Short Portraits of White Antiracists in U.S. History

This is a growing collection of short portraits of White antiracists in U.S. history. Here are a few ideas for how White antiracists and organizations can get the most out of this resource:

1. Keep a journal as you read about these figures. Create the following sections: Self-reflection; strategies and lessons; and mistakes to learn from. As you read, make notes in the self-reflection section about things you relate to or ways you could imagine yourself growing. In the strategies and lessons section, note down ways that White antiracist organizing has been done effectively in the past, and also consider if any of those lessons could be adapted to your own organizing. Under the learning from mistakes section, reflect on what prevented White antiracist work from being as effectively as it could have been.

   Keeping a journal like this will be especially helpful if you do it with a group of friends, or better yet, with people you organize with!

2. White antiracist organizations can use this resource for a gallery-walk exercise. Choose antiracist ancestors that would most interest your particular group, and print out their image and story using this printable version. Then post the image on the wall with the story next to it, and have the group spend fifteen minutes walking around the space looking at different figures, followed by a group discussion.

Herbert Aptheker

As a history student in college, Herbert Aptheker was disturbed by the dominant narrative of African slaves as a naturally servile people. This led him, in 1937, to focus his Master's thesis on Nat Turner's slave rebellion. His 1942 Doctoral dissertation, which later developed into *American Negro Slave Revolts,* uncovered 250 uprisings and helped to undermine deeply racist historical narratives about slavery. During this time, Carter G. Woodson himself took Aptheker under his wing. The meetings led by Woodson on Black history were held in the segregated neighborhoods of New York, where Aptheker was often the only White person in an audience of hundreds. In such settings he befriended many of the figures who had been leading lights of the Harlem Renaissance. After finishing his dissertation, Aptheker joined the military, and participated in the Invasion of Normandy. He rose to the rank of Major, and published in military journals advocating for integration in the armed forces. At his request, Aptheker led the all-Black 350th artillery unit. His unit organized the tables in the mess hall into the Double-V formation, which in the WWII-era Black freedom struggle symbolized victory over fascism abroad, and over White supremacy at home. However, when it was discovered that Aptheker was a Communist Party member, he was discharged. Aptheker, who was Jewish, had joined the Party both because he viewed it as an anti-fascist force, and because it took American racial oppression seriously. After his dismissal from military life, Aptheker found himself barred from working as a professor. He headed to the Deep South, working first as a union organizer for agricultural and tobacco workers, and then becoming a leading figure in the Communist Party's efforts to fight the brutal sharecropping system that had replaced slavery. Back in Manhattan in the late 40s, he became close friends with W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois mentored Aptheker and even invited him to share his office space. Although kept outside of the academy until the student revolts of the late 60s, Aptheker continued to be a brilliant and prolific scholar of Black history… and the man Du Bois chose as his literary executor. Du Bois turned his vast correspondence over to Aptheker shortly before his death, and Aptheker subsequently spent two decades publishing his monumental 40-volume "The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois." When Du Bois expatriated to Ghana at the end of his life, it was Aptheker who saw him off at the airport.

The Battle of Blair Mountain

The Battle of Blair Mountain was, in the words of the Zinn Education Project, "the largest example of class war in U.S. history. It was fought over the course of five days in 1921 by 10,000 coal miners" in West Virginia. The mining conditions were brutal enough to unify miners across racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black and White miners, as well as marginalized European immigrants. Many of these diverse men were veterans of World War I. When their unionization efforts were met with mass evictions of mining families and outright murders at the hands of the mine owner's personal police forces, the miners armed themselves not only with rifles but machine guns… and then marched on the police. The mining owners pulled together a 3,000 person private army, and dug in along the ridge of Blair Mountain to face off with the miners. In response, the miners formed "an effective military strategy. They gained the ridge at one location and established a standard military operation that included a command center, a rear guard, and a perimeter." According to the New York Times, the rebel army of miners "commandeered passenger trains, cut telephone wires, looted coal company stores of arms and ammunition; and executed two alleged company spies."

During the long mining struggles leading up to this showdown, White "union organizers and officials worked diligently to address the civil struggles of Black miners. For instance, Black miners served in a wide range of union political positions, and if the union would not have recognized this and other fundamental concerns of Black civil struggles, they would have had a much harder time uniting with Black miners. This does not mean that Black miners did not still face significant discrimination, but there was a large amount of progress as many racial lines were crossed . . . Throughout the campaign Black miners served as commanders and logistics officers. There is even one instance of a Black miner leading a troop of fighters to the front. The majority of Black soldiers in WWI were not allowed to be in combat, and so the fact that they were armed and leading white troops at Blair Mountain is an important historical milestone . . . All of this enabled the miners at the Battle of Blair Mountain to enact a degree of solidarity that was so strong it took three regiments of federal troops to stop it. This did not occur through simple class solidarity; instead the everyday interests of white, Black, and immigrant miners were woven into the larger struggle."

"The true lesson of Blair Mountain is that when people come together in a way that genuinely attempts to integrate different struggles, one of the most powerful social forces for change can be formed. When poor white, Black, and immigrant people work together, that is what truly scares people in power. As stated above, this mix of racial, ethnic, and class solidarities was not perfect. But it was something unique for the time, and its effect can best be summed up by a white miner who fought in the battle: 'I call it a darn solid mass of different colors and tribes, blended together, woven together, bound, interlocked, tongued and grooved together in one body.'"

The Battle of Blair Mountain is also where the term "redneck" comes from. As Southern Crossroads – which works to organize White southerners for racial justice – writes, "Real rednecks know that the term comes from the legacy of white coal

miners in West Virginia who wore red bandannas [to signify they were with the union] and joined with their Black comrades to rise up against the coal company during the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921." Southern Crossroads seeks to reclaim this legacy for the White South today, using the hashtags #ReclaimRedneck and #SpiritofBlairMountain.

This entry consists mostly of extensive quotes from two articles from the Zinn Education Project, with the closing quote from Southern Crossroads. Here are the links to all three articles:

- https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/blair-mountain-ends/
- https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/devil-is-here-in-these-hills/#battle
- https://fight4thesouth.medium.com/the-spirit-of-blair-mountain-week-of-action-sharing-our-southern-stories-9e6f19fdc1dc

Heather Booth

Born into a progressive New York Jewish community at the end of World War II, Heather Booth was raised to understand the importance of fighting injustice. In 1964 she headed south to participate in the Mississippi Freedom Summer, where she helped organize the freedom schools and voter registration drives. At the age of 18 she thus stepped into a world of racial violence, where Black people took risks on a daily basis to organize for their freedom. The Black family hosting her was making themselves a target by doing so… an experience that led Booth to feel her privilege deep in her bones. Heather Booth also saw that women were in many ways the backbone of the movement, but that their efforts often remained invisible. The civil rights movement thus accelerated her already growing feminist consciousness. During the Freedom Summer, Booth met a young woman who had become suicidal due to an unwanted pregnancy. After returning to her campus in the North, Booth founded the Jane Collective, a clandestine student-run organization that connected women to doctors who were committed to the right to a safe abortion. She also joined the Students for a Democratic Society, where she led women in walk-outs when the men proved unable to hear their voices, and organized women's groups on campus to tackle the misogyny that ran rampant in the University system. She also continued her racial justice efforts by leading the local Friends of SNCC chapter, travelling and raising funds in the North for SNCC's efforts. In 1968 when SNCC became an all-Black organization, Booth threw her energy more fully into women's liberation and antiwar organizing. Over the decades, Heather Booth grew into one of the nation's leading organizers of progressive politics, creating numerous organizations and training programs. In 2000, SNCC leader Julian Bond hired her to lead the voter registration drive for the NAACP, which led to a strong Black turnout in the 2000 elections. Most recently she played a key role in the Biden/Harris get out the vote effort.

Vernon Bown

Vernon Bown was a White member of the Wade Defense Committee, a group that was formed to defend the home of Andrew and Charlotte Wade. The Wade's were a Black family who, with the support of Anne and Carl Braden, had purchased a home in a segregated White neighborhood in Louisville. When crosses were burned in front of the house and shots were fired into it, supporters of the Wade's formed an armed defense committee. Most members had to work during the day, but as a truck driver who worked the night shift, Vernon Bown was able to protect the Wade family's home during the daylight hours. As a former soldier who had volunteered to fight the rise of fascism in Spain in the years preceding World War II, protecting the Wade's home was a job Bown was well prepared to do.

When the house was bombed and a trial ensued, the White supporters of the Wades were hauled before McCarthyite courts, where their support for desegregation was deemed subversive activity. While Anne and Carl Braden were the main targets of this trial, Vernon Bown's commitment to living in a Black home and to protecting it – with force if necessary – was also viewed as evidence of a subversion of the social order. While the Braden's were charged with sedition, it was Bown who was charged with the actual bombing of the Wade house… despite overwhelming evidence that the bombing was conducted by segregationists. Luckily, when the case reached the Supreme Court, the charges were dropped.

Bown, who was born in 1917, lived until 2012, at which point he was one of the last surviving members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of American volunteers who had fought fascism in Spain. According to *The Volunteer,* a website dedicated to Brigade veterans, in his old age Bown "grew his own garden and kept his own bees to make honey. He enjoyed going on walks and dancing at the senior center as often as he could."

Guy and Candie Carawan

In the early fifties, Guy Carawan was an aspiring folk musician, inspired both by Southern folk music and songs from the labor movement. He visited the Highlander Folk Center for the first time in 1953. Located in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee, Highlander had been a training ground for labor organizing since the early days of the Great Depression. By the time Carawan arrived, the center was beginning to focus on civil rights organizing as well: it was one of the few integrated Southern spaces where such trainings occurred. In 1959, Guy returned to Highlander to lead the music program there and continue the legacy of Zilphia Horton, who had collected movement music from across the South and used it to support movement organizers. In Carawan's words, "My job would be to help get people singing and sharing their songs. When someone began to sing, I'd back them up softly on my guitar so they'd get courage and keep going. Sometimes in sharing a song, people find bonds between themselves that they never knew they had."

In 1960, Highlander hosted a workshop for the sit-in students. Guy Carawan introduced the students to a union organizing song that was an adaptation of a Black spiritual: "We Shall Overcome." As one of Martin Luther King's chief organizers C.T. Vivian remembers, "I don't think we had ever thought of spirituals as movement material. When the movement came up, we couldn't apply them." Guy inspired C.T. Vivian, as well as the sit-in students, to "take the music out of our past and apply it to the new situation, to change it so it really fit . . . The first time I remember any change in our songs was when Guy came down from Highlander." Once the sit-in students heard spirituals adapted for a movement context (as had been done earlier in labor movement songs), they ran with it, and adaptions flourished within the movement. Guy Carawan always emphasized that in his music workshops, the students had discovered a concept, originally developed by Black labor organizers. He hadn't created it. But by working at Highlander, with it's commitment to fusing labor and civil rights struggles as well as to building movement culture, Guy was able to facilitate the transmission of the concept into the civil rights movement.

At Highlander, Guy met the woman who became the love of his life. Candie was a young White woman, who had been arrested during the Nashville sit-ins. While in the segregated jails, Candie recalled that "The only connection we had with the others was the music." Whether at sit-ins or marches or in jail, the music served both to unite the people as a group, and to fortify the spirit. Experiencing this gave Candie a profound appreciation for the power of song. Guy and Candie soon married, and together the Carawans traversed the South throughout the 60s, hosting workshops and bringing the music of the movement to as many communities as possible. Their workshops also supported people in the movement in creating their own music to meet their own organizing needs.

For decades, the Carawans worked to record and preserve the music that had come out of the civil rights and other social justice movements. Guy continued to be the musical director of Highlander for 30 years. He passed away in 2015. Candie continues her culture-building movement work with Highlander to this very day.

Levi Coffin

Born in North Carolina in 1798, Levi Coffin was born into a Quaker family that had been deeply influenced by the antislavery teachings of John Woolman… teachings that had played an important role in Quakers taking on an abolitionist stance. In addition to being raised in an antislavery household, Levi's own antislavery commitment was also deeply influenced by an interaction he had with an enslaved man when he was seven years old: passing by the man on a chain gang, the young Levi asked him why he was in chains, and the man replied "that it was to prevent him from escaping and returning to his wife and children." The comment deeply troubled Levi as a child and stayed with him.

