attribute the radicalization of SNCC and CORE to a "growing frustration and militancy of younger members in the two organizations" (p. 152). Rudwick and Meier (1976, pp. 258-259) suggest that SNCC's rejection of non-violence was the result of a growing influence of nationalist-oriented northern Blacks in the organization who differed from southern Blacks about the use of armed resistance. Jack Bloom (1987) gives multiple explanations of the political contradictions between SNCC and SCLC that included a contrast in the organizing styles of the two organizations and age difference. Both Bloom (1987) and James Forman (1972) argue that different class orientations and compositions created political conflict between SNCC and SCLC. In conducting a comparative study of the three organizations, this article will review each of the following factors: differences in age, region, ideological orientation of its leadership and membership, and styles of organizing and internal decision-making processes. Each of these factors will be examined to determine which were essential in the transformation of SNCC and CORE from solely nonviolent groups to the embrace of armed defense.

THE PACIFIST ORIGINS OF CORE, SCLC, AND SNCC

Nonviolent direct action was at the center of the philosophy and program of CORE, SCLC, and SNCC at the inception of each organization. Armed self-defense was not officially considered a viable alternative for any of the organizations' leaders during their inceptions. CORE, founded in 1942, was the first organization committed to nonviolence to challenge racial segregation. CORE's original statement of purpose read that "CORE has one method-interracial, non-violent direct action." James Farmer, a founder and

leader of CORE, stated that the Gandhian principle of *Satyagraha* (nonviolent direct action) was "essential to the discipline" of CORE (Meier & Rudwick, 1973, p. 10)

Besides invoking Gandhian principles, SCLC, founded in 1957, emphasized the principle of Christian love in the desegregation fight. In its founding statement to the press, SCLC leadership made its position clear on nonviolence:

> Nonviolence is not a symbol of weakness or cowardice, but, as Jesus and Gandhi demonstrated, nonviolent resistance transforms weakness into strength and breeds courage in face of danger. (Carson, 1981, p. 23)

Although calling for Black people to confront segregation, "Even in the face of death," the Southern Leadership Conference declared, "not one hair of one head of one white person shall be harmed" (Rustin, 1971, p. 102). SCLC leaders felt it necessary to dissociate themselves from any retaliatory violence or form of self-defense by local activists and movement supporters, for Black people in general to win the public opinion battle with White segregationists. They believed that the use of force by Black people and the movement would only serve to alienate White liberal and the general White population (Garrow, 1986, pp. 329-330).

SNCC was founded in 1960 after a proliferation of nonviolent sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in the South, organized by Black college students. SNCC's founding statement also advocated nonviolence as the core of its organizational philosophy:

> 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. (Carson, 1981, p. 23)

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CORE AND SNCC

The challenge of nonviolent direct action in the White supremacist South had transformed the strategies and philosophical orientation of both CORE and SNCC by 1965-1966. Although both

organizations possessed nonviolent origins, by this time tension began to emerge in SNCC and CORE concerning complete adherence to nonviolence. Some suggest that from its inception, SNCC always had much of its membership opposed to nonviolence as a philosophy and the sole tactic of the organization. Many SNCC activists saw nonviolence as a tactic to be used when advantageous, but were willing to use other tactics. By 1964, SNCC members began to engage in debates concerning armed self-defense at the organization's National Staff meeting (Forman, 1972, pp. 374-375; Grant, 1998, pp. 196-197; King, 1987, pp. 310-325; Umoja, 1997, pp. 130-139).

By 1963, CORE also began to experience internal debate on the question of armed self-defense. At the CORE national convention of 1963, a special emphasis was placed on reinforcing the use of nonviolence. This emphasis was due to increasing support for armed resistance within the organization and the civil rights movement overall. CORE activists in the South had experienced the terror of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups, receiving often less than minimal protection from the federal government or local authorities. In some cases, indigenous Black southerners protected the CORE workers, and a growing number of CORE workers in the South were arming themselves for protection (Farmer, 1985, p. 251; Moody, 1968, pp. 302-304). Understanding these and similar developments in the fall of 1963 and winter of 1964 CORE national leadership would reemphasize in policy statements the need for strict adherence to nonviolence (Meier & Rudwick, 1973, pp. 296-303; Sobel, 1967, p. 226).