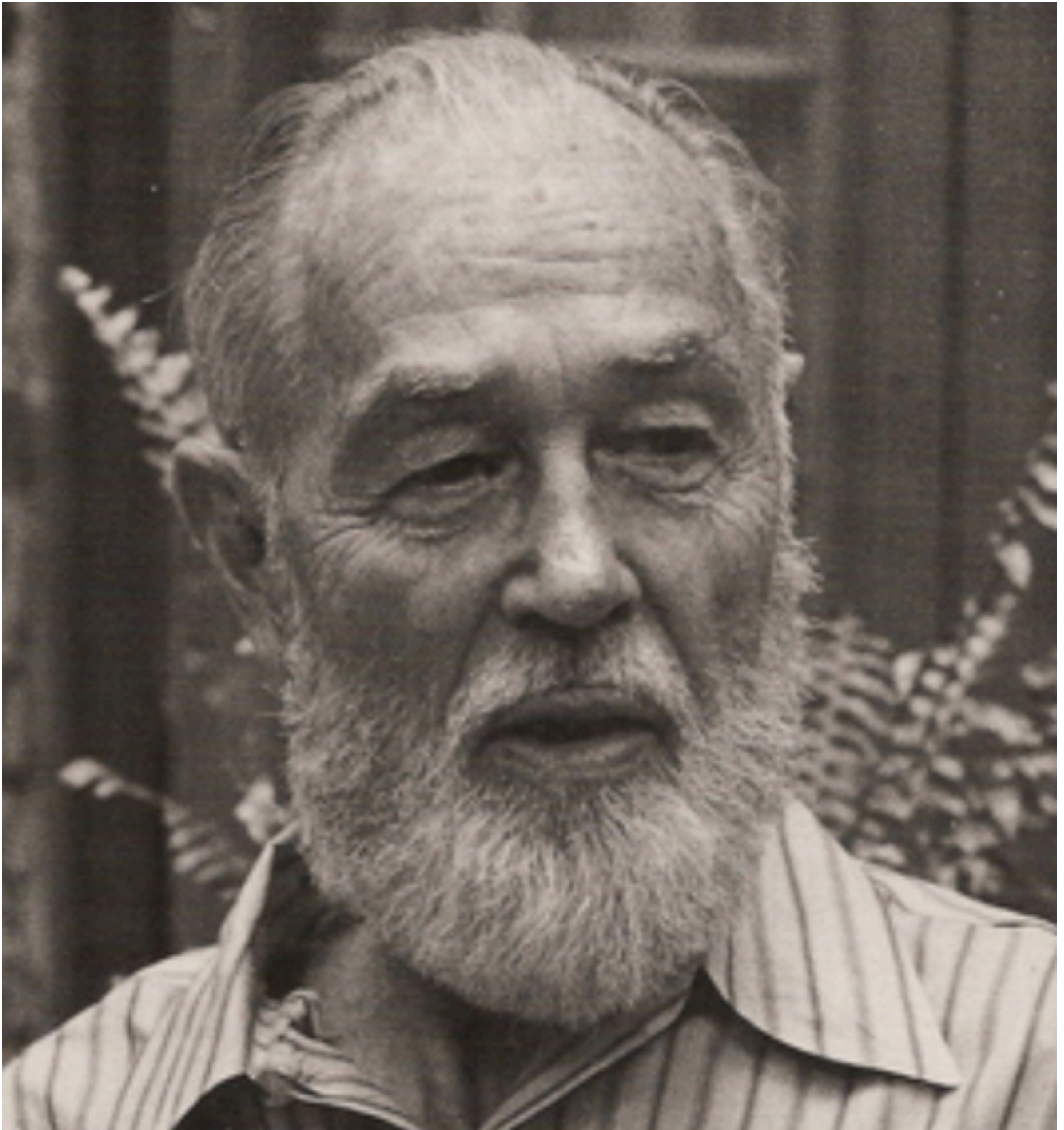
By the time Levi was a young teenager, his family had turned their barn into a hiding spot for escaped slaves heading north, and Levi was given the task of making sure they had food, water and other supplies. During this era, however, a series of laws were passed cracking down on participants in what later became known as the Underground Railroad. By 1820, Quakers were being openly persecuted in North Carolina for their abolitionist beliefs. As this persecution escalated, Levi's family relocated to Indiana, where their home became one of the early stops on the antislavery freedom routes developing in that region. One of the first things Levi did in Indiana was to build a relationship with the free Black community there: slaves often escaped to free Black communities in the North, but slave catchers expected this and also felt freer to abuse their power there. It was thus safer for escaping slaves to stay with White families such as Levi's.

In Indiana, Levi Coffin developed a successful business. He leveraged his wealth and his network in the cause of abolition, buying stock in companies that did not use slave labor and marketing their products. He helped bring more people into the cause and helped develop a more formalized route in what he called the "mysterious road." By 1833 he had become the director of a bank, and by 1838 was wealthy enough to build a large home with secret passages and hiding spaces. It was during the 1830s that the term "Underground Railroad" came into being… and Levi's home became known within the underground network as "Grand Central Station." Fugitive slaves would dress as maids and butlers of Grand Central, use the hiding spaces if necessary, and head north in the dead of night hidden on horse-drawn wagons carrying other commercial supplies. Historians estimate that over the course of his life, Levi Coffin probably assisted 4,000 slaves escape to freedom.

Bernardine Dohrn

As a radical law student in the late 1960s, Bernardine Dohrn helped the National Lawyers Guild organize young lawyers to defend antiwar and racial justice activists. She was swept deeper into the movement at a time when the Black freedom struggle was radicalizing, as it confronted the limitations of the civil rights movement to tackle systemic racism, and as it made stronger connections between imperial wars abroad, globalized economic inequality, and White supremacy. During this time both SNCC and the BPP called for White racial justice organizers to go into the belly of the beast – into White communities across the U.S. – and organize there. When Dohrn became a leader within the most radical wing of the Students For A Democratic Society – a wing that morphed into the Weathermen – she played a key role in translating those ideas to the White student movement. A turning point for Dohrn and the Weathermen came in the winter of 1969, when photos of the Mỹ Lai massacre were released to the public during the same month that Fred Hampton was assassinated by police while he slept in his bed. It was clear that state violence would continue to escalate, and that COINTELPRO's surveillance and infiltration of antiwar and racial justice groups would intensify even further. Dohrn and the Weathermen went underground in an effort to keep part of the movement outside of state violence and surveillance, and for the remainder of the Vietnam War they conducted bombings of the institutions responsible for that violence. Dohrn stayed underground with her husband Bill Ayers until 1980, after which she served seven months in prison for refusing to testify before a grand jury against other Weathermen. By the early 90s she had transformed herself into a leading figure for juvenile justice reform. Dohrn remains an important figure in racial justice movements today.

James Dombrowski



James Dombrowski was one of Anne Braden's most important mentors. The man she regarded as a "saintly theologian" had cofounded the Highlander Folk School in 1932, which became one of the few Southern multiracial training grounds for labor and racial justice organizing. Starting in the early 40s, Dombrowski directed the Southern Conference Education Fund, which sought to organize White southerners who supported integration and to fuse the struggles for racial and economic justice. Dombrowski's life is an opportunity to learn how a primarily White Southern organization built deep relations of trust with Black civil rights workers: Under Dombrowski's leadership, radical Black civil rights leaders like Fred Shuttlesworth (of Birmingham fame) gravitated towards the SCEF and worked in close connection with it.

Virginia & Clifford Durr

When you think of White southern aristocrats from the Jim Crow era, "antiracist" might not be the first word to spring to mind. But that's exactly who Virginia and Clifford Durr were. Cliff was an elite lawyer in the upper echelons of the New Deal administration; he also did a ton of legal work on the down-low for the Black freedom struggle where he lived in Montgomery… including supporting the Rosa Parks case (she was a close friend) and taking on a slew of police brutality cases in the wake of the famous boycott. Virginia was more outspoken and explicitly radical; openly participating in socialist organizations pushing for integration, and ensuring the Durr's home was always open to freedom fighters traversing the South. The Durr's wealth shielded them from the economic retaliation that crippled so many White antiracists, and Virginia leveraged her proximity to the White power structure on the one hand and Black freedom fighters on the other to channel money into the right places. Despite their proximity to power, the Durrs were severely isolated because of their activism. Virginia dealt with this by keeping up a fascinating correspondence that brings us right into profound historical moments and relationships and provides rich material from which to craft powerful stories.

Joseph Ellwanger

On the day before Selma's infamous Bloody Sunday, the White pastor Joseph Ellwanger led a march of seventy-two White civil rights supporters calling themselves the "Concerned White Citizens of Alabama." (Ellwanger had previously been involved in the Birmingham campaign and had spoken at the memorial for the four little girls killed in the infamous church bombing.) During Selma many of the White religious figures who came into town stayed at his home. In the wake of Selma, Ellwanger was the only White person to be invited by the Black leadership to speak with President Johnson, and then with George Wallace. Ellwanger is so humble that in his autobiography – which is primarily a how-to manual for social justice ministry – he barely explores these events, instead focusing on how congregations can support the homeless or people suffering abuse, or how congregations can strengthen their communities by having shared experiences being on the front lines of social justice. Today, at 86 years of age, he is primarily committed to ending mass incarceration and police brutality.

Bob Fitch

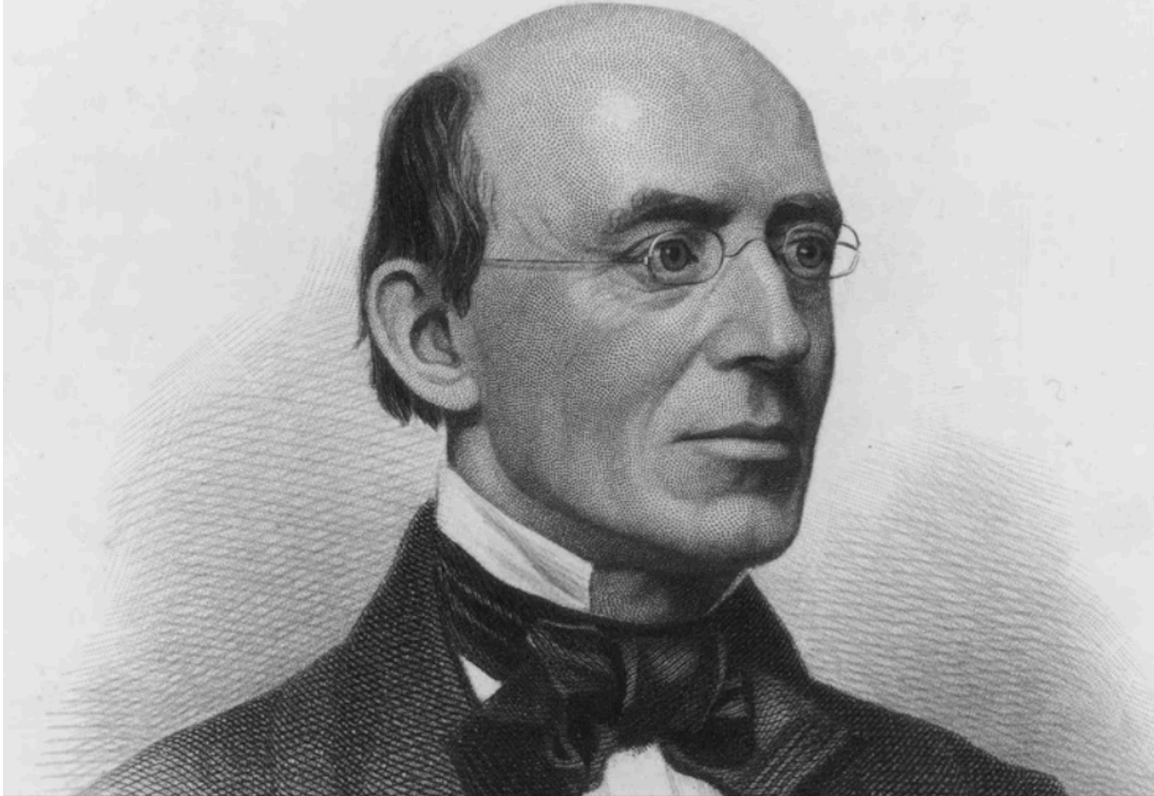
Born in 1939, Bob Fitch was the son of a conservative Christian minister. He experienced his family as cold and emotionally withdrawn, and as a teenager gravitated towards the warmth and vibrance of Berkeley's social justice scene. During that time, he tossed aside what he viewed as his father's rigid belief system… but went on to pursue a Master's of Divinity, according to his own understanding of a Jesus whose teachings centered on feeding the poor, housing the unsheltered, and giving company to the isolated.

Bob Fitch began his career as a minister at the famed Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, with a focus on supporting the homeless population and people suffering from addiction. Many were LGBT refugees who had been ostracized and abandoned by their families and communities, and had fallen into severe isolation and despair. The church had begun publishing books about the inequities in San Francisco, and asked Bob to take pictures during his time ministering to people on the street. He took the task to heart, and began studying the works of famous photographers in order to visually portray the inequities Jesus had preached against.

In 1963, Bob had a vision: "I had read James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* straight through one night and early morning. At the end of that reading I was entranced; I had a vision of myself being engaged with what I had encountered in the book in some sort of aesthetic manner." Soon afterwards, he was invited by Martin Luther King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to become a movement photographer. They needed a photojournalist, not only to take pictures of big movement events, but to embed themselves in the daily grassroots movement building and portray the daily work of the movement. And, given the extreme threats Black journalists faced, they needed the photojournalist to be White. For Bob Fitch, it was the fulfillment of the vision he had had while reading Baldwin through the night. Along the way, he also ended up becoming Martin Luther King's official photographer: many of the most famous pictures of King were taken by Fitch. Bob became a deeply trusted figure: he was often the only White person present during some of the civil rights movement's most emotional internal debates.

After King's death, Bob felt uneasy about growing tensions within the movement. During an angry civil rights retreat, he left the meeting and went to meditate in the forest, where he experienced a vision of Martin Luther King urging him not to walk away from the work. Fitch wanted to remain committed to documenting powerful nonviolent movements driven by ordinary people. He relocated to Delano, California, and became a photojournalist for the United Farm Workers, where for years he captured evocative images of everything from life in the fields to strategy sessions to police brutality against workers on strike. The official U.S. postage stamp of Cesar Chavez is based on a photo taken by Fitch. For Bob, photography was both a spiritual experience of being present, in the moment, allowing himself to be guided by intuition; as well as a spiritual commitment to justice. He passed away in the farming community of Watsonville in 2016.