The experience of both SNCC and CORE in organizing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in the Freedom Summer of 1964 affected the embrace of armed self-defense in both organizations in the deep South. In the Mississippi Black Belt, as in other southern Black communities, civil rights workers found much of the constituency of the movement willing practitioners of armed defense (Dittmer, 1994, p. 106; Umoja, 1997, pp. 96-98, 103-104, 106-110, 118-122). Whereas SNCC and CORE activists were frustrated by the 1964 Democratic Party Convention's

unwillingness to unseat the segregationist Mississippi state delegation in favor of the MFDP, they also suffered the wounds of physical abuse and the memories of several murders of Black Mississippians and civil rights activists.

By 1965, both the SNCC and CORE supported armed self-defense. National CORE leadership, including James Farmer, publicly acknowledged a relationship between CORE and the Deacons for Defense in Louisiana (Meier & Rudwick, 1973, pp. 398-399). After the Mississippi Freedom Summer, many of SNCC and CORE activists were armed in the deep South. By 1966, SNCC officials told participants in demonstrations that they had the option of using "any means necessary" to keep their march from being disrupted (Sellers, 1990, p. 163).

The CORE National Convention of 1966 proclaimed what was already a fact in its southern organizing. At this convention, CORE delegates voted to eliminate the requirement of chapter affiliates to adhere to "the technique of nonviolence in direct action." Another resolution declared the concepts of "nonviolence and self-defense are not contradictory" and self-defense was also a "natural, constitutional, and inalienable right" (Meier & Rudwick, 1973, pp. 414-415). Moreover, some local CORE affiliates were members of self-defense groups like the Deacons for Defense and Justice (Meier & Rudwick, 1973, pp. 414-415; Sobel, 1967, p. 377).

King and SCLC leadership stood its philosophical ground, a strict adherence to nonviolence. Although King compromised with SNCC and CORE on the involvement of the Deacons in the 1966 Mississippi March, he was greatly disturbed by their involvement and advocacy of armed defense (Garrow, 1986, p. 485). Attempting to encourage more expedient action on the part of the federal government after the Meredith March, King warned that "I'm trying desperately to keep the movement nonviolent, but I can't keep it nonviolent by myself. Much of the responsibility is on the white power structure to give meaningful concessions to Negroes" (King, 1968, p. 56). Consistent with King's sentiments, SCLC did not abandon its advocacy of nonviolence and did not publicly embrace armed self-defense.

FACTORS EXTERNAL TO THE NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT

From 1964 to 1966, CORE and SNCC's national leadership significantly altered their views on self-defense. Certainly external factors played a major role in transforming the perspectives of these organizations, though alone that cannot explain this transformation. All three organizations were threatened by White supremacist violence. Each organization interacted with local forces within the southern movement that advocated armed resistance. In the 1960s, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC all existed in a cultural climate where radical voices were becoming increasingly popular, both nationally and internationally.

Yet, external factors alone do not explain why SNCC and CORE embraced armed self-defense, and SCLC maintained its position on nonviolence. Why were SNCC and CORE influenced by or changed consistently with the cultural climate, and SCLC resisted change? Examining external factors is not sufficient to identify the factors responsible for the transformation of SNCC and CORE. On the issue of armed self-defense, we must also look for internal factors to distinguish SCLC from CORE and SNCC on the issue of armed self-defense.