William Lloyd Garrison



Born in 1805, William Lloyd Garrison founded the weekly abolitionist newspaper "The Liberator" in 1831. The paper was an uncompromising assault on slavery, calling not for its gradual end, but for complete and immediate abolition with no compensation to slave owners. Garrison opened the founding issue with these words: "I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present."

Garrison viewed the press as an essential tool for political change. The Liberator published Black abolitionist voices, first-hand accounts of slavery, and as such quickly gained traction in free Black communities throughout the North. Soon it spread to a White readership in the thousands, and helped to strengthen a network of committed abolitionists. Garrison and other leading abolitionists built on this momentum by founding the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. The organization "drew violent reactions from slave interests in both the Southern and Northern states, with mobs breaking up anti-slavery meetings, assaulting lecturers, ransacking anti-slavery offices, burning postal sacks of anti-slavery pamphlets, and destroying anti-slavery presses. Healthy bounties were offered in Southern states for the capture of Garrison, 'dead or alive.'" Despite such harassment, by 1838 the Anti-Slavery Society had 1,350 chapters, and boasted 250,000 members.

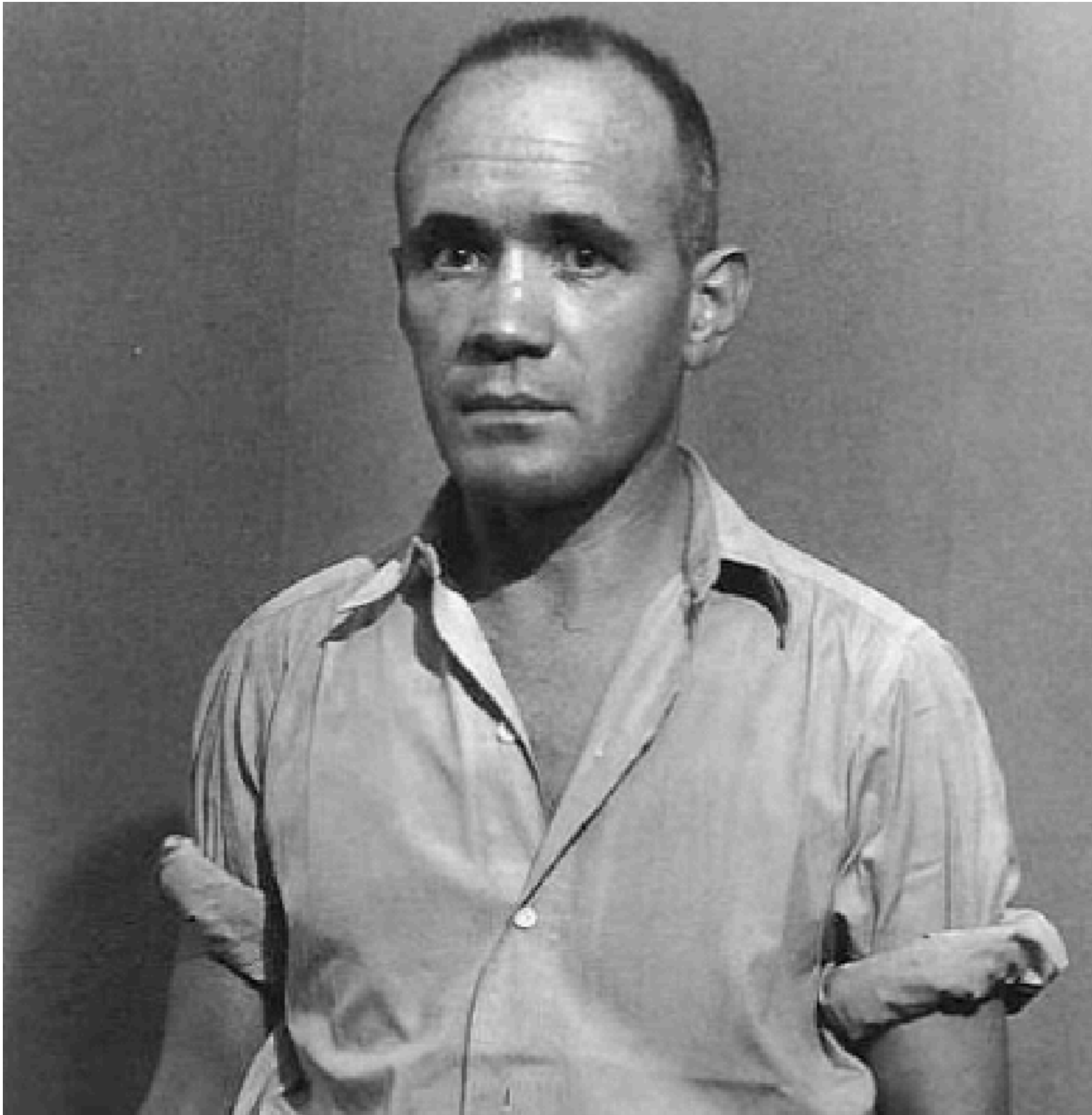
Garrison also used The Liberator to call for women's rights, and was an early advocate of women's right to vote. He urged women to engage in mass petitioning against slavery, welcomed their contributions to The Liberator, and invited them to become prominent members of the American Anti-Slavery Society. When the London-based World Anti-Slavery Convention refused to seat the female delegates sent by the U.S., Garrison gave up his seat and sat with the women in the spectator's gallery.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1865, William Lloyd Garrison closed The Liberator, resigned from the American Antislavery Society, and called for the formation of new organizations to push for civil rights. The Antislavery Society remained active for five more years, when the 15th Amendment granted Black Americans the right to vote. When Garrison passed away in 1879, his friend Frederick Douglas delivered his eulogy: "It was the glory of this man that he could stand alone with the truth, and calmly await the result . . . He was unusually modest and retiring in his disposition; but his zeal was like fire, and his courage like steel, and during all his fifty years of service, in sunshine and storm, no doubt or fear as to the final result ever shook his manly breast or caused him to swerve an inch from the right line of principle."

Betty Garman

Betty Garman was a young college student in New York when the sit-in movement broke out in 1960. She helped to organize discussion groups that brought together hundreds of White students to discuss how they could be in solidarity from the North. The experience led her to study racial justice movements as a graduate student at UC Berkeley. When Garman formed an organization to support the Southern freedom struggle, she was put in touch with SNCC's Executive Director, Jim Forman. In 1964, she dropped out of college and moved to Atlanta to work for SNCC full time. As the group's official Northern Coordinator, her task was to mobilize resources and student support from outside the South. This included being the lead organizer of the Friends of SNCC groups across the country, which served to plug people into movement news and events, and communicated the needs of the movement to people throughout the nation. Friends of SNCC chapters could be called on to throw parties to raise bail funds, host demonstrations, or make phone calls to local legislators or radio stations to spread news or generate outside pressure. "At the height of SNCC's work," Garman recalled, "we could organize large coordinated demonstrations in fifty northern cities simultaneously, with only a few days notice." Friends of SNCC played a major role in recruiting people across the country to head south and volunteer on the ground. They also saved people's lives: the outside pressure and attention Friends of SNCC created meant that violence against SNCC workers in the South would get national attention, something White Southern leaders tried hard to avoid. Betty Garman also worked to make sure that the Southern SNCC folks in the field understood the importance of the Northern work which sometimes felt distant to them, and that the folks in the North felt valued by the movement even though they weren't in the thick of it. Over the decades, she continued to work on a range of racial justice issues from housing to healthcare and community organizing. In recent years she helped found SURJ Baltimore, commenting: "In the 1960s, SNCC told us to go into the white community because this is where the power lay. Sixty years later it is clearly a necessary focus for white organizers to be doing this and undermining white supremacy." She passed away in October 2020: May Betty Garman rest in power.

Jean Genet



In 1970, the Black Panther International Section – based out of Algeria, where prominent Panthers-in-exile had fled – approached the controversial French literary giant Jean Genet, who was a fierce critic of French neocolonial oppression in Algeria and elsewhere. The Panthers asked Genet if he would issue statements of support for the Panthers from France. The situation for the BPP was dire at the time: COINTELPRO was decimating the party, cofounders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were both in jail along with hundreds of other leading Panthers, and finances were in shambles. The BPP International hoped that Genet, as one of the world's most famous authors, could help generate support from abroad.

Instead of issuing statements from France, Genet got on a plane. Banned from the U.S. as an outspoken radical gay man with a criminal record, Genet flew to Montreal, where the BPP Deputy of Information for New York State, Zayd Malik Shakur (later arrested alongside Assata Shakur), met him and smuggled Genet into New York. In the words of scholar Robert Sandarg, "With his illegal status, he would of necessity lead a shadowy existence, emerging from Panther sanctuaries to address audiences, then disappearing again." Although Genet often addressed multiple audiences a day, at one point he went underground for two entire weeks… time that he spent actively strategizing with the Black Panthers. Genet spent two months travelling the U.S. He focused especially on mobilizing White youth from privileged economic backgrounds, speaking everywhere from Yale to MIT to Stanford, in an effort to leverage the resources and networks these students had in the cause of the Black Panther Party… and to move them into action. During his talks Genet discussed concepts central to the BPP: the right to self-defense, escalating police brutality and surveillance as a form of American fascism, and solidarity between Black Americans and colonized people in the shared struggle against White supremacy as it played out on the global stage.

Genet urged these students to mobilize their communities to financially support the Black Panther Party Legal Defense Fund, but he also expressed that he was sick of watching White intellectuals do nothing BUT donate and talk about the issues. For Genet, White radical good conscience was impoverished. As he put it: "You must face life and no longer live in the comfortable aquariums of the California universities, like goldfish only capable of making bubbles . . . I can only relate to people by their practices and actions . . . not by their words." In an article titled "Bobby Seale, the Black Panthers, and Us White People" published in the Black Panther newspaper, Genet wrote to White youth: "When the Black Panthers contacted me in France, I came right away to the United States to put myself at their disposal. Your youth, your intellect and physical agility, your moral imperatives are capable of making you act faster than I, and with greater efficiency. This is why I am counting on you to help the Black Panther Party."

Eventually Immigration Services tracked Jean Genet down. He crossed back into Canada rather than submit to them. From there he flew back to France, which he soon left to spend six months working in Palestinian refugee camps. Genet continued his support for the Black Panther Party from overseas, giving large

portions of his personal fortune to the BPP, anticolonial freedom struggles, and to immigrant's rights groups in France. Angela Davis had assisted Genet with interpretation during his tour, and Genet later contributed to the Free Angela Davis Movement, writing articles that lambasted the American news media for their unwillingness to forthrightly discuss her case. Genet also threw his support to George Jackson: the introduction to Jackson's famous book "Soledad Brother" is written by Jean Genet.

Grass Roots Organizing Work (GROW)

(Image: GROW meeting in a cow pasture, where Klan rallies had traditionally been held).

In late 1966, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had not yet become an all-Black organization, but it was headed quickly in that direction. By this time, the organization that had grown out of the sit-ins, conducted freedom rides, and become the most effective civil rights organization in terms of grassroots organizing had asked its White members to focus on organizing White communities for racial justice. Stokely Carmichael in particular emphasized the importance of organizing poor White folks.

Bob Zellner – one of SNCC's very first White members – took SNCC's new direction to heart. He and his wife Dottie Zellner founded Grass Roots Organizing Work, with a mission statement that read: "We want to begin the serious long-range effort to organize the white people in the south into an equal force in strength and similar in commitment to the movement now flourishing in the Black community . . . so that interracial coalitions, based on common interest, can be formed."

Bob and Dottie originally hoped that GROW would work in connection with SNCC. As Dottie writes, "I . . . thought that white people could not be organized in a vacuum; there had to be some black presence if such organizing were not to degenerate into racist activities." As Bob writes in his autobiography, he also hoped to help poor White southerners "link up with the expertise and the experience and drive that existed in the black community." After all the other White SNCC members had left the organization, the Zellner's stayed on to present the project idea to SNCC. They knew that the project moved against the direction SNCC was headed in, but at the same time they were two of the most trusted White members of SNCC, and had the support of many of the older and more experienced members. However, the project was rejected, after which the Zellners became the last White members to leave the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

The couple moved to New Orleans in 1967 and launched GROW with the support of Anne and Carl Braden's organization, the Southern Conference Educational Fund. They chose New Orleans because it was easy to access both Mississippi and Alabama, and because it was safe: they didn't want to move to a rural southern area where they'd have to waste time, energy and resources defending themselves. GROW began reaching out to poor White folks through their extensive network of Black southern civil rights workers, who had encountered sympathetic Whites over their years of organizing. For example, Fannie Lou Hamer put GROW in touch with poor White southerners who she had built connections with.

However, GROW found that the White rural poor were so desperate that asking them to spend additional time organizing when they were struggling just to survive was too big of an ask. As Bob Zellner remembers: "They were all so poor. We stayed with them during the winter in houses so ramshackle the wind blew straight through." Many of them didn't own shoes. In addition to their dire poverty, some of the White sharecroppers and other rural poor were scared to death that their overseers would retaliate if they found out they took a literacy class or organizing workshop with GROW. Unlike the Black rural poor, they didn't have a broader

movement to look to or feel inspired by: their fear was crippling. GROW concluded that they needed social services before they could organize, and GROW wasn't equipped to offer that. As GROW member Robert Analavage wrote, "These are people who must eventually be a part of any movement we build, but they do not have the strength to be the spearhead of it."

And so, GROW turned its attention away from severe rural poverty and towards factory workers and unionization efforts. GROW's first breakthrough was with a group of woodworkers who were on strike in Laurel, Mississippi. Laurel was a Klan hotspot, and some of the country's most notorious Klansmen were part of the strike. Bob Zellner's own father had been a Klansman, and he knew how to talk with them. The workers accepted a meeting with Bob, and he opened by being upfront about his background as a SNCC worker. Then he described the new GROW project: "We work with black and white people who believe they are stronger working together with each other rather than against each other. If we can help you, we want to." A Klan leader named Herbert Ishey slammed his fist down on the table: "Goddammit, I don't care who you are. We need help from wherever we can get it. You think you're the only one's who have trouble with the FBI. They call us Kluxers. We don't care, commies or Kluxers, we need to get together."

With the support of GROW the woodworkers were soon holding drive-in rallies with thousands of Black and White workers, in the same cow pastures where Klan rallies were held, "talking about how the power structure was holding them down." As Bob Zellner recalls, "We had 1,500, 2,000 workers, half Black, half white, half with Wallace stickers and half with NAACP stickers, in the cow pasture meeting together. This is in 1968, '69, in Mississippi." Although GROW was a primarily White-led organization, there were also Black militants – like Republic of New Afrika member Walter Collins – on staff. Like many Black Power militants, Walter believed in the transformational power of organizing poor Whites for racial and economic justice. He built his own relationships with old Klan members, and between his efforts and the Zellners, GROW got Black workers and Klan members to go leafleting together in integrated groups with flyers that said, "Come to the working people's rally". Mississippi had never seen anything like it.

GROW would continue such work for ten years, not only with woodworkers but also with workers in the poultry and fishing industries. How did GROW do it? Just as they had done in their civil rights work, the members of GROW embedded themselves in the communities they worked with, got to know the people, practiced humility and respect across their differences, and built trust. They provided considerable benefits to those they worked with by facilitating connections to their network of movement lawyers and researchers. And they emphasized practical, material change over idealism. As Bob Zellner put it to one group of White workers: "If you're going to have a strong union, you must have black and white in there. You know you don't want black people crossing the picket lines, and you can't have segregated drinking fountains and bathrooms and lockers, the way you had before . . . You have to do more than you ever expected to, but when you do that, then you have strength and

they can't beat you." GROW emphasized that segregation led to poorer jobs, schools, and healthcare for everyone. They urged skeptical White workers to at least give it a shot… try some new behavior and see what happens to your ideas, they would say. And to some extent it worked: the ideas of these White southern workers did indeed begin to change. GROW shifted a lot of folks away from the Klan, without ever telling them they were bad people. As Dottie Zellner put it, GROW's work "proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that on a grass-roots level, it is possible to create working-class interracial coalitions. Period."

The Grimke Sisters

Sarah Grimké (born 1792) and Angelina Grimké (born 1805) – known together as the Grimké Sisters – were the first nationally renowned White female abolitionists. Their father was wealthy, sat on the Supreme Court of South Carolina, and held hundreds of slaves in bondage. Witnessing violent brutality against their father's slaves while they were children guided the sisters into serious doubts about their father's beliefs. His misogynistic repression of their passion for education facilitated a further break. The turning point towards embracing abolitionism came when Sarah travelled to Philadelphia in the 1820s, where she was introduced to Quaker beliefs. She was drawn to their humility, opposition to violence, embrace of gender equity… and commitment to abolition. By 1829, the sisters had both moved to Philadelphia and embraced Quakerism.

After William Lloyd Garrison – who ran the abolitionist newspaper The Liberator – published a letter by Angelina in 1835, the sisters became popular figures on the abolitionist speaking circuit. They were especially valued because they were examples of people who had turned against the wealthy slave-holding planter class they had come from. The sisters were also brilliant writers, publishing moving appeals to White southern women, Christians, and believers in democracy to take a stand against slavery. Their writing vividly described how slavery was anti-Christian and anti-democratic, which became key abolitionist themes leading up to the Civil War. The sisters often went beyond the comfort zones of their fellow abolitionists by not only advocating the destruction of slavery, but of racial prejudice itself.

The Grimké sisters were also early feminists, writing and speaking about gender equity and how women needed to use their voices and recognize their potential power if they were ever going to create the world they wanted to see. For example, Angelina's *"Appeal to the Christian Women of the South"* reads: "I know you do not make the laws, but I also know that you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do; and if you really suppose you can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken." They helped organize White women for abolition by approaching them in a sisterly and non-condescending way, and for their words were threatened with imprisonment if they ever returned to the South.

Myles Horton

Myles Horton was born in 1905, to loving, impoverished parents in Tennessee. His mother and father had both been educators, but when new teaching standards were passed that required teachers to have a high school education, they lost their jobs and became factory laborers. His parents, however, continued to organize classes for members of the community.

Myles left home at fifteen to work in a sawmill, and then as a packer in factories. There, he was exposed to unions, and became an organizer. He continued his labor organizing when he entered college in 1924. While in college, he also taught Bible classes. During one of the sessions, a group of rural workers told Myles about the difficulties they faced, and looked to him for answers. He had none, but asked the group to share more about their experiences. By creating a space for sharing, reflecting, and listening, the participants were able to discover their own solutions. It was a moment that would shape the rest of Myles Horton's life: by the late 1920s he was envisioning creating an educational space for the poor and working class people of Appalachia, geared towards helping communities wrestle with the problems that were the most important to them. This led him to travel to Denmark in 1931 and study the Danish folk schools, which were centered on the lived experiences and concerns of students. Myles' thinking was influenced by these school's informality, focus on community problem solving, and culture building.

In 1932, Myles Horton rented a small farm in the Appalachian Mountains, where he co-founded the Highlander Folk School. Poor and working class Southerners would attend workshops and discussion groups, with the purpose of sharing their own experiences and ideas with one another and generating solutions. They were then encouraged to go back to their communities and put those solutions into practice… and perhaps return to Highlander for further rounds of reflection and refinement in their search for solutions to the problems they cared about. Highlander soon became a center for labor organizing… and for combatting the racism that divided working-class people from mobilizing and working together.

In 1944, Highlander hosted its first integrated workshops. As momentum for the civil rights movement picked up in the early 1950s, Highlander shifted to become a civil rights training ground. Rosa Parks attended sessions before the Montgomery bus boycott, and after the boycott, Martin Luther King began using Highlander as a retreat and training ground for his organization. Most importantly, the ethos of Highlander had a huge impact on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: influenced by trainings at Highlander, SNCC members organized Black communities throughout the South not by telling people how to organize… but through deep listening and sharing, through which communities were able to organize themselves and develop local, sustainable leadership and movement community.

Myles Horton continued to direct Highlander until 1973. Highlander remains a vital organizing center to this day.

Zilphia Horton

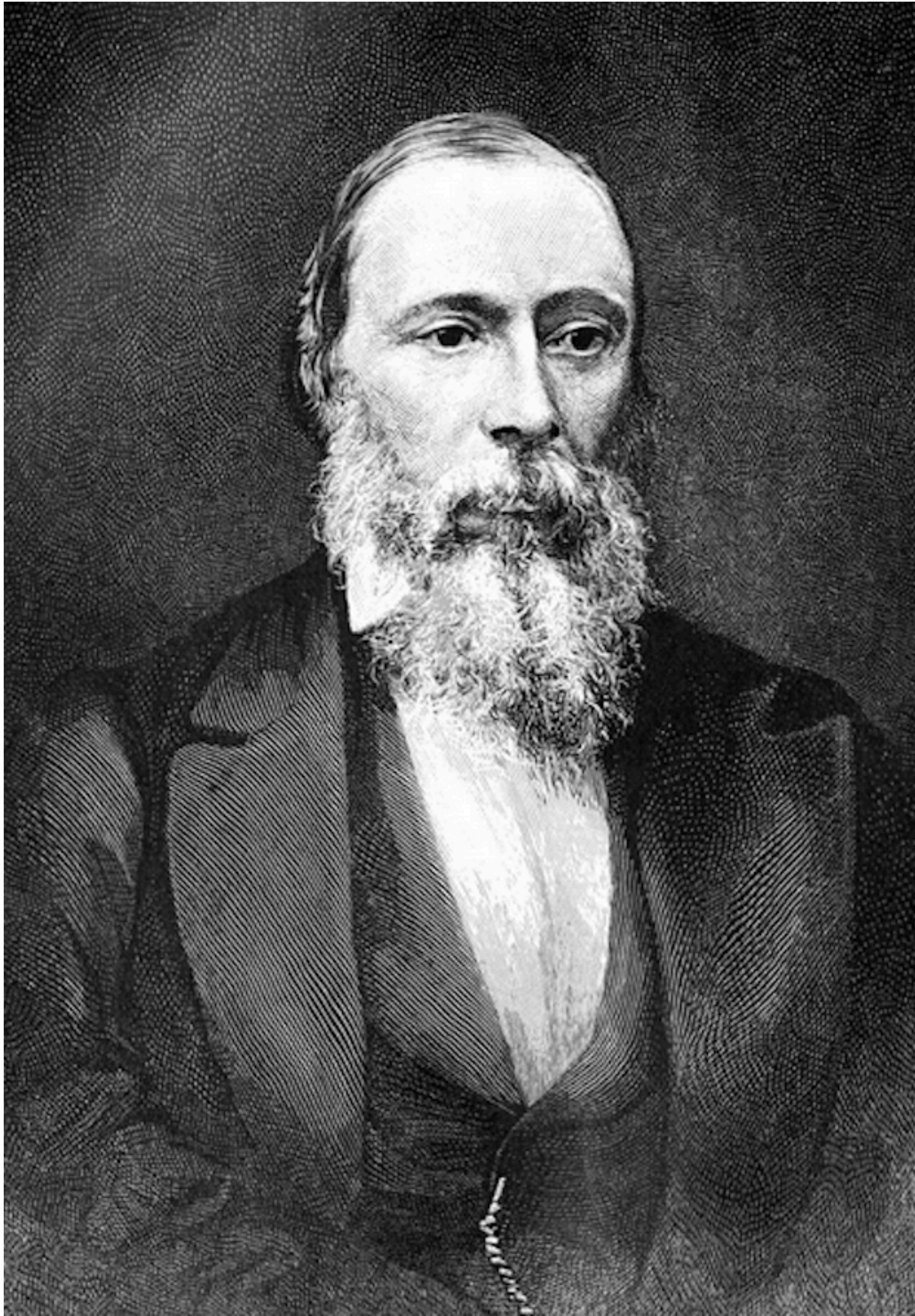
In 1910, Zilphia Horton was born in a coal-mining town in Arkansas… to a father who owned the mine. She was sent to college and trained as a classical musician. Despite her class privilege, she was moved by the struggles of the coal miners, and became an active member of their unionization efforts. For this, Zilphia's father disowned her.

In 1935, Zilphia attended a workshop at the recently founded Highlander Folk School, a labor organizing training center in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee. There, she and the co-founder of Highlander, Myles Horton, fell in love and were soon married. Zilphia believed that theatre, music, and art were essential for labor organizing, and began directing Highlander's theatre and music programs. For the theatre component, organizers would create skits about the problems they faced and were attempting to solve. Audience members would then comment on how the skit could even better clarify or solve the problems workers faced. These refined skits would then be presented at actual union meetings. For the musical component, Zilphia would ask participants to share their songs and dances together. This was a way of building community, but also for workers to learn about new songs that could strengthen their own organizing.

Zilphia would compile these songs into songbooks. Over the years, she gathered an enormous amount of music from different organizing communities, whether it was the protest songs of miners or sharecroppers or religious music meant to nourish the spirit. There were plenty of labor struggles in the fields and factories; in the mines and the mills near Highlander, and Zilphia would often take her music down to the picket lines to re-energize tired workers with some communal singing. In this way she was constantly adapting the many songs she learned to fit new contexts.

In the early 50s, Highlander began shifting its attention towards racial justice. Zilphia, however, died of a tragic accident in 1956, just as the civil rights movement was being born. Her music, however, would have a powerful impact on the movement she was not able to participate in herself. In 1946, one of the groups of organizers that came to Highlander were striking tobacco workers. On their picket lines, the workers - who were both Black and White – had changed the words of a Black spiritual that originally went, "I will be all right, I will be all right, the Lord will see me through." The adapted song went: "We will organize, we will organize, the Lord will see us through"… and also "We will overcome, we will overcome." When Zilphia heard this song, she felt it was incredibly powerful… and began closing all of her workshops with it. In 1947, her friend Pete Seeger altered it to: "We SHALL overcome." In 1957, Martin Luther King was moved by the song at a training he attended at Highlander. Finally, in 1960, a group of sit-in students came to Highlander… and soon found themselves singing the song to strengthen their spirits as police raided the training center, and then while in jail. From that moment, "We Shall Overcome" quickly emerged as the unofficial anthem of the civil rights movement.