INTERNAL FACTORS

AGE

One important aspect of the study of collective action is the politics of age. Political sociologists have debated the relevance of generational differences and the impact of age on social change and consciousness. Three generational models of social change have been dominant in political sociology. The first paradigm of generational politics is the experimental model, which argues that "politically relevant experiences among members of the same age" group are the "necessary condition for the shaping of a generation." The life cycle model asserts that the individuals' social and political orientation changes as their personal roles and responsibilities change

and the individuals mature. Finally, the interaction model argues that generational conflict is "rooted in each generation's reaction against the values of the previous one so that there is a cyclical nature to social and political change" (Kilson, 1977, pp. 29-36).

Although many noted sociologists have supported one or a combination of the above arguments, others have asserted that generational factors are not independent variables, as are religion, social class, gender, or ethnicity. Martin Kilson examined the aspect of generational change among Black people during the 1960s. Using attitudinal surveys concluded in 1963, 1966, and 1969, Kilson asserted that there was not a clear pattern of generational differences among young adults, middle-aged, and elder Blacks (1977, pp. 29-36). This article agrees with Kilson's assertions. When examining the leadership of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC, there is not a coherent pattern of attitudes by leaders of different generations that demonstrate that age was a primary factor in these organizations embracing armed resistance.

SNCC was primarily composed of young people either enrolled in or old enough to be enrolled in college. CORE's national leadership and staff was a combination of young college-age activists, professionals, and middle-aged veterans of the civil rights movement in their 30s and 40s. SCLC's leadership was primarily composed of ministers over the age of 30.

Although CORE and SNCC were definitely younger organizations, age, independent of other factors, is not significant. CORE and SNCC both contained middle-aged leaders whose receptivity to armed self-defense was certainly consistent with the sentiments of younger members. Southern communities included several elders and mature adults who advocated and practiced armed resistance in their daily lives. The age assertion must explain why middle-aged veterans of the movement supported self-defense, whereas some of their younger counterparts supported nonviolence. Although SNCC and CORE were definitely younger organizations, the factor of age cannot be seen as a significant reason for the transformation of SNCC and CORE on the issue of armed self-defense.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Was the embrace of armed defense by SNCC and CORE the result of influence by northern Blacks? The regional argument is implied by Meier and Rudwick (1976), who claim that CORE membership was predominately located outside the South and that SNCC's northern-born staff members were responsible for its "national thrust." According to Meier and Rudwick, "The Southern leaders (of SNCC), particularly those who had been profoundly implied with philosophical nonviolence, were more likely to retain original SNCC ideology (Gandhian nonviolence)." They also assert that one significant factor to SCLC's unwavering support for nonviolence is "its Southern base" (Meier & Rudwick, 1976, pp. 258-259).

There is no conclusive evidence that northern Blacks exhibit a greater propensity for militant armed resistance than southern Blacks. In 1963 and 1966, *Newsweek* magazine conducted a survey of more than 100 persons of African descent in various Black communities in the United States, who were asked the following question:

> Do you personally feel Negroes today can win their rights without resorting to violence or do you think it will have to be an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? (Brink & Harris, 1964, p. 72)

There seems to be no significant impact that is regionally based determining one's perspective on armed self-defense. In 1963, 22% of the respondents from the nonsouthern states agreed that Blacks will have to use violence, with 21% of those in the South agreeing with this position. In 1966, 23% of the nonsouthern respondents embraced the necessity of an eye for an eye, as did 20% of their southern counterparts (Brink & Harris, 1964, 1966).

Elements of Meier and Rudwick's (1973) regional thesis do not apply to CORE and SNCC. In their own work on CORE, Meier and Rudwick documented support for armed defense among CORE's Southern staff, primarily composed of local southern-born activists. In their work, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968* (1973), Meier and Rudwick state, "Among staff members

in Mississippi and Louisiana, continuing experiences with racists violence fueled the growing feeling that some sort of armed self-defense was necessary and legitimate" (p. 397). The alliance between CORE and the Deacons for Defense highlighted the support of southern CORE activists for the concept of armed self-defense as a complement to nonviolent direct action. A significant portion of SNCC's southern-born leadership and staff also supported armed self-defense. These examples clearly show that the idea of regional difference in determining movement support for armed self-defense is fatally flawed.