Jean-Charles Houzeau



One of the strangest and also least-known tales from the chronicles of abolitionism is the story of Jean-Charles Houzeau, a Belgian astronomer born in 1820. When revolutions swept across Europe in 1848, Houzeau's revolutionary sympathies cost him his position running the royal observatory… and put his life in danger. In order to disappear, he relocated to the Texas frontier, just before the Civil War. The European revolutionary was horrified by the slavery he witnessed there, and Houzeau participated in an underground movement to help fugitive slaves escape south to Mexico. During the Civil War, he helped Union sympathizers who were being hunted by Confederates escape as well. Soon, Houzeau had to flee himself. He had become fascinated by the plant and animal life of the Texan deserts, and his skin had browned from his extensive time conducting biological research under the desert sun. The scientist disguised himself as a Mexican laborer, and crossed the border into Mexico.

When New Orleans was liberated even as the Civil War raged on, Houzeau crossed back across the border to live there. He was soon submitting articles to the local Black newspaper, *The New Orleans Tribune,* sharing his ideas for how greater degrees of Black freedom could be attained and how Black unity across regional and class differences could be strengthened. Because Houzeau spoke French and had a light brown complexion, the owners of the paper – who were light-skinned Black men who spoke French and had even studied in Paris – at first assumed that Houzeau was a light skinned Creole man, until he told them otherwise. When they asked Houzeau to become the editor of the paper, however, they did not disclose his race… in fact, the Tribune instead emphasized that it was "edited by men of color" and that it would never be "controlled by any white man." The Belgian scientist and revolutionary did not dispute this, and began passing for Black… perhaps because the Tribune leadership had decided it was in the paper's best interest for him to do so. This arrangement continued for three and a half years, when Houzeau left the paper, and moved to Jamaica.

Houzeau's experiences with revolution and revolutionary thinking in Europe gave him a unique analysis of American power dynamics and race relations that the *Tribune* valued, and which helped it become a leading Black newspaper in the U.S. Under Houzeau's editorship, The Tribune's reach soon extended to Black communities across the country, and even into the halls of Congress, where it was read widely by abolitionists and later by supporters of Radical Reconstruction. Half a century later, W.E.B. Du Bois quoted extensively from the Tribune in his masterful book Black Reconstruction, hailing the newspaper during the time it was run by Houzeau as "an unusually effective organ" during the era of emancipation.

Stanley Levison

Shortly after Martin Luther King was assassinated, a group of his closest friends met in his home. Some of them wondered who the White man was who kept ducking into the King's bedroom – alongside Harry Belafonte – to check on Coretta and the kids. That was Stanley Levison. Levison was a wealthy Jewish businessman from New York… and also the former manager of the Communist Party's finances, who had left the Party to use his business acumen to channel money into the Black freedom struggle. Together with his comrades Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin, Levison had been involved in an effort to fund movements in the South that were trying to get off the ground in the period leading up to the civil rights movement. When the Montgomery bus boycott erupted, these three master-strategists channeled resources to the local movement, hoping that it would become the spark that lit the fire of a regional movement. They were right: and from that moment on, Levison had been King's invisible confidant… the man who King always knew he could call if he woke up at 3AM filled with fears or with new ideas he wanted to explore. Over the years King's relationship with Levison never wavered… not even when the FBI began using King's connection to the former Communist as the excuse for their campaign of surveillance, demonization, and intimidation of King that was designed to destroy the entire civil rights movement. King valued Levison partly because unlike so many others, Levison had no interest in pushing King's ideas or strategies in a certain direction. King, knowing that Levison didn't want anything from him in return — such as to gain status through associating with him — trusted Levison more than anyone else to be brutally honest with him. For years Levison did King's taxes; secured his book contracts… and when King offered payment, Levison refused. In one letter explaining his refusal of payment Levison wrote: "My skills . . . were acquired not only in a cloistered academic environment, but also in the commercial jungle . . . I looked forward to the time when I could use these skills not for myself but for socially constructive ends. The liberation struggle is the most positive and rewarding area of work anyone could experience." One of King's most beloved friends and most important aides, Andrew Young, later said of Levison: "Of all the unknown supporters of the civil rights movement, he was perhaps the most important." Coretta Scott King said of Levison: "Because he was such modest man, few people know of the magnitude of his contributions to the labor, civil rights and peace movements." After King's death, Levison joined his friend Belafonte in ensuring that King's wife and children would have no economic difficulties. Levison continued to fund a variety of movement causes until the day he died.

Grace & Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin

Born in the 1890's, Grace and Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin were raised by a resentful father from a once prominent slave-holding family. After the Civil War, the Confederate veteran joined the original Ku Klux Klan. As children, the sisters witnessed their father mercilessly beating the family's Black servants. Although they were raised in an atmosphere of hardcore White supremacy, it was the awful witnessing of their father's violence that led the sisters to have their first doubts about racial injustice.

After high school, the sisters attended an all-women's college in Georgia. Although they were in the Deep South during the height of Jim Crow, it was also the Progressive Era: labor and women's rights were much discussed, as was education reform, often through the lens of a Progressive Christianity. As has been true for other White southern women like Anne Braden, having the opportunity to attend college – and especially a women's college – became the first opportunity for the Lumpkin sisters to be exposed to different ideas than those they were raised with.

When Katharine joined the Young Women's Christian Association, she was shocked to hear that a Black woman was going to address the group. Afterwards, however, she realized that "the heavens had not fallen, nor the earth parted asunder to swallow us up in this unheard of transgression". She began to question the racial beliefs she was raised with, and made further experiments with crossing the color line. Each time she did, not only did it not feel wrong… it felt right. She soon joined efforts to desegregate the YWCA. Inspired by her own discovery, she worked to create spaces for interracial contact within the YWCA – such as interracial study groups and conferences – with the hope that other White women would have the same experience she had. Many of them did: and because they had supportive community through the YWCA, these women were not faced with the severe isolation some other White dissenters from segregation faced. This allowed them to stay in the work of challenging segregation, even though it was the 1920s and the Klan was at the height of its powers.

Grace, meanwhile, joined picket lines, and was arrested at a protest supporting the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. She published a piece in a Black newspaper titled "Why I as a White Southern Woman Will Vote Communist." Soon, she grew into a literary star of the Left. In 1929 she worked with the Communist Party to organize Black sharecroppers in the South. Grace, however, grew deeply disillusioned with Communism after experiencing harsh party discipline and threats meant to keep her in line. She became an FBI informant to help take the Party down. Grace's backlash against Communism – which supported racial justice – may have been what led her to reverse her racial beliefs as well: during the civil rights movement, the woman who once fought for Black sharecroppers now supported segregation.

While Grace was diving deeper into radical labor movements, Katharine studied sociology in Northern universities, which continued her antiracist trajectory. As she recalled, "Until now, it came over me, I had never studied the South. I had never 'gone to the sources,' 'checked facts against hearsay,' sorted out 'unbiased from

biased history' . . . I began to doubt my own characterizations." In her memoir, "The Making of a Southerner," Katharine describes her process of breaking away from her upbringing… and uses as source material her family's own slave inventories and Klan records. By showing how far she had moved from her roots, she hoped to model the possibility for others. During the civil rights movement, as a sociology professor Katharine taught a class contextualizing and analyzing the events unfolding before the eyes of the students. When Stokely Carmichael initiated the Black Power movement in the late 60s, she wrote to him expressing her support.

Jack Minnis

Jack Minnis was the creator and director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's research department. He was a "crusty older white guy," in the words of one of his SNCC comrades, "who smoked like a fiend, looked generally unkempt, and could get research from a turnip." He was also a highly sought after lawyer, especially by D.C. think tanks, but he had chosen SNCC. Jack ran with ideas when they came up: one day when a fellow SNCC worker was pouring out some thoughts, Jack stopped him cold. He started "bellowing to various staff members that he wanted to have an executive meeting right then at that time and got up from his desk and gave me a hug that came close to breaking my back," because apparently something in the flow of thoughts had struck Jack as brilliant. If research departments were the kinds of things that became legendary, SNCC's research department would have had a legendary status. As Minnis recalled, "we had a research department either the DNC or RNC would have been proud of." It was through that department that essential information was channeled to SNCC workers in the field, allowing them to be highly effective community organizers.

Part of Jack's work was uncovering the stakeholders in the power structures that opposed SNCC's civil rights work. For example, if plantation owners mobilized their local political power against a SNCC campaign, Jack Minnis would track down which corporations or major stockholders across the country had financial interests in the plantation. The majority stockholder of one plantation, he discovered, was the Queen of England, but more typically it would be a major U.S. corporation that didn't want to be seen as supporting segregationist efforts. Such information was effectively leveraged by SNCC to put outside political and financial pressure on the Southern power structure at war with the civil rights movement.

Another task of the department led by Jack was researching the local legal systems of the counties and cities SNCC worked in. As Stokely Carmichael recalls, "I asked Jack Minnis to check out the laws on independent parties in Alabama . . . In less than a week he called back." Based on an obscure Reconstruction-era law Jack discovered, Stokely initiated an independent Black political party in the primarily Black Lowndes Country. The Lowndes County Freedom Party began running Black candidates for everything from the sheriff to school board members. It was one of the major moments in the trajectory towards Black Power.

Jack's example also impacted SNCC workers in other ways. As Bruce Hartford recalled, "Jack had the facts and he [laid] them out for all to see, and that did more to radicalize me than any fiery speech." SNCC worker Judy Richardson – who later produced *Eyes on the Prize* – recalled being impacted by the way Jack organized his research in such a detailed yet concise fashion: his example helped her organize material for her famous documentary… as well some of her own research about police brutality in New York City.

After SNCC became an all-Black organization, the "crusty older white guy" retreated to a wooded cabin with other White SNCC comrades, finished off a bottle of Jack Daniels, and felt sad, but not bitter. And then SNCC called him. He couldn't be on

staff anymore, but they needed his research skills. So did groups like GROW, which had been founded by White SNCC workers to organize White southerners for racial and economic justice. Jack Minnis got back to work.

Juliette Morgan

Juliette Morgan was one of the only White people in Montgomery to vocally support the famous boycott. For this, she was abandoned by her friends, church, and community, and was ruthlessly demonized, harassed, and threatened. After a couple years of fear and isolation she took her own life. Morgan's suicide became a symbol for other White Southern antiracists of the necessity for building networks of community and emotional support systems in order to successfully engage in White Southern antiracist work. Anne Braden herself commented that if she had not had community support she could easily imagine suffering Morgan's fate, and felt that Morgan's death highlighted even further the need for White southern antiracists to connect with one another. Morgan's story is a grim one, but it's also an opportunity for White antiracists today to wrestle with how White antiracist voices have been marginalized, mocked, and isolated, and to reflect on how we can build antiracist cultures of connection and resilience today. Although Morgan is most well known for the circumstances leading to her suicide, the story of her years of activism before the boycott remains almost totally invisible.

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland

“I am Southern and White – as southern as the red clay of Georgia, as southern as Lee’s mansion overlooking the Potomac.” Such are the roots of freedom rider Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, who participated in over 50 sit-ins and demonstrations by the time she was 23 years old. For her actions she was disowned by her family, attacked, shot at, incarcerated in America’s most notorious prison, and hunted (unsuccessfully) by the Klan for execution.

Joan was 13 years old when the Brown v. Board of Education ruling ordered schools desegregated in 1954. When Joan witnessed the virulent rage that was unleashed she says “I knew something was terribly wrong in the South . . . We southerners needed to put our own house in order.” The feeling grew over time, prompting her to join the sit-in movement as a college student at Duke University in 1960. During a sit-in in Mississippi, when a White man approached one of the Black sit-in students holding a knife, Joan – who unknown to the crowd was acting as a designated observer – intervened. When the crowd saw a White woman from the crowd join the sit-in, it descended into the most violent sit-in of the civil rights movement. During Joan’s first arrest, authorities were perplexed by the participation of a White southern woman: she was branded as “mentally ill” and taken in for testing. Under pressure from Duke University to cease her activism, Joan instead dropped out.

When the first freedom riders were firebombed and beaten, Joan was working for the Nonviolent Action Group. NAG helped with the effort to supply new freedom riders and Joan went herself in a group that included Stokely Carmichael. The riders were thrown into the notoriously violent Parchman Penitentiary of Mississippi, where Joan was held in the “death row” unit for two months. Although Parchman was a brutal jail, there was a continuous flow of freedom riders into the cells and the prisoners filled their days and nights with freedom songs, prayer, and worship. After her release, Joan – now an outcast from White southern society – continued her college degree at Mississippi’s historically Black Tougaloo College.

During the build-up to the 1964 Freedom Summer, Joan was placed on the Klan’s “most wanted” death list. The Klan hoped that killing a White civil rights worker would prevent White students from travelling to Mississippi to support the voting rights effort. One night the car Joan and her movement comrades were in was followed, and then blocked by other cars from the front. The driver was a Pakistani professor named Hamid Kizilbash, and when he was pulled out of the car and beaten, one of the other riders was able to convince the mob that Hamid was a foreigner… and that if a foreigner was killed it would cause international problems and bring FBI and State Department attention to the Klan. The crowd that had begun chanting about holding a lynching “party” dispersed. The infamous murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner took place three weeks later, but by that time Freedom Summer was in full swing. Joan had given Michael Schwerner his orientation about what he needed to know about being a White civil rights worker to survive in Mississippi just days earlier. She recalls, “Because we weren’t killed, our friends were.”