CLASS AND IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Speaking in very general terms, the leadership of all three organizations was composed primarily of middle-class individuals. SCLC was initiated by newly emerging middle-class clergy who had not established dependent relations with the local White power structure in their areas. In the early 1960s, CORE and SNCC members tended to be what Inge Powell Bell characterized as "pre bourgeois," in transition from working class into middle class (1968, p. 75). As petty bourgeois intellectuals from working-class backgrounds, many Black activist students had not completed their "progress" into the Black middle class.

Although the leadership of CORE, SNCC, and SCLC was predominately middle class, we must not look at the Black petty bourgeois as a monolithic group. In *Race, Class, and Conservatism* (1988), political economist Thomas D. Boston identifies different strata in the Black middle class, distinguished by similar ideological orientation. Boston divides the Black middle class into three ideological strata: independent, dependent, and conservative. The independent stratum of the Black petty bourgeois is the "political and ideological left" of the class; its consciousness is oriented to "grassroots Black opinion, which is for historical reasons, most often very liberal or even radical at times." At the "center" of the Black political life, the dependent strata, while maintaining social ties and identification with the aspirations of the Black masses are also obligated to "pacify to anxieties of white society" from which

it draws political and financial support (1988, pp. 39-46). This tension creates vacillation in the dependent strata relative to militant collective action. Finally, the conservative sector represents the "far right of the Black Middle Class and Black society in general" and is characterized by its alienation from "Black public opinion" and consciousness.

The leadership of SCLC emerged initially as part of the independent strata as their political relationship with the executive branch of the federal government in particular, and external support in general, increased. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations and SCLC leadership developed and maintained a cooperative relationship in the early to mid-1960s. Although on several occasions King and SCLC did openly criticize the Kennedy administration for its inaction, their relationship was qualitatively different from that of CORE and SNCC. King and SCLC occasionally honored the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' requests to have moratoriums on civil rights demonstrations at critical periods in local desegregation campaigns. SNCC and CORE leadership did not enjoy amicable relations with Washington. In fact, SNCC and CORE were often seen as troublemakers by the executive branch during this period. According to King's biographer, David Garrow, President John F. Kennedy was pleased that SCLC rather than SNCC was leading the 1963 desegregation campaign in Birmingham. Garrow (1986) quotes Kennedy as saying "SNCC has got an investment in violence. . . . They're sons of bitches" (p. 296). During the 1964 presidential elections, both SNCC and CORE refused to honor a request by incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson to place a moratorium on demonstrations. The Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and SCLC all agreed to honor President Johnson's requested moratorium to support his reelection efforts.

Although SNCC, CORE, and SCLC all had predominately middle-class leadership, their class orientations were different. SCLC's leadership's relationship with the executive branch places them in the category of dependent petty bourgeois. CORE and SNCC's growing antagonistic relationship with federal, state, and

local administration reflects their leadership's orientation as independent Black middle class. These differences in ideological orientation were significant in effecting the process of each organization. Given SCLC's relationship with the Kennedy administration, they were least likely to openly embrace activists who advocated armed self-defense. The leaders of CORE and SNCC's fundamental principle of philosophical nonviolence also made them initially uncomfortable of advocates of armed resistance. But due to CORE and SNCC's tenuous and adversarial relationship with the federal government, they had little to lose by associating themselves with often working-class advocates of armed self-defense. National leaders in SNCC and CORE recognized in dangerous Southern battlefields like Cambridge, Maryland, Danville, Virginia, and rural Louisiana and Mississippi that their nonviolent organizer's survival depended on indigenous armed militants. The orientation of SNCC and CORE leadership toward the perspective of the independent Black middle class made them more likely to embrace armed activists, because they realized that they would have to rely on local militants for protection as the federal government seemed unable or unwilling to protect them.

STYLE OF ORGANIZING

While organizing in the Black Belt, SNCC staff encouraged the development of indigenous leaders to create a "peoples movement without dominating it" (Forman, 1972, p. 255). Ella Baker's initial emphasis on a group-centered orientation rather than a leader-centered orientation was incorporated into the organizing style of SNCC. The southern staff of CORE would also adopt this orientation in its Black Belt organizing (Haines, 1988, p. 49). SNCC activist Robert Moses called its style of organizing the "community organizing tradition." Moses (1989) states that there were three elements that characterized the "community organizing model." First, there was the importance of organizers integrating themselves into indigenous Black southern households, an "informal absorption" into communities that allowed SNCC and CORE activists with

meager resources to survive in the Black Belt. Second, they tried to empower grassroots people (including sharecroppers, domestic workers, and farmers) by encouraging their involvement and leadership. Third, SNCC called for organizers to "cast down your buckets where you are," based upon the political, cultural, and social space in which the activists were organizing (pp. 424-428).

In contrast to the community organizing model of SNCC and CORE, SCLC and King relied on the community mobilization tradition. This model focuses on mass mobilizations to engage major national events, demonstrations, and marches and requires national leadership and national media. The development of King as a national and international personality played a decisive role in attracting large numbers of people for the major events and national media. Because of this, King and SCLC tended to make critical decisions in local civil rights campaigns, often subordinating local demands to the national objectives of achieving federal civil rights legislation. Some critics of King cited that SCLC often achieved victories on national objectives while failing to win the demands of local activists and communities. Although SNCC and later CORE chose to promote indigenous leadership, King was considered a messiah who could bring national media and federal attention to resolve local situations. Deference by indigenous leaders to SCLC's leader-centered approach allowed King to make major tactical and strategic decisions in movement campaigns without consulting local leadership.

The promotion of indigenous community organization and leadership made it difficult to maintain nonviolence as the only tactic of movement activity organized by SNCC and CORE. The community organizing perspective encouraged organizers to learn from the experiences and wisdom of local people and indigenous activists and to rely on their resources. In communities where activists and grassroots people relied on armed self-defense, it was difficult for SNCC and CORE, who were committed to nonviolence, to condemn the methods and actions of community people and encourage their initiative at the same time. In communities where there was a tradition of Black armed self-defense, the informal absorption of SNCC and CORE into these communities may have meant the

necessity to compromise their position on nonviolence. And nonviolence would certainly be questioned in communities where White supremacist terror was the order of the day.

MODELS OF LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The leadership models and organizational decision-making processes within CORE and SNCC varied from those of SCLC. All three organizations differed from the strong national bureaucratic processes of the NAACP. CORE, SNCC, and SCLC, however, all began as direct-action groups, seeing the legalism of the NAACP as insufficient to advance the national drive toward desegregation. At the inception of all three organizations, their founders had experience with bureaucratic national processes stifling local initiative and the ability to mount indigenous direct-action movements. CORE, SNCC, and SCLC all chose to develop organizational structures that would not inhibit direct-action campaigns; however, SCLC differed with the other two organizations, in terms of models of organizational structure, leadership, and decision-making processes.

King possessed "the ultimate power in the SCLC (Morris, 1984, p. 93). Several key SCLC leaders agreed that King had the power to initiate or veto policies on his own. Ella Baker, the former associate director and key administrator in the early years of SCLC, criticized SCLC's decision-making style. Baker believed organizational and movement decisions should be made collectively and the ultimate authority of SCLC should be its board of directors, not one charismatic leader (Dallard, 1990, p. 76; Morris, 1984, pp. 103-104; Mueller, 1990, pp. 60-62; Payne, 1995, p. 93). On the other hand, King's charisma and his public persona were, in fact, a definite asset to SCLC. Local SCLC affiliates believed that their organizing efforts were tremendously enhanced due to their association with King. The name Martin Luther King, Jr. attracted people, financial contributions, and publicity (Morris, 1984, pp. 92-93). Consequently, local SCLC affiliates often yielded authority to King when he was involved in campaigns in their local areas. Consistent with Black church culture and the experiences of church-based

movement, organizations believed that one central leader was necessary for success of the movement (Morris, 1984, p. 104). King's firm commitment to the philosophy of nonauthority within SCLC would make it difficult for advocates of armed self-defense to change the organization's policy.