A.J. Muste

In the words of Martin Luther King, "The current emphasis on nonviolent direct action in the race relations field is due more to A.J. than to anyone else in the country." By the late 1930s, A.J. Muste was at the forefront of building a mass, nonviolent direct action movement for economic and racial justice. Muste's was a vision that Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King's future mentor, was deeply compelled by. Rustin went on to work closely with Muste and was mentored by him. The story of the two men's deep and sometimes heartbreaking connection not only weaves together the narratives of a profound White antiracist and radical peace activist with one of our greatest Black freedom fighters, it explores the important subject of antiracist mentorship in all of its real-world messiness. The story of Muste and Rustin is also an opportunity to wrestle with the history of homophobia… both in terms of the homophobic arm of state repression, and how homophobia within movement culture fragmented and weakened it.

James Peck

Despite being born into a wealthy New York City family in 1914, James Peck was always something of an outsider. His Jewish family had converted to Christianity, but their conversion was never accepted: and as a young person, the already independently-minded James was never accepted either. This didn't change when he entered Harvard in 1933… especially not after he brought a young Black woman to a school dance during his freshman year. For that action James was ostracized by both school and family, and his alienation from "the American establishment" became complete. He escaped by becoming a seaman for several years, where he joined striking ship workers, developed a lifelong commitment to unionization efforts, and experienced his first beatings and arrests. During the buildup to World War II, James Peck attended ant-Nazi rallies, and adopted a stance of radical antiwar pacifism and a commitment to nonviolent resistance. He was incarcerated for over two years during the war as a conscientious objector.

After James Peck was released, he joined anti-nuclear proliferation and other antiwar efforts, which he would continue for the rest of his life. He also joined the Congress of Racial Equality. CORE was dedicated to adapting Gandhian principles to the Black freedom struggle, and in the 1940s waged sit-in campaigns to desegregate the North. Amongst CORE's leadership were luminaries such as James Farmer and Bayard Rustin, (who had also been imprisoned during the war for conscientious objection). James Peck was beaten during some of CORE's northern sit-ins, including into unconsciousness by a police officer. He was arrested alongside Bayard Rustin during the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, an integrated bus ride through the upper South that was a precursor to the Freedom Rides of 1961. Although these original freedom rides were far less violent than those of the 1960s, James Peck's comrade Bayard Rustin was thrown on a chain gain doing hard labor. During the Montgomery bus boycott, Bayard emerged as Martin Luther King's mentor, and James Peck, working as CORE's publicist, worked to generate northern support for the bus boycott, writing: "By encouraging and supporting actions such as that in Montgomery, we who adhere to the principles of nonviolence hope to hasten complete abolition of segregation within our social system".

James was the only member of the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation to also participate in the much more famous freedom rides of 1961. He was on the second of the two original buses. The first was firebombed, seriously injuring the passengers. The bus that James was on was attacked by Klansmen, who beat James unconscious and left him with gashes across his head that took 53 stitches to close. As John Lewis describes, he was "knocked down at my feet by twelve of the hoodlums, and his face was beaten and kicked until it was a bloody pulp." After a hospital refused to treat him, James was taken to civil rights leader Fred Shuttlesworths' home, where he stumbled out of the car looking "as bloody as a slaughtered hog". Shuttlesworth was finally able to find a hospital willing to treat a White civil rights worker, where James underwent emergency treatment.
James Peck was soon released, and many of the freedom riders assumed their journey was over… or at the very least was over for James. However: "I said that for the most severely beaten rider to quit could be interpreted as meaning that violence

had triumphed over nonviolence. It might convince the ultrasegregationists that by violence they could stop the freedom riders. My point was accepted." James Peck reboarded the bus and continued the freedom ride. The moment turned James into a nationally recognized figure, a status he leveraged by travelling the country raising funds for the movement. James Peck continued his civil rights, antiwar, and labor organizing until a stroke in 1983 made organizing difficult.

Mab Segrest

Mab Segrest is a queer White southerner who came into racial justice by fighting the new formations of White supremacist extremism arising in the 1980s and 90s, and by drawing links between homophobic violence, sexism, and White supremacy at the height of the AIDS epidemic. Her life is full of lessons about the intersections of feminism, LGBT freedom struggles, and racial justice – much of it learned from brilliant Black feminists including from the legendary Combahee River Collective – that every White antiracist today should spend some time marinating in. Mab's story is also an opportunity to grapple with the roots of the White supremacist resurgence we see today and to reflect on the skills and tactics necessary to fight it. From Mab we learn the importance of studying our enemies and how to do it, in order to make connections that would otherwise not be made, and to draw media and community attention to injustices and dangers that would otherwise remain invisible. Like her fellow White antiracist sisters/elders/ancestors Lillian Smith and Anne Braden, Segrest is also a brilliant and self-reflective psychologist of White supremacy. Her journey of wrestling with Whiteness can serve as a platform for White antiracists today to deepen their understandings of their own journey, in ways that can help them take that journey to the next level.

Glenn Smiley

Glenn Smiley was a White southerner who, through his work as a minister, became deeply interested in the teachings of Gandhi as a means to solve racial inequity and other forms of oppression. This led him, in 1942, to join the Congress of Racial Equality and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interfaith, antiwar, and social justice organization dedicated to nonviolence. Starting in the 1940s, through these organizations Smiley participated in nonviolent resistance campaigns, and by the start of the civil rights movement he had become FOR's national field director. Bayard Rustin was also a member of FOR, and the two men were both sent to Montgomery to mentor King in the early days of the bus boycott. Smiley was sent specifically after the bombing of Martin Luther King's home, when there was a real fear that the commitment to nonviolence would break down. As a White man, Smiley was also in a position to gather intelligence for the movement regarding the plans of the local Klan and White Citizens Council. When the Montgomery buses were desegregated, King and Smiley sat on the same seat together during the first desegregated bus ride in the city. After Montgomery, Smiley became one of the civil rights movement's major organizers of nonviolent resistance trainings, working alongside luminaries such as James Lawson and Bayard Rustin. King sent him on speaking tours throughout the South, with the goal being for Smiley to organize other White ministers. King later wrote of Smiley that "his contribution in our overall struggle has been of inestimable value." After the civil rights movement, Smiley worked throughout Latin America conducting trainings in nonviolent resistance.

Lillian Smith

Born in 1897, pioneering White antiracist Lillian Smith served as one of the great psychologists and critics of the White racist South. Her writings explore how Jim Crow shaped her as a child in ways that not only enforced White supremacy but severely limited her own life; how Jim Crow rituals sunk in on a deeply somatic level that made it hard to question the racial order; and how a broader authoritarian culture that enforced unquestioned and strict rules around religion, gender, and sexuality was necessary to create the conditions for also not questioning White supremacy. Smith's insights about how dehumanization takes place are still relevant today, and served as an important wake-up call for her generation of White antiracists. Her writings also laid foundations for the White antiracists of the civil rights era to build off. Lillian Smith is also an early example of how queer Southern women were often at the forefront of asking the deepest questions and developing the deepest analysis of power at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

The Southern Conference Educational Fund

There are 40 million white people in the South

WHO WILL ORGANIZE THEM ?

THE KU KLUX KLAN?

GEORGE WALLACE ?

OR THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT ?

During the civil rights era, Anne Braden worked for the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), which was dedicated to organizing White southerners for racial and economic justice. However, despite Anne being one of the most famous White antiracists in U.S. history, the story of the organization she worked for is little known…

Launched in 1942, SCEF was originally the educational branch of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. SCHW was one of the "popular front" organizations during the 30s and 40s that brought liberals together with socialists and communists in order to fight the threat of fascism. After World War II, popular front coalitions began to crumble, and under the pressures of McCarthyism disintegrated almost entirely. As a successful popular front organization advocating anti-lynching legislation, widespread voter registration, labor unions, equal schooling, and other civil and economic rights issues throughout the South, the SCHW came under special attack… although it was largely undermined not by segregationists, but by anticommunist liberalism from within. Even after the SCHW folded in 1948, however, its educational branch SCEF was able to hold on, and branch out into its own organization.

One of SCEF's major goals was to meticulously document racial inequity in all its forms… and then build support for racial justice by showing how those inequities held back the South as an entire region, and led to inferior schooling, healthcare, and employment for the majority of White southerners, as well as Black. SCEF's newspaper, the Southern Patriot, communicated these inequities and the struggles against them to members of the old popular front, even after much of that front had crumbled. It also highlighted examples of White antiracism, in the hopes that those examples might inspire other White people.

SCEF polled White university workers, doctors, politicians, and other White Southerners about their racial attitudes. By gathering such information, they discovered which White populations were more open to some level of integration… groups that included White university and medical workers. SCEF leveraged this information by encouraging, for example, leadership in White hospitals to consider accepting Black patients or training Black doctors. SCEF then used its large network to fundraise for any southern institution willing to take on such efforts. In other words, part of SCEF's work was to discover cracks in the edifice of segregation and widen them; to figure out where anti-segregationist embers lay buried in the White South and stoke them.

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling Brown v. Board of Education brought mass hysteria and resistance to the South, leading the full weight of McCarthyist redbaiting to come crashing down on SCEF. For over a decade, the organization was under intense assault, including police raids of its offices and the homes of its leaders. At the same time, the Montgomery bus boycott began in late 1955, and opened the door for SCEF to begin working closely with the civil rights movement. Black freedom struggle leaders such as E.D. Nixon of Montgomery and Fred Shuttlesworth

of Birmingham joined the organization, and Martin Luther King began working closely with the group. It was during this time that Anne and Carl Braden joined SCEF.

Despite living under assault, during the civil rights era SCEF did incredible work. The organization leveraged its network to raise funds for legal aid and bail money for the movement, as well as other necessary funds due to the crippling economic retaliation waged by the White South. SCEF brought doctors in from the North to provide medical aid, which was critical given the refusal of White hospitals to treat Black people (as well as White civil rights workers). After the sit-ins of 1960, SCEF hosted workshops for the sit-in students to help them cultivate fundraising and journalism skills. And Anne Braden, as a brilliant journalist, kept White antiracists around the country informed of events through the Southern Patriot.

During the Black Power era of the late 1960s, however, SCEF entered a decline. When groups such as SNCC transitioned into all-Black organizations, many White SNCC members poured into SCEF. The Southern Conference Education Fund fully agreed with the Black Power position that White racial justice activists should focus on organizing White communities, and initiated projects designed to mobilize poor southern Whites and build Black-White working class unity. However, unlike the patient grassroots organizing of the early SNCC years, where SNCC organized rural Black southerners through embedding themselves in the community and engaging in deep listening, many of the new White members of SCEF put their own need to prove how revolutionary they were front and center. This alienated the poor White working class people they were trying to organize. These new White members also tended to view the very people they were trying to organize as the enemy. As Anne Braden put it, “They just didn’t like white people! You can’t organize people if you don’t like them.”

During the Black Power era, SCEF remained committed to being an integrated organization, out of the concern that if it became an all-White organization racism could easily creep in. However, Black Power militants within the group were upset with SCEF’s resources going towards building up White antiracist efforts instead of to Black communities, and tensions escalated into violent standoffs which, combined with dogmatic ideological disputes between the young White self-styled “revolutionaries”, crippled the organization. Anne and Carl Braden, as well as the rest of the staff who had built SCEF, left the organization before it completely imploded. In Anne Braden’s words, “I had spent sixteen years of my life building that organization and saw it destroyed in six months.” It broke her heart. Anne’s biographer Cate Fosl writes, “What three decades of attacks had failed to do was accomplished from within.” It was also true that local police and the FBI leveraged these internal tensions and played a role in turning members of the organization against one another, as they did with racial justice organizations across the nation.

Jane Stembridge

As the sit-in movement swept the South early in 1960, Black freedom struggle elder and master organizer Ella Baker convened a meeting to bring student leaders together. Out of this meeting grew the most important grassroots organization of the civil rights movement: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Baker asked Jane Stembridge, one of the only White students to attend the founding meeting, to leave behind her theological studies and help administer the new civil rights organization. As sit-ins continued to break out in many cities, part of Stembridge's job was to make contact with local sit-in leaders, find out what their needs were, connect them to organizers in their region, and plug them into SNCC. When people wrote to SNCC asking what they could do for the movement, Stembridge was often the one to respond. As she helped to organize SNCC's second major conference in October 1960, Stembridge noticed that there were no participants from the most dangerous and isolated parts of the South. She discussed this with her close colleague, Bob Moses… and those conversations helped Moses decide that he was going to go into those areas and organize. Moses's work in the most dangerous parts of the South made him legendary, and led to some of the civil rights movement's most important voting rights work. Stembridge also worked closely with Bayard Rustin, putting his organizing genius into the service of SNCC. When SNCC severed its ties with Rustin to avoid a scandal over his sexuality, Stembridge, who was also gay, was infuriated. Patriarchy and homophobia had played a key role in pushing her into the civil rights movement: as she later commented, "we had to find a husband, we had to be subservient to that man, and I'm like this is bullshit . . . I couldn't work with that. And that anger and sense of injustice was in me . . . its part of what propelled me into the civil rights movement, my own sense of repression." She was deeply hurt to find such oppression even within spaces committed to liberation. In 1964 that hurt, and particularly the way Rustin had been treated, led her to leave SNCC.