The experience of CORE reflects a strong tradition of local autonomy and a relativity weak national bureaucracy. From its inception in 1942 to the 1960s, the CORE affiliates remained practically free to decide local actions within the context of the CORE constitution. Established as a secular organization in the liberal tradition, CORE maintained an executive that owed accountability to its entire membership. The National Convention, with representation from all CORE chapters, selected the national executive body, the National Action Council (NAC). Although CORE suffered from lack of local participation in national conventions, its leadership was sensitive to sentiments from its grassroots membership (Meier & Rudwick, 1976, pp. 238-260), and its executive officer did not possess veto power and was often challenged and criticized by other CORE leaders. The chief executive of CORE was evaluated and held accountable by the NAC and did not posses the ultimate power of his counterpart in SCLC.

SNCC, like CORE, maintained a flexible structure. Due to the demands of the movement, there was a call for a growing centralized administrative structure. At SNCC's inception, the group-centered approaches of Ella Baker would cement a collective leadership style in the organization. Though not without fault and difficulty, SNCC maintained through most of its organizational life a strong principle of collective leadership and decision making. Although strong personalities emerged within the organization, it was unusual for any of its leaders' ideas and proposals to be accepted without challenge or question. The strong anti-leader-centered tendency within SNCC made it difficult for any one individual to develop an unchallenged power base within the organization. Similar to CORE, SNCC leaders were subject to criticism, evaluation, and removal by their peers on the executive committee. Although the structure of Baker's group-centered leadership approach may have changed forms and names from 1961 to 1966,

the basic principle was maintained as a fundamental characteristic of the organization.

CORE and SNCC differed from SCLC in terms of leadership models and decision-making processes. CORE and SNCC decision-making processes seem to have been more collective and democratic in nature. In CORE and SNCC, the composition, consciousness, and ideological orientation of its voting membership had greater consequences on the organization than those of SCLC. As opposed to the Black church culture of SCLC, the more secular and democratic movement culture of CORE and SNCC empowered the active membership and workers of both organizations to transform the organization more rapidly from below than their counterparts in a leader-centered organization. As more of these members and workers began to support armed resistance, it was more difficult for SNCC and CORE to maintain their nonviolent stance.

In summary, SNCC and CORE's models of leadership and decision-making processes allowed for more open debate and discussion. Particularly as local activists, workers, farmers, and sharecroppers became involved in the organizational structures and the cultural climate began to shift, debate began to take place on the support of armed self-defense by the organized civil rights movement. SCLC's more hierarchical leader-centered approach would not allow open discussion that would allow dissidents to challenge the fundamental practices of the organization.

SUMMARY

Evaluating the histories of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC, we can see what differences are critical in transforming the perspectives of groups previously committed to nonviolence to embracing armed self-defense. This evaluation reveals age, regional, and class differences as nonessential to distinguish SCLC from CORE and SNCC. Class orientation, methodology, and leadership models/decision--making processes do distinguish these organizations, however. The question we must ask is, How do differences, ideological

(class) orientation, methodology, and decision making/leadership models move SNCC and CORE, but not SCLC, to embrace armed self-defense?

In 1960 and 1961, the primary tactics of the civil rights movement organizations required the mobilization of dedicated, determined cadres to disrupt the institutions of segregation. These cadres would initiate the sit-ins of 1960 and jail-ins and Freedom Rides of 1961. The actions of the nonviolent cadres of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC would inspire a greater mobilization of mass participation in civil rights movement activity, particularly drawing from indigenous institutions, the Black church, and Black colleges—and the NAACP, SNCC, CORE, and SCLC could maintain the discipline of nonviolent direct action by the training and orientation of small groups of cadres who made a conscious choice to participate in the movement. The participation of preexisting organizations (churches and NAACP) and aspiring middle-class students would involve members of the Black community more likely to adhere to the principles of nonviolence advocated by the civil rights leadership.

In 1961, SNCC initiated community-wide direct action campaigns that involved sit-ins, mass demonstrations, mass arrests, and economic boycotts. The community-wide campaign asserted multiple demands for desegregation of public facilities, employment opportunities for Black people, and the establishment of biracial committees to coordinate integration of local private and public sectors. Voter registration projects were also initiated, often as a parallel activity to direct action. CORE also employed this method of organizing particularly in Mississippi and Louisiana, and SCLC in its campaigns in Birmingham and Selma. The community-wide campaigns involved a greater degree of community organization and participation. As the civil rights movement developed, its mass base expanded recruiting, involving elements of the Black community other than active Black church members, Black college students, Black professionals, and others, particularly persons with experience in the NAACP. The involvement of Black workers, high school students, and Black farmers particularly in SNCC, CORE, and affiliated organizations (e.g., Lowdnes County Freedom

Organization, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Council of Federated Organizations, Cambridge Non-Violent Action Movement) served to radicalize the movement. By 1965, the character and base of CORE and SNCC were significantly different. Although SCLC maintained, as argued by Morris (1984), a significant mass base and was not just a middle-class organization, its class orientation and hierarchical structure and process of operation prevented the type of transformation that occurred in CORE and SNCC.

CORE's members and leadership were predominately White middle-class individuals prior to the 1960s. By the summer of 1964, CORE membership was predominately Black (Bell, 1968, p. 14; Meier & Rudwick, 1976, p. 259). CORE's rapid inclusion of Black participants included all classes within the Black community, including Black workers, farmers, and high school youth. SNCC began as a group of predominately aspiring middle-class college students. The inclusion of non-college-educated southern Blacks had also rapidly increased within SNCC by 1964. By 1965, most of SNCC's executive committee was composed of Black southerners with only a high school education (Carson, 1981, p. 151; Forman, 1972, pp. 438-440). The rapid recruitment of grassroots, militant workers, farmers, and youth into SNCC and CORE created political tension in the organizations around the question of nonviolence. Many of these grassroots elements were not as committed to nonviolence as the founders of both organizations. Many new recruits were also not trained in nonviolent philosophy and tactics due to their rapid recruitment and the inability for their organizations to meet the demands of orienting new members. The leadership and organizers of SNCC and CORE were particularly sensitive to the sentiments of their growing mass base, which included support for militant armed defense. Due to SNCC and CORE's relationship with indigenous activism, it was difficult to condemn militant armed resistance by local Blacks. SNCC and CORE organizers found it difficult to impose the tactic and philosophy of nonviolence as a requirement of participation in the movement. The internal decision-making processes of CORE and SNCC allowed the voices of the supporters of armed self-defense to be heard in

organizational discussions and debates. As these organizations broadened, their mass base combined with environmental factors that question the logic of strict adherence to nonviolence, and armed self-defense was not only advocated but practiced.

The comparison of the experience of these organizations suggests that class orientation, methodology, and models of leadership and decision making are what separated SNCC, CORE, and SCLC. Due to these differences, SNCC and CORE's relationships with their mass base, particularly Black workers, farmers, and youth, served as agents of transforming these organizations. Even more importantly, these differences allowed them to question their commitment to the philosophy of nonviolence, and facilitated their receptiveness to armed self-defense. On the other hand, SCLC's class orientation (i.e., its relationship with the mass base and the U.S. government), its leader-centered method of activism, and its hierarchical models of leadership and decision making allowed it to maintain its advocacy and adherence to nonviolent direct action and distance itself from advocates of armed defense in the civil rights movement.