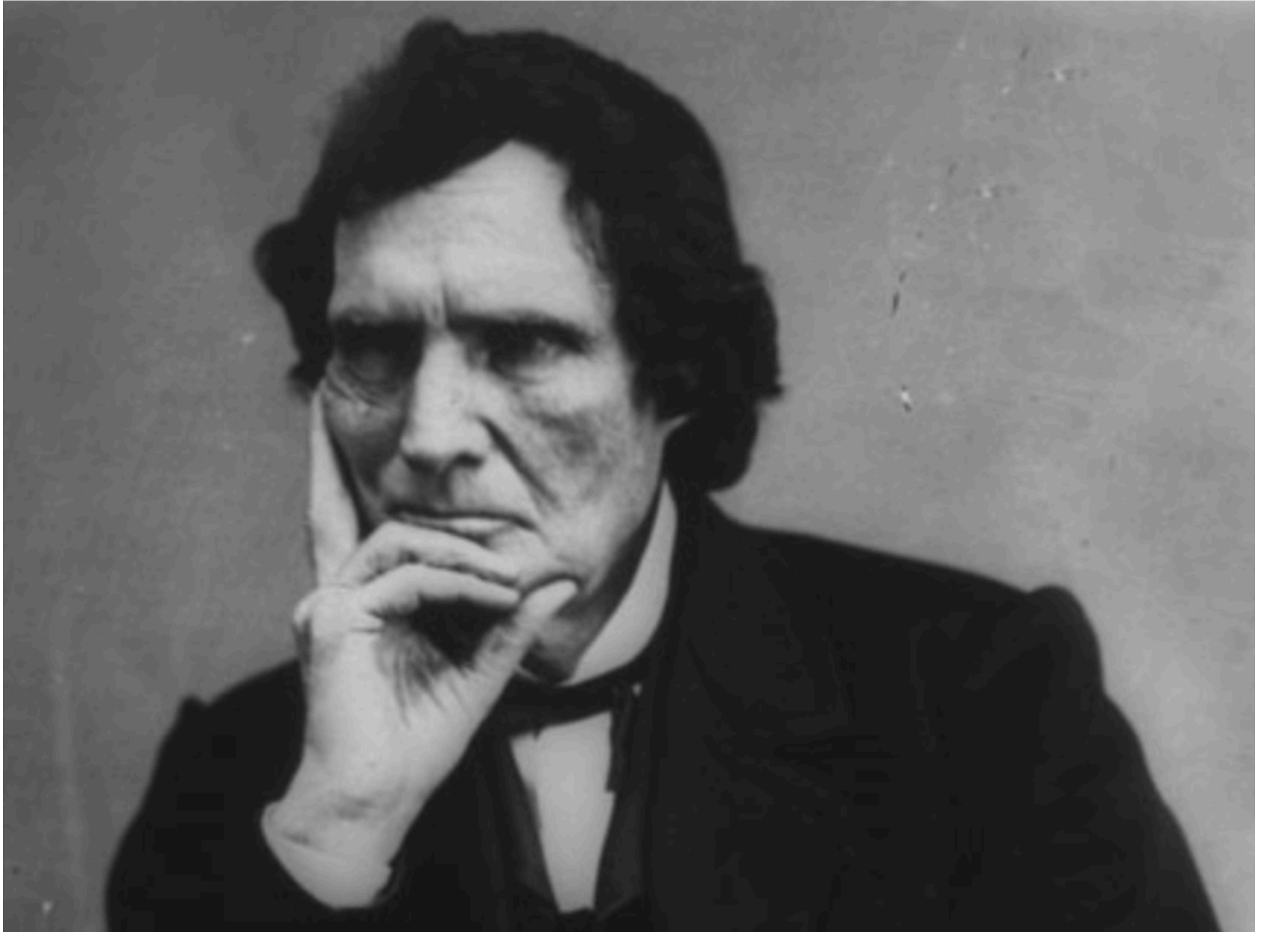
Fay Stender

Born in 1932, Fay Stender was raised in Berkeley in a middle-class Jewish household, by parents who dreamed of her being a concert pianist. At age 14 she was playing for the San Francisco Symphony: but it wasn't the life Fay wanted. She studied literature in college in the 1950s, where she witnessed professors being redbaited and fired. Witnessing the antidemocratic McCarthy era as a student led her to conclude that the stories she had been taught in school about American freedom and justice were falsehoods. She became radicalized, changed her major to law, and graduated with a law degree from the University of Chicago. While studying there, she set an intention to walk regularly through the segregated slums of Chicago on the outskirts of the university, in order to expose herself to realities her otherwise privileged life prevented her from being aware of.

After college she returned to the Bay Area. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had entered its Black Power phase, and Fay began doing legal work for them. Then, when Black Panther Party cofounder Huey Newton was accused of murdering a police officer in 1967, Fay became his lawyer. She played a major role in overturning his conviction. In the run-up to the trial, Fay visited Huey regularly in prison, and Huey told her about another member of the BPP who had been charged with killing a prison guard at Soledad Prison. That was George Jackson, who was being held in solitary confinement due to his ability to organize and revolutionize other prisoners. When Fay first visited him, she was shocked by the conditions and the dehumanization she witnessed there: she, as a Jew, called Soledad "America's Dachau," referring to the Nazi death camp originally constructed to hold political prisoners. Fay and George Jackson began a correspondence. Soon afterwards, she arranged for Jackson's prison letters to be published as *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, and recruited the French literary giant, radical, and Black Panther supporter Jean Genet to write the introduction. The book became a phenomenon and skyrocketed George Jackson to fame.

It wasn't only George Jackson who leaped into celebrityhood: so did Fay Stender. Thousands of prisoners now asked for her representation, leading her to found the Prison Law Project. During this time, however, her relationship with George deteriorated when she refused to help him break out of prison. She abandoned his case in 1971. Six months later, he attempted an escape and was killed. In the anger over George Jackson's death, many of his supporters came to see Fay as a traitor. Feeling like her work advocating for prisoner's rights now put her in danger, she closed the Prison Law Project and refocused her legal work on women's rights. Then, in 1979, a man who believed she had betrayed George Jackson broke into her house, tied up her family, and forced her to write the following words as he held a gun to her head: "I, Fay Stender, admit I betrayed George Jackson and the Prison Movement when they needed me most." He then shot her six times in the form of a cross through her body, although the bullet aimed at her head only grazed her skull. Fay survived, although she was paralyzed from the waist down. Fearing further attempts on her life, she fled to Hong Kong, where she took her own life a year later.

Thaddeus Stevens



During the Civil War, Radical Republican leader Thaddeus Stevens led the charge for the immediate abolition of slavery, the enlistment of Black soldiers, land redistribution to secure economic stability for freed slaves, and the right to vote. The congressman introduced a bill to abolish slavery shortly after the war began, and was exasperated when Lincoln took another year merely to call for emancipation in the border-states. Thaddeus and his fellow Radical Republicans – called radical because of their call for immediate abolition – held Lincoln's feet to the fire, leading the president to comment: "Wherever I go and whatever way I turn, they are on my tail." Even after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, Thaddeus Stevens pushed for more. The Proclamation did not apply to all slaves, and it was a wartime measure that could be reversed when the war ended. It was Thaddeus Stevens who led the charge for a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery, which culminated in the passage of the 13th Amendment.

As early as 1862, Thaddeus called for permanent land redistribution as a way to create a solid economic foundation for former slaves, which he (and they) saw as a prerequisite for true freedom. Other measures such as General Sherman's wartime order allowing slaves to settle on abandoned land did not grant them legal title to the land, and it was quickly stripped from them. Thaddeus Stevens instead proposed confiscating land from the wealthiest two percent of plantation owners, in order to provide forty acres to former slaves. He assured poor and middle-class Whites that their land would remain untouched, and argued that it made sense to redistribute wealthy plantation land because slaves had long worked that land with no compensation. His arguments, however, were deemed too radical even by many of his allies, who saw it as an unconstitutional assault on private property. The failure to provide former slaves with land quickly led to the rise of the neo-slavery systems of sharecropping and convict leasing.

When Thaddeus Stevens passed away in 1868, he had two Black preachers by his bedside, as well as Lydia Hamilton Smith… a Black woman he had lived with for twenty years and who was officially his "housekeeper," although many suspected the relationship was more than that. For the following century, Thaddeus would live on as the arch-villain in the White southern imagination: Villains in Jim Crow stories and movies were often based on caricatures of the Radical Republican. The same qualities that made him a villain in the White South made him a hero to many Black Americans, who named schools, organizations and awards after him. Frederick Douglass even kept a portrait of Thaddeus Stevens hanging on his wall.

Frances Titus

Born in 1816, Frances Titus was a young woman during the era when abolitionism was growing into a major movement… and as a member of an antislavery Quaker community, she was in the thick of it. In 1856 she met Sojourner Truth at an antislavery Quaker gathering. Truth, who had escaped enslavement decades earlier, travelled the country speaking of the evils of slavery and the necessity of abolition, as well as of women's rights. Frances Titus began supporting Sojourner Truth's travels however she could, including securing housing for her children and grandchildren while Truth travelled. After the Civil War, Truth and Titus worked closely together to secure land, employment, and education for former slaves. While Truth focused much of her efforts on securing land for former slaves in the expansive American West, Titus focused on local resettlement efforts, especially in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she leveraged her connections to wealthy White communities and founded a school for former slaves in the old city hall building. During Sojourner Truth's old age, Frances Titus helped her revise her autobiography, and travelled with her on speaking tours serving as her business manger and personal secretary. When Truth fell ill in her old age, Titus tended to her and handled her correspondence.

The White Folks Project

(Image: Sam Shirah of SNCC, a White southerner and one of the project directors of the White Folks Project. In the image other White southerners are refusing to shake his hand.)

During the Freedom Summer of 1964, a small group of White students who had volunteered for the massive voting rights campaign in Mississippi made an attempt to bring poor White southerners into the movement. Many in the civil rights movement understood that racism in poor White communities was purposefully stoked by those with political and economic power, in order to prevent unity between poor Whites and Blacks in the shared quest for economic justice. The civil rights movement, however, had not found a way to leverage the self-interest that poor Whites potentially had in the movement. The students who formed the "White Folks Project" aimed to change that.

To quote from the SNCC Digital Gateway entry on the White Folks Project: "In June of 1964, 18 mostly southern, white volunteers arrived in Biloxi [Mississippi] on the Gulf Coast at nightfall. They rolled up to the rundown Riviera hotel and rented rooms that would become their offices, meeting space, and living quarters for the summer." They had chosen Biloxi "because of its tourism industry . . . town leaders didn't want reports of violence toward outside white students to keep business away. The volunteers counted on the pressure from local businesses to keep the Klan at bay." It was a strategic location to begin to bring White folks in.

Although the group had previously trained at Highlander to prepare for the task, none of them had experience in organizing White communities. The only way to learn was through trial and error. Biloxi may have been a less dangerous Mississippi town to organize in, but notions that the organizers were "outside agitators" working to create "special privileges" for the Black population were deeply ingrained. Six members of the White Folks Project left in frustration within the first month. But the project continued.

A memo seeking to expand the project – and bring in more effective organizers – reads: organizers "must have an understanding of the poverty of the Southern white poor. They must be able to communicate a concern for that poverty without precipitating or reinforcing fear and hostility toward the Negro and the freedom movement . . . PLEASE SEEK OUT people who are interested in working with this program and get them in touch with White Folks Program, 1017 Lynch St. Jackson, Mississippi." Six other volunteers joined the campaign, this time moving into a community of fishermen. More experienced organizers from SNCC joined the effort, and the organizers began canvassing in integrated pairs… knocking on doors and speaking about the problems that poor Blacks and Whites had in common. They found that speaking individual to individual, they could have a good conversation about the issues with many White southerners… but that speaking to groups of White southerners was impossible. The White Folks Project had minor successes: a couple dozen White southerners agreed to vote for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and one fisherman named Bob Williams even became a party delegate.

However, according to lead organizer Bruce Maxwell, the group made amateur errors. For example, someone put a SNCC sign up in their window. Rumors were

already swirling in the White community that the organizers were there to get jobs for Blacks rather than Whites, and such actions whipped up fears that White southerners already had about the civil rights movement. The rumors proved fatal to the organizing efforts of the White Folks Project. Although it was short lived and had few results, the project's very failure held valuable lessons, which other like-minded projects would soon learn from. "Right now it is only a dream," Maxwell admitted, "but I feel it is a dream which can catch fire in the minds of a lot of people."

The White Panther Party

In 1968, Huey Newton was asked during a radio interview what White people could do to support the Black Panther Party: he said that they should form their own organizations in solidarity with the BPP. A White counterculture group who ran the Detroit Artists Workshop, which had a network of communal houses, a print shop, and a performance space heard the interview, and founded the White Panther Party in response to Huey's suggestion. (It should be said, however, that they chose the name without consulting with the Black Panther Party – the Panthers joked about them being "psychedelic clowns," until the White Panther Party did a good job distributing the Black Panther Party paper in Detroit).

The White Panther Party had three primary founders: jazz and rock n' roll photographer Leni Sinclair – who also ran Magic Veil Light Company that produced psychedelic light shows; jazz poet John Sinclair – who managed the gritty proto-punk band MC5; and communal member Pun Plamondon who later drove equipment trucks for rock bands. In the years leading up to the formation of the White Panther Party, the Detroit Artists Workshop was targeted by police and raided numerous times, with 54 people once arrested in a single raid, typically for marijuana possession. Following one police raid, the Detroit Artists Workshop was re-organized into a group called Trans-Love Energies Unlimited, which provided assistance to people who were left homeless after the Detroit uprisings against police brutality in 1967, which left 2000 buildings burned to the ground. During the uprising they flew a banner outside their commune reading "Burn, Baby, Burn!"… leading to further police raids.

White members of the Detroit Artists Workshop were not only receptive to the Panther's message because of their negative experience with police and their shared vision of capitalism as oppressive: as jazz aficionado John Sinclair puts it, "we dug black people cos that's where the great music came from and the great weed and the refreshing concepts of sexuality. All that stuff didn't come from no white people. Are you kidding me?" For the White counterculture figures who joined the White Panther Party, Black culture itself – or their fantasy of Black culture, that is – seemed like an expression of freedom from everything they felt was wrong with White America.

The White Panthers issued their own ten-point platform. Although it overlaps with the platform of the Black Panther Party, it also expresses the radical countercultural and communal visions of the 1960s. For example, the points include "free time and space for all humans—dissolve all unnatural boundaries!", and "a free world economy based on the free exchange of energy and materials and the end of money." The White Panther Party was a group that pledged to support the Black Panther Party and advocated for the freedom of political prisoners and the abolition of systemic racial injustice… alongside free love, rock n' roll, and the expansion of consciousness through psychedelics. Their belief that basic survival needs should be free led them to pool communal money to purchase bulk foods for redistribution, with the San Francisco chapter feeding 5,000 families at one point.

White Panther Party member Pun Plamondon became the first hippie placed on the FBI's ten most wanted list: indicted for bombing a local CIA office in 1968, Pun fled to Algeria – where he joined Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver –, but returned in 1970 and was soon arrested. Meanwhile, in 1969 John Sinclair was arrested and faced up to ten years in prison for offering two joints to an undercover officer. The harsh sentence mobilized the counterculture: everyone from John Lennon to Stevie Wonder to Allen Ginsburg to Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale came together for a "John Sinclair Freedom Rally." Both Sinclair and Plamondon were freed shortly afterwards when it was discovered that the government had been surveiling them without a warrant, in what became a major Supreme Court precedent.

The name "White Panther Party" didn't sit well with many people, and some even assumed it was a White supremacist group when they first heard about it. Because of this, the group later changed their name to "Trans-Love Energies."

John Woolman

Born in 1720, John Woolman was an early abolitionist. He played a large role in pushing Quakerism into a strong antislavery commitment… a commitment that helped ignite a full-fledged abolitionist movement a century after his birth.

One of the formative spiritual moments in John Woolman's life occurred during his childhood: coming across a bird's nest, he starting throwing rocks at the mother bird to see if he could hit her. When he killed her with a stone, "he was filled with remorse, thinking of the baby birds who had no chance of survival without her. He got the nest down from the tree and quickly killed the hatchlings, believing it to be the most merciful thing to do. This experience weighed on his heart." John became determined to show kindness towards all living things. He later became a vegetarian and refused to ride in horse-drawn carriages, given the regular abuse of the horses.

The spiritual inclinations that John experienced as a child were supported and deepened by his Quaker community, and guided him towards an antislavery position. As a successful trader in his mid-twenties who sometimes helped his customers write their wills, he refused to include slaves in the wills and tried to convince his customers to instead free their slaves upon their death. John Woolman soon gave up business completely, out of the feeling that the pursuit of profit was a distraction from his spiritual pursuits. He began to travel extensively, meeting with Quaker chapters hundreds of miles apart to express his concerns about slavery. He worked on a very personal, individual level with many Quakers, helping to guide them towards the decision to free their slaves. During his travels, when John stayed with slaveholders he modeled his antislavery stance in his interactions with slaves: for example, he always paid slaves for any work they did attending to him. He also "refused to be served with silver cups, plates, and utensils, as he believed that slaves in other regions were forced to dig such precious minerals and gems for the rich." He also traveled to England to help Quaker communities there take a stance against the slave trade.

Due to the efforts of John Woolman and others like him, by the end of the American Revolution almost all Quakers in North America had freed their slaves, and had ended any business involvements with the slave trade. In the decades to follow, the Quaker community remained a persistent antislavery voice that would play a vital role in the era of abolition.

Quentin Young

Quentin Young was a White doctor who used his medical expertise to support racial justice causes. Born to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in 1923, Quentin was deeply impacted as a child by witnessing the poverty of the Great Depression… not only in his hometown of Chicago, but especially in the rural areas where his grandparents lived in proximity to Black sharecroppers. Before pursuing medicine, his early moral impulses led him to consider becoming a rabbi. He dropped out of the University of Chicago when the United States joined World War II, for the explicit purpose of fighting fascism, and continued his studies when he returned from the war.

Quentin became deeply concerned by racial disparities in the medical field, as well as by White supremacist violence. In the 1950s he campaigned to desegregate Chicago's hospitals. During the civil rights movement, he helped found the Medical Committee for Human Rights, which sent doctors to treat civil rights workers in the South… tending to freedom riders, victims of racist attacks during the violent Freedom Summer, and those who were beaten at Selma. When Martin Luther King led a campaign to challenge racialized poverty in Chicago, he was struck in the head by a large rock. Quentin Young, who had been marching beside King, was the doctor who treated him… and who continued to be his personal physician. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the Medical Committee for Human Rights treated Black Panthers who had battered by police during protests, as well as anti-Vietnam War protesters. Quentin also helped the Black Panthers and the Young Lords set up their community health clinics during that period. For such efforts, the notorious "red squad" of the Chicago police department – which surveilled and terrorized social justice workers – monitored Quentin closely. So did the FBI… for over 30 years.

Quentin Young continued to advocate for just, equal healthcare for decades. In the 1980s he became the nation's leading voice for single-payer health care, arguing that it was no less feasible than Medicare and Social Security. Private health insurance companies, in his mind, were motivated by profits rather than healing, and perpetuated unequal and unjust healthcare. In the 1990s, Quentin met Barack Obama, and became his personal physician. He was greatly disappointed when Obama failed to pursue the single payer healthcare option. Quentin Young passed away in 2016.

Bob Zellner

Bob Zellner is the son of a reformed Klansman, who grew up wearing clothes made out of his dad's old Klan robes that had been cut up and repurposed. A working class kid who had to prove himself by fighting each time his family moved, Zellner eventually became one of the very few White southerners involved in the civil rights movement early on. While taking a sociology class in Montgomery, Zellner interviewed Black participants of the boycott despite threats of expulsion from the university for doing so. Soon afterwards, Anne and Carl Braden began mentoring him, and then hired him to organize White college students in the South. Zellner became SNCCs first White field secretary: while organizing in the most dangerous parts of Mississippi he was beaten unconscious multiple times, tortured in the South's most notorious prisons, and nearly lynched. Dangerous as it was, Zellner continued to use his Whiteness to move amongst White spaces, organize White southern youth, and cultivate sympathy for the cause amongst White southerners in positions of economic and political power. As the last White member to leave SNCC when it became an all-Black organization, Zellner was in the room for many debates about the role of Whites in the movement. Those debates are rich opportunities for White antiracists today to reflect on all the right – and all the wrong – ways that White antiracists show up in Black and Brown spaces and in racial justice movements. Today Zellner is dedicated to the continuing effort to fight voter suppression, and works closely with the Moral Mondays Movement associated with Reverend William Barber.

Dottie Zellner

Dottie Zellner grew up in an immigrant Jewish household in New York City. As she recalls, “I had grown up with the heroic stories of resistance to fascism, particularly of the young Jewish fighters of the Warsaw ghetto.” She was also taught to value Black freedom struggles, and even saw Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois. Dottie was 22 when the sit-ins began and was drawn to their efforts. She enrolled in a nonviolent resistance workshop, headed south, and began participating in sit-ins. When an image of her being arrested appeared in a southern newspaper, Dottie’s father was so proud he cut the article out of the paper and showed it to everyone.

Soon Dottie was working for SNCC, where she put her skills as a writer to use for SNCC’s newsletter. SNCC workers would come in from their work in the field, describe to Dottie the events that were unfolding, and she would make sure their stories got told. She was struck by how nonchalant everyone was as they described to her not only the patient organizing of communities, but the inevitable brutality that ensued. The reports that Dottie wrote were used to inform SNCC supporters around the country. As an official staff writer, Dottie worked on whatever SNCC’s writing needs were, from pamphlets to press releases to the “ceaseless stream of telegrams” sent to the Kennedy administration, “reporting each and every atrocity and urging them to intervene.”

She also saw her share of protests, got knocked down by fire hoses and police clubs, and was indicted under Virginia’s ludicrous “John Brown law,” which made it a felony to “incite colored people to acts of war and violence against the white population.” She skipped town and was careful about travelling through Virginia for years afterwards. In the build up to Freedom Summer, Dottie headed back to the North East, where she was the chief recruiter for volunteers in the region. Then she headed to Mississippi herself. There, in the words of the SNCC Digital Gateway, she answered calls “from civil rights workers who had been beaten, arrested, or had disappeared, thereafter alerting local authorities, the press and family members.”

A couple of years later Dottie was at work in the SNCC Atlanta office when Stokely Carmichael “asked me to draw a panther for the Lowndes County Freedom Organization campaign. I said no, I wasn’t that capable an artist.” Carmichael came back to her with a “rough line drawing of a panther” that had been made by SNCC member Ruth Howard, based on the mascot from a local Black college. Dottie remembers: “I cleaned it up, added better whiskers, and made it black, at his request,” said Dorothy of the drawing. “The next time I saw it, that image was on TV sometime in 1967—I was shocked!”

After SNCC, Dottie founded GROW with her husband Bob Zellner, which helped organize poor White southerners for racial and economic justice for 10 years. After GROW disbanded, Dottie and Bob parted ways, and she returned to New York after 22 years in the South. Today she is especially active in Palestinian solidarity work.

James Zwerg

Born in 1938, freedom rider James Zwerg was raised in Wisconsin. He didn't have a single Black classmate until he attended college, to study sociology. That first Black classmate, Robert Carter, became a close friend. As James recalls, "I witnessed prejudice against him . . . we'd go to a lunch counter or cafeteria and people would get up and leave the table. I had pledged a particular fraternity and then found out that he was not allowed in the fraternity house. I decided that his friendship was more important than that particular fraternity, so I depledged."

Robert was from Alabama, where the Montgomery bus boycott had just taken place. He gave James a copy of Martin Luther King's first book, "Stride Towards Freedom: the Montgomery Story." James Zwerg was hooked: the book (which talks at length about revolutionary Love) spoke to James as a philosophically minded, devout Christian, who was feeling angry about the treatment of his friend. Watching Robert navigate all-White spaces as a young Black man made James wonder what it would be like for him to navigate all Black spaces. He decided to find out, and in 1961 enrolled at Fisk University. Fisk was a primarily Black university in Nashville, where James Lawson – a Black pastor who had studied nonviolent resistance in India prior to the civil rights movement – was leading some of the nation's deepest civil rights trainings. At Fisk, James Zwerg befriended John Lewis, who trained with Lawson. Soon, James was training with Lawson as well.

In their nonviolent resistance role-plays, James typically took the role of the angry bigot. His first real-life test was to walk into a movie theatre with a Black man, for which he was knocked unconscious with a monkey wrench. Shortly afterwards, the Congress of Racial Equality launched the first freedom ride. When that bus was firebombed, the Nashville group James was training with launched reinforcement rides. The group was ambushed at a bus stop in Montgomery. James Zwerg was the only White man on board, and volunteered to be the first to exit and face the mob. He recalls stepping off the bus vividly: "In that instant, I had the most incredible religious experience of my life . . . I felt a presence with me. A peace. Calmness. It was just like I was surrounded by kindness, love. I knew in that instance that whether I lived or died, I would be OK."

Although many of the participants were beaten badly, James Zwerg was given special treatment for being a "traitor to his race": after being beaten unconscious, freedom rider Lucretia Collins recalls that his body was held up "while white women clawed his face with their nails. And they held up their little children - children who couldn't have been more than a couple of years old - to claw his face." After it was over James returned to a state of semi-consciousness and tried to use the handrails to the loading platform to pull himself to his feet. Instead, he was tossed over the railing, landing on his head on the ground below.

At first James was denied medical treatment. When he was finally hospitalized, he lay unconscious in the hospital for two days. Photos of his badly beaten body spread rapidly around the country. When he did wake up, the speech he gave from his hospital bed became a sensation: "Segregation must be stopped. It must be broken

down. Those of us on the Freedom Rides will continue.... We're dedicated to this, we'll take hitting, we'll take beating. We're willing to accept death. But we're going to keep coming." He was still barely conscious, and has no recollection of speaking the most famous words of his life.

Shortly afterwards, James Zwerg had a conversation with Martin Luther King that convinced him to enroll in theological seminary. What struck him most about the meeting was not something King said, but King's incredible presence as a listener… a profound presence that James Zwerg perhaps aspired to. James had three broken vertebrae, which made it difficult to continue in the movement. He went on to become a minister working with rural communities in his home state of Wisconsin, although for decades he was racked with guilt for not continuing with the movement. After finally confessing these feelings to old movement comrades who told him they had nothing but profound gratitude for him, James released the guilt. He retired in 1993, moved to rural New Mexico, and built a cozy A-frame cabin with his wife. According to a USA Today article published in 2013, "Zwerg and his wife Carrie — married 48 years — find peace most days watching wildlife outside the floor-to-ceiling windows. They look out on a pine forest and a red-and-white-striped mesa."