This study shows the diversity of the civil rights movement and the factors for the transformation of some of its key players. More serious analysis of the movement will allow historians and students to give a more sophisticated understanding of the heterogenous character of the activists and their mass base of the civil rights struggle. To understand the character of the entire movement fully, more attention must also be focused on local civil rights campaigns and their methods of struggle and survival. If not, the civil rights movement will not be viewed as an undertaking of hundreds of thousands of people who struggled with their means and understanding, incorporating nonviolent direct action and armed militancy, but the efforts of a few heroic individuals. In addition, one must make a critical analysis of the class orientation of the movement's leadership and major organizations. The history of the civil rights movement cannot be narrowed to the activities of a few heroic individuals, but must be inclusive of the efforts of tens of thousands of indigenous southern Black people and their influence on movement organizations and leadership. Including the

perspectives of the broad social base of the struggle to desegregate the South must revise the definition of the civil rights movement to include the role of armed militancy as a complement and alternative to nonviolent direct action. Only through understanding the role and participation of the southern Black masses in the civil rights movement can we understand the embrace of SNCC and CORE of armed self-defense by 1966.

REFERENCES

Bell, I. (1968). *CORE and strategy of non-violence*. New York: Random House.

Bloom, J. (1987). *Class, race, and the civil rights movement*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Boston, T. D. (1988). *Race, class, and conservatism*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Brink, W., & Harris, L. (1964). *The Negro revolution in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Brink, W., & Harris, L. (1966). *Black and White*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Carson, C. (1981). *In struggle: SNCC and the Black awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dallard, S. (1990). *Ella Baker: A leader behind the scenes*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett.

Dittmer, J. (1994). *Local people: The struggle for civil rights in Mississippi*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Farmer, J. (1985). *Lay bare the heart: An autobiography of the civil rights movement*. New York: Arbor House.

Forman, J. (1972). *The making of Black revolutionaries*. New York: Macmillan.

Garrow, D. (1986). *Bearing the cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: William Morrow.

Grant, J. (1998). *Ella Baker: Freedom bound*. New York: John Wiley.

Haines, H. (1988). *Black radicalism and the civil rights mainstream*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Hampton, H., & Fayer, S. (1990). *Voices of freedom: An oral history of the civil rights movement from the 1950's through the 1980's*. New York: Bantam Books.

Kilson, M. (1977). Generational change, cycles, among Black Americans. In R. Samuels (Ed.), *Political generations and political development*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

King, M. L. (1968). *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* Boston: Beacon.

King, M. (1987). *Freedom song: A personal story of the 1960's civil rights movement*. New York: Quill William Morrow.

Meier, A., & Rudwick, E. (1973). *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meier, A., & Rudwick, E. (1976). *Along the color line: Explorations in the Black experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Moody, A. (1968). *Coming of age in Mississippi*. New York: Dell.

Morris, A. (1984). *The origin of the civil rights movement: Black communities organizing for change*. New York: Free Press.

Moses, R. (1989). The algebra project: Organizing in the spirit of Ella. *Harvard Educational Review*, *59*, 424-428.

Mueller, C. (1990). Ella Baker and the origins of participatory democracy. In V. Crawford, J. A. Rouse, & B. Woods (Eds.), *Women in the civil rights movement*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson.

Payne, C. (1995). *I've got the light of freedom: The organizing tradition and the Mississippi freedom struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Piven, F., & Cloward, R. (1979). *Poor people's movements*. New York: Vintage.

Rustin, B. (1971). *Down the line*. Chicago: Quadrangle.

Sellers, C. (1990). *The river of no return: The autobiography of a Black militant and the life and death of SNCC*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Sobel, L. (1967). *Civil rights 1960-1966*. New York: Facts on File.

Umoja, A. (1997). *Eye for an eye: The role of armed resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Emory University.

Akinyele O. Umoja is an assistant professor of African American Studies at Georgia State University. In December of 1996, he received his Ph.D. in American and African American Studies at Emory University. Dr. Umoja's primary research focuses on African American political and cultural resistance movements, and is currently preparing a manuscript based on the topic of his dissertation thesis, Eye for an Eye: The Role of Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement.