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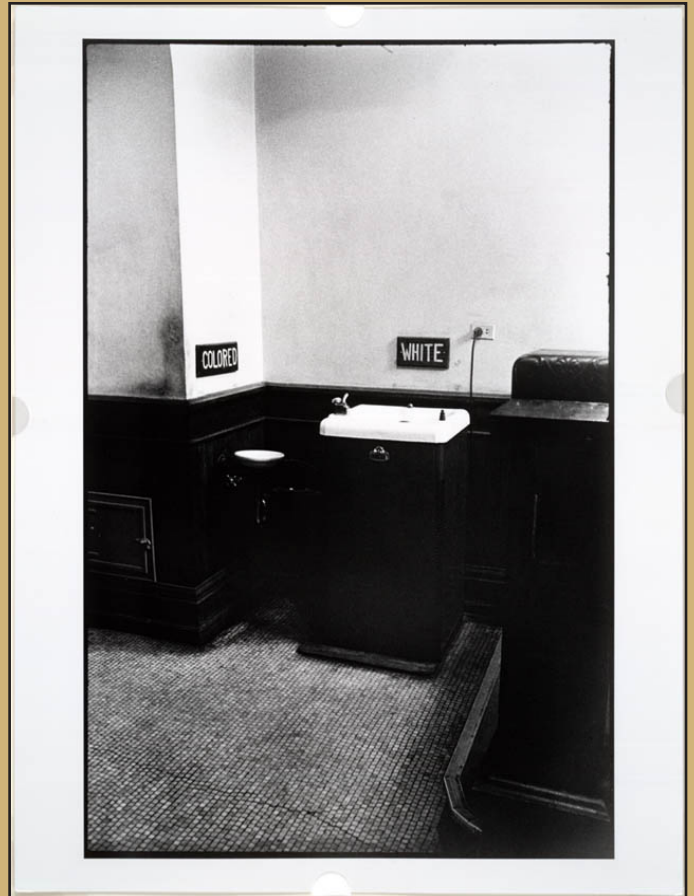
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EMORY

In the early 1960s, in furthering their effort to redress the oppressive weight of Jim Crow policies in the south, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) initiated a series of programs in African American communities in the south. Amongst their efforts, SNCC focused on increasing literacy, registering new voters, and encouraging active participation in civic practices.

Maria Varela was a SNCC member in charge of developing literacy materials for adult education in the "contact zones" of Alabama and Mississippi during the 1960s; Varela's pedagogical vision and multimodal innovations reflected the struggle and grappling between dominant and minority groups in those spaces. As a member of the Selma Literacy Project (SLP) in 1964, Maria Varela was responsible for developing "literacy materials out of the experience, needs and aspirations of adult" African Americans in Selma, Alabama. Later, in 1966 she worked in a primarily African American community in Mississippi. These programs ran concurrent with Stokeley Carmichael's efforts in The Freedom Schools and, not surprisingly, reflect an effort to develop an "organic relationship" between reforming literacy practices and creating new opportunities for social and civic change. Where the average age of the students in the Freedom Schools was 15, Varela was engaged in working with adults in already existent social movements outside of the hierarchies of any particular institution. The express goal of SNCC's efforts was to not only develop literacy and citizenship, but to offer a means for cultivating agency by fostering critical self reflection, engendering confidence, responding to histories of racism, and promoting sustainable modes of learning within the community itself. When "official" literacy education failed to produce results SNCC adapted a policy of working with the specific desires of the local community. By using filmstrips and combining them with text, the farmers in this community effectively organized new literacy practices using multimodal discourse to achieve the goals of their community. In these efforts we see the birth of an alternative representation of the communities at work across the South, and the establishment of a communal ethos stemming from the broader dissemination of an awareness of a sub-nation joined by similar interests, relations and resistance to oppression, and efforts to enter a civic discourse heretofore prohibited to them. It is this ethos of place that lies at the heart of the creation and dissemination of multimodal textual practices.

This is part of that story



Act 1

[In which we note the pervasive misrepresentation of a national movement. In which we see the portrayal of the civil rights movement by the mainstream media. In which we take note of where the force of the movement stems. In which we take note of an alternative portrayal emerging from within the local communities]

I JUST WANT TO TESTIFY— I'M NOT GOING TO SIT AROUND ANY LONGER. I'VE GOT FREEDOM ON MY MIND.



The representation of the movement is, not surprisingly misleading, built as it is on "second-hand hearsay and newspaper accounts." Amongst the many misleading representations is that the movement is driven by a central corpus of people. This representation presents a faceless mass of African Americans as victims attacked by dogs, hosed down, and arrested; but importantly in suggesting that there are a few central leaders it misleadingly suggests that there is also a center of activity with a clear power structure that can be addressed and negotiated with, and that the members of this "faceless" mass do not have an agency or authority to take action themselves.

FROM PAGE 1
ed they were attacked in the
den, 12 miles from here.
rights activity said the doc
out.

"Isn't it a fact that the w
nation and all people who
Mississippi newspapers
that an army of agitators is c
ing down in June?" state sen
Helden Campbell was quote
the Jackson Daily News as
ing.

As candidate for governor
July, Johnson told audience
opposed the plans of his
position to establish a state
lice force to control liquor p
tices.

"I would never permit su
police force to operate in the s

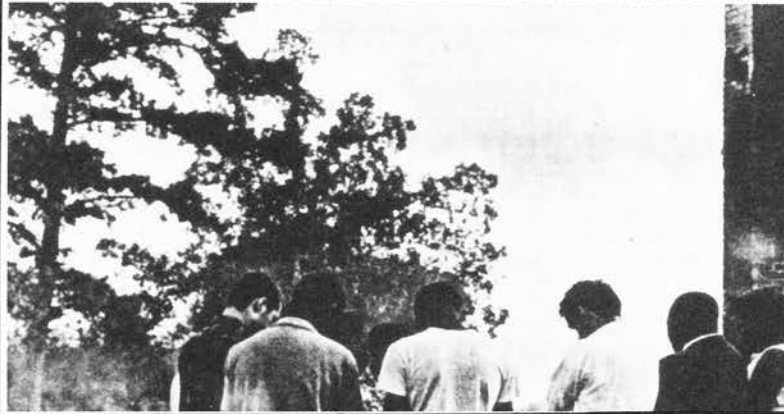
They Lived In The Counties

Churches Burned, Nightriders Attack SNCC Sta In Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Dr

TERRELL AND LEE COUN-
TIES, GEORGIA -- SNCC
workers from North and
South spent a summer here
in these rural counties liv-
ing and working with the
people to increase voter re-
gistration.

For these young students,
the summer was one of
threats, beatings, jailing--
and inspiration.

They worked on SNCC's
Southwest Georgia voter
registration project under
the leadership of Charles
Sherrod, a field secretary
who first came to Albany in
October, 1961, and was a
participant in the original



MAYHEM IN MISS.

NATCHEZ, MISS. - Sheriff James Anders of Natchez said this
week his office has "uncovered nothing" in his investigation into
the beating of an elderly Negro by five hooded members of the Ku
Klux Klan, as other beatings, two shootings and the arrests of two
SNCC workers were reported in the area.

Reluctant Judge Releases Coed

BATESVILLE, MISS. - Night-
riders attack old coed from
lege for Women, convic-
racial case and given the maxi-
mum sentence by a county judge,
was freed Feb. 22 under a \$15,
000 property bond.

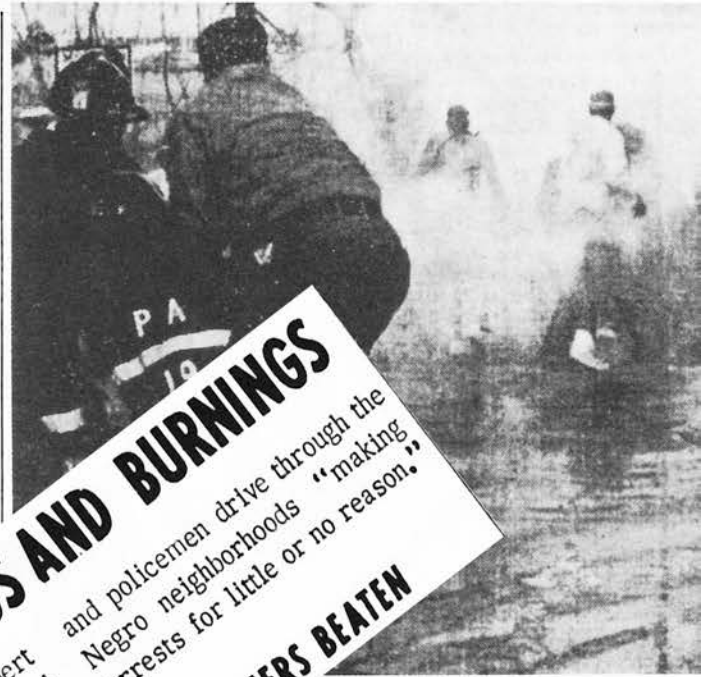
The girl, Mardon R. Walker
of East Greenwich, Rhode Island,
was sentenced to 12 months in
the common jail and six month
at hard labor. She was
fined \$1,000.

She was the third
son convicted for r

Archie Curtis, 60, an undertak-
er, said he and his attendant
Willie Jackson, were whipped on
the night of Feb. 15.

In Atlanta, SNCC asked At-
torney General Robert F. Ken-
nedy to investigate "repor-

surgeance of the
reemen beat and tar
tore his three-
with their hand
shotgunned
eight m"
Wilke



BURNINGS
and policemen drive through the
Negro neighborhoods "making
arrests for little or no reason."

iremen turn hoses on Maryland
dents to halt demonstrations.

SHOOTINGS, BEATINGS, BOMBINGS AND CHURCHES DESTROYED

WIDON, MISS - The four-
ch burning since the
began was re-

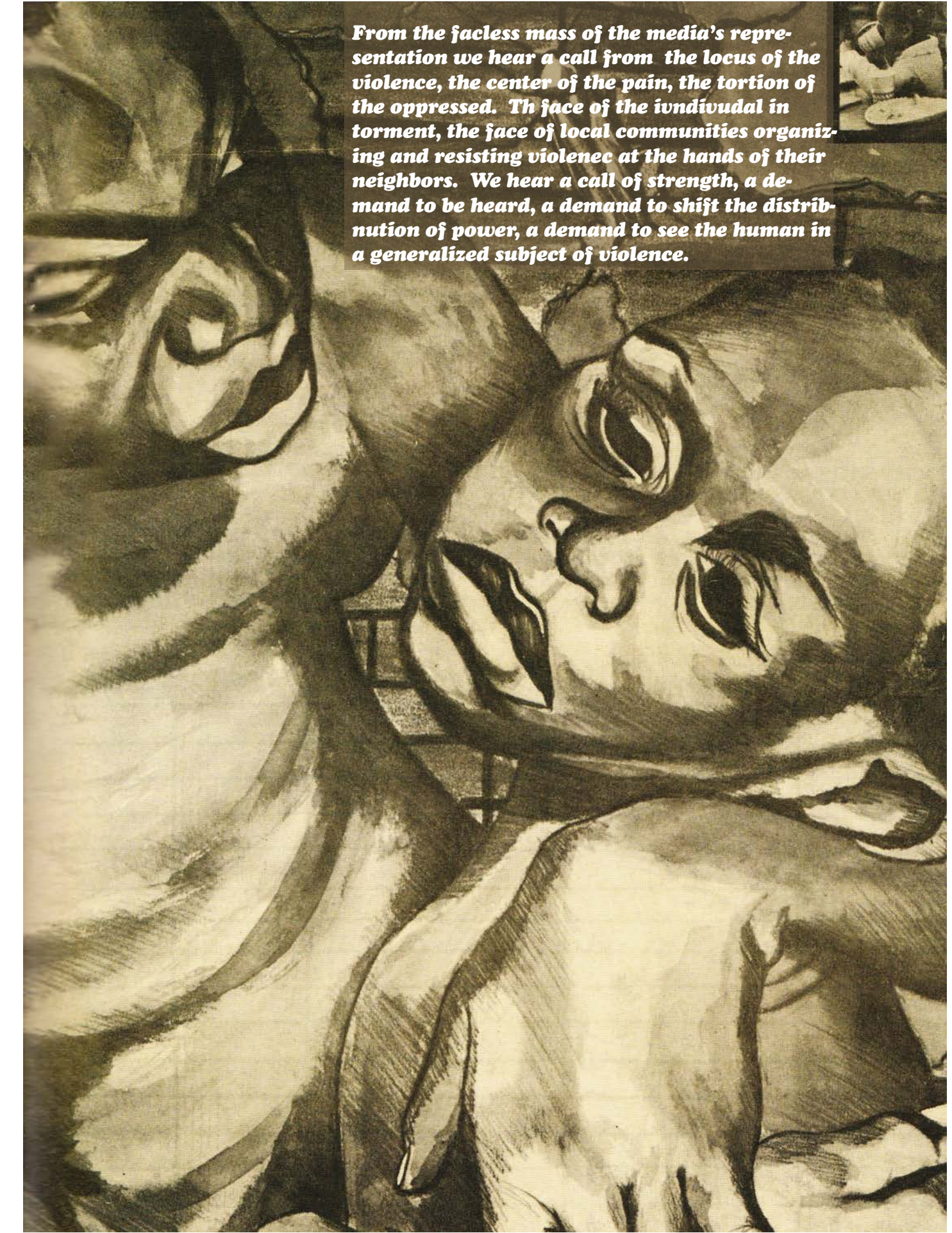
The owner of the home, Robert
Miles, had received threats, and
on July 25, his home was tear-
gassed.

During the past week, 100 Pan-
ola County Negroes were regist-
and

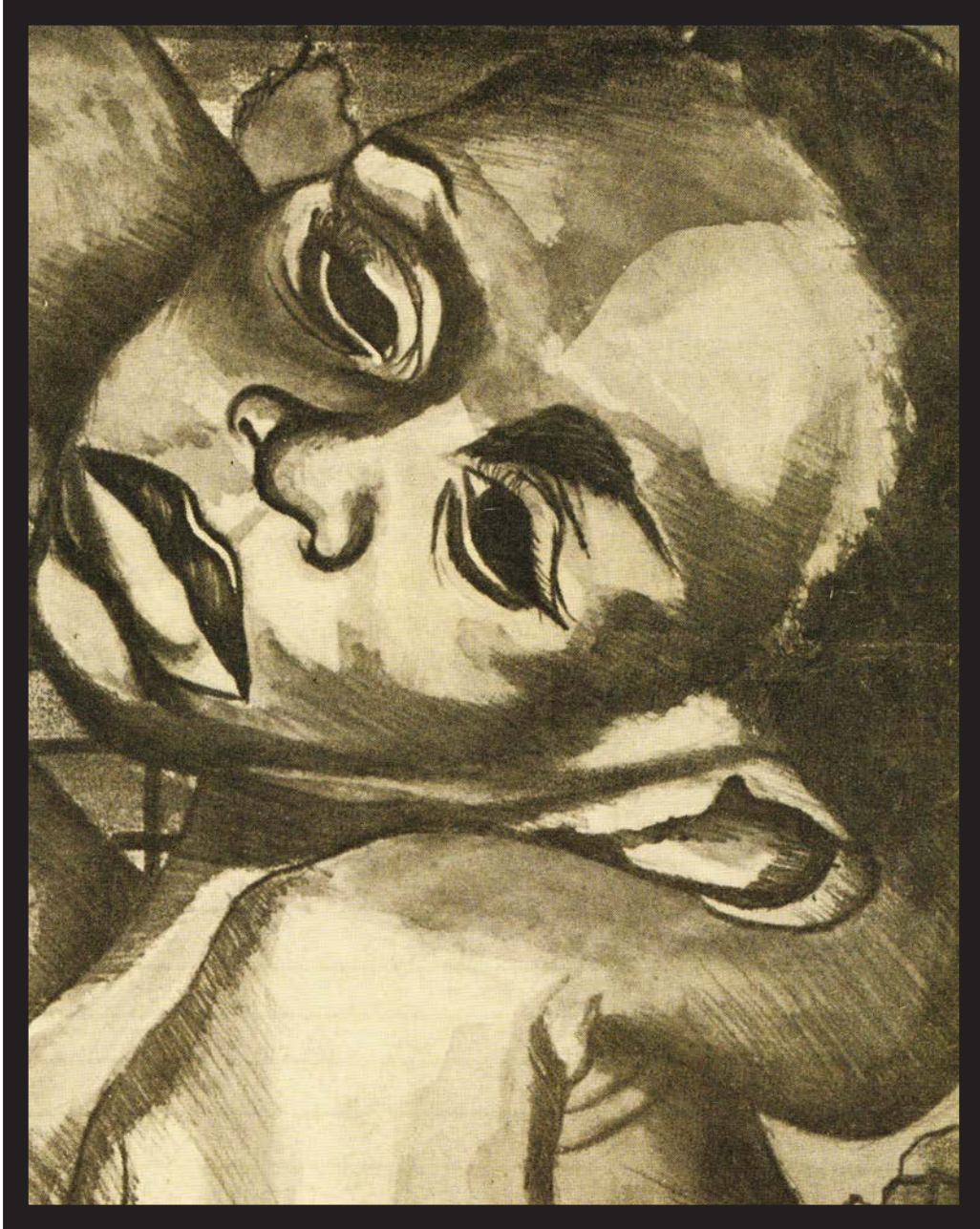
DOGS, FIRE HOSES QUELL PROTESTS

PRINCESS ANNE, MD. - Anti-
segregation protests, halted by a
weekend moratorium called by

demonstrating against segrega-
ted restaurants.
SNCC Chairman John Lewis



From the faceless mass of the media's representation we hear a call from the locus of the violence, the center of the pain, the tortion of the oppressed. Th face of the iwndivudal in torment, the face of local communities organizing and resisting violenec at the hands of their neighbors. We hear a call of strength, a demand to be heard, a demand to shift the distribution of power, a demand to see the human in a generalized subject of violence.



Act 2

[In which we see a new consciousness about visual rhetorics emerge in the movement . In which we see new representations designed to disseminate a new vision of a sub-nation moving together. In which visual rhetorics address the issues of status, centralized leadership, and violence to illustrate the prominence and role of collaboration and group leadership in mobilizing local communities. In which the idea of an imagined nation of communities responding at a local level is disseminated and made available to other isolated communities. In which we first hear of the "beloved community."]



**"It is no accident that SNCC workers have learned that if our story is to be told we will have to write it and disseminate it ourselves."
- Mary King**

Dear Mrs. St. Scheldt,

The reason why I want integrated schools is because we have to live and work with other races when we grow up. But we have to grow up with other races to be able to work well with you. You can't just grow up in your own race and then go to a world that has mixed races and do good work. This is what I think.





'I didn't know colored people could vote.'



"I came up on a porch and an ancient man says "Yes, sir" and offers me his chair. An enraged white face shouts curses out of a car window. We are greeted with fear at the door: "I didn't know colored people could vote." And people ask why we are down here"

- from a white SNCC worker's field report.

NOW



come let us build a new world together

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE 815 RAYMOND STREET, N.W. ATLANTA 14, GEORGIA

NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

8½ RAYMOND STREET, N.W. ATLANTA 14, GEORGIA

JOHN L. LEWIS

Through their use of photography, SNCC members created a formidable independent media structure that indeed influenced the course of the civil rights movement.

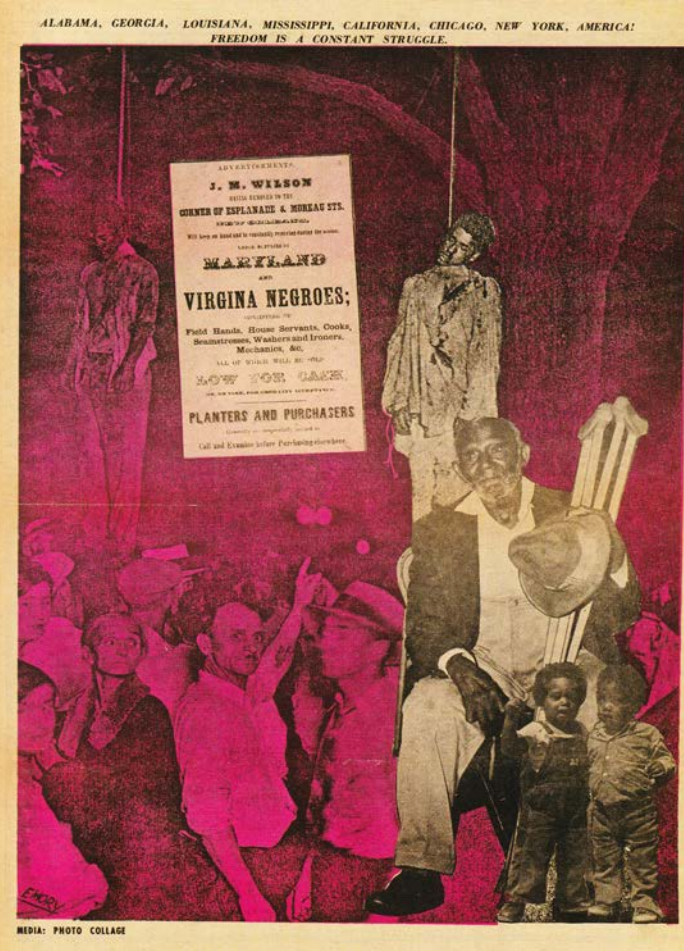
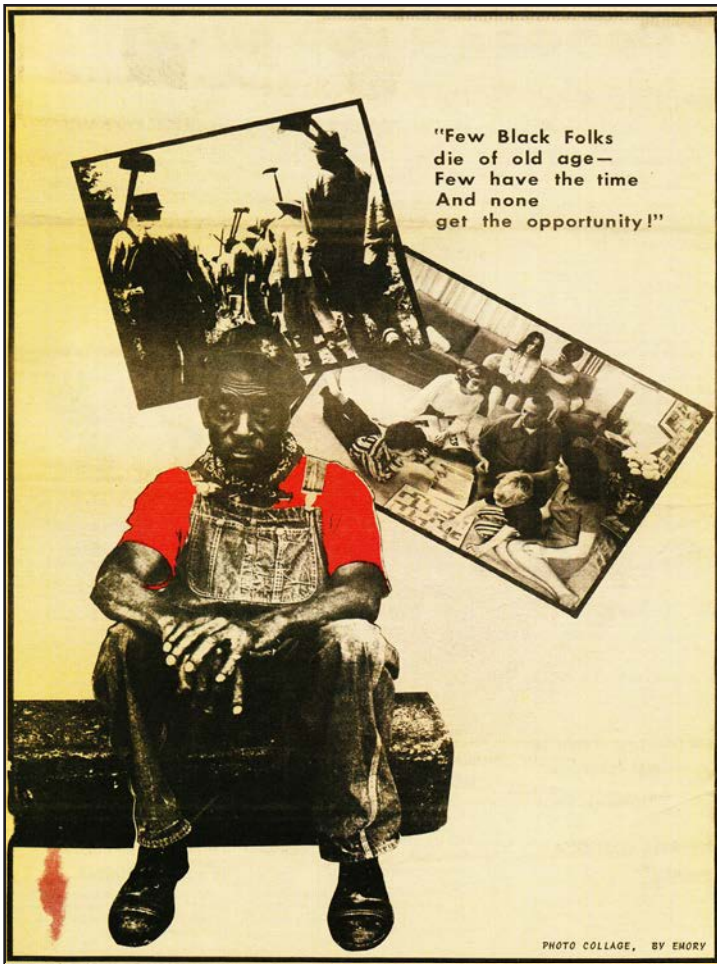
Nonviolence took one out of the role of victim and put her in total command of her life. By acting in this clear, pure way, in which the act itself was of equal value to its outcome, and by risking all for it, we were broken open, released from old and lesser definitions of ourselves in terms of race, sex, class, into the larger self of the Beloved Community. This was freedom as an inside job, not as external to myself, but as created, on the spot and in the moment, by our actions. This was ideology turned inside out. - Casey Hayden

The text accompanying the image provides an open invitation and an opportunity, a call to action. Here, the juxtaposition of words and image functions as a catalyst to transform audiences into active participants,

SNCC, perhaps more than any other civil rights group of the time, understood the importance of photographs not only as documents of the efforts of thousands to raze the world of southern oppression, but also as visual bricks in the raising of the new integrated free world.

“Now-time” does not mean the present, nor does it represent the present. “Now-time” presents the present, or makes it emerge. . . . The present of “now-time,” which is the present of an event, is never present. But “now” (and not “the now,” not a substantive, but “now” as a performed word, as the utterance which can be ours) presents this lack of presence. A time full of “now-time” is a time full of openness and heterogeneity. “Now” says “our time;” and “our time” says: “We, filling the space of time with existence.” Jean Luc-Nancy

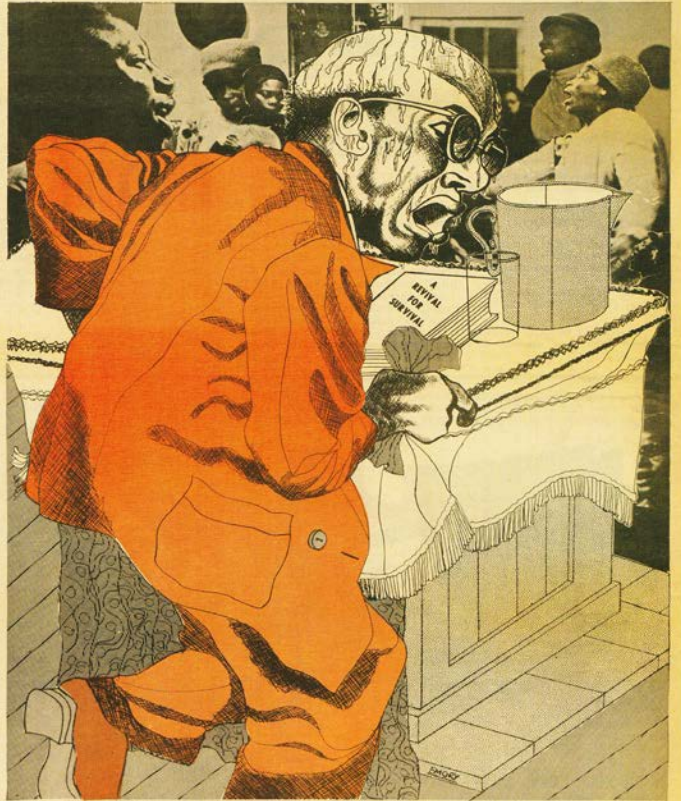
This poster, like so many SNCC posters, aligns multiple temporalities. Nine years after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision ordering the desegregation of public schools, “now” speaks of and to the youth gathered in the capital, frustrated and impatient with the glacial pace of “all deliberate speed.” “Now,” as utterance, as declaration, as performative, pronounces “this lack of presence,” the undelivered promise of integration and equality. As such, the poster’s power lies not in a faithful, identifiable documentation of the March; it “does not represent the present” as we have come to understand it as integrated multitudes and charismatic leaders. Rather, it captures the “fierce urgency” of its moment. The poster calls attention to the unfreedoms that envelop the very moment of the photograph, a moment surrounded by a past and future of oppression and resistance. Yet at just this moment, the moment of the photograph, this man and those around him are free. They make freedom “emerge.” This is an image filled with now-time, with the we. The act of this poster is an effort to rip open history.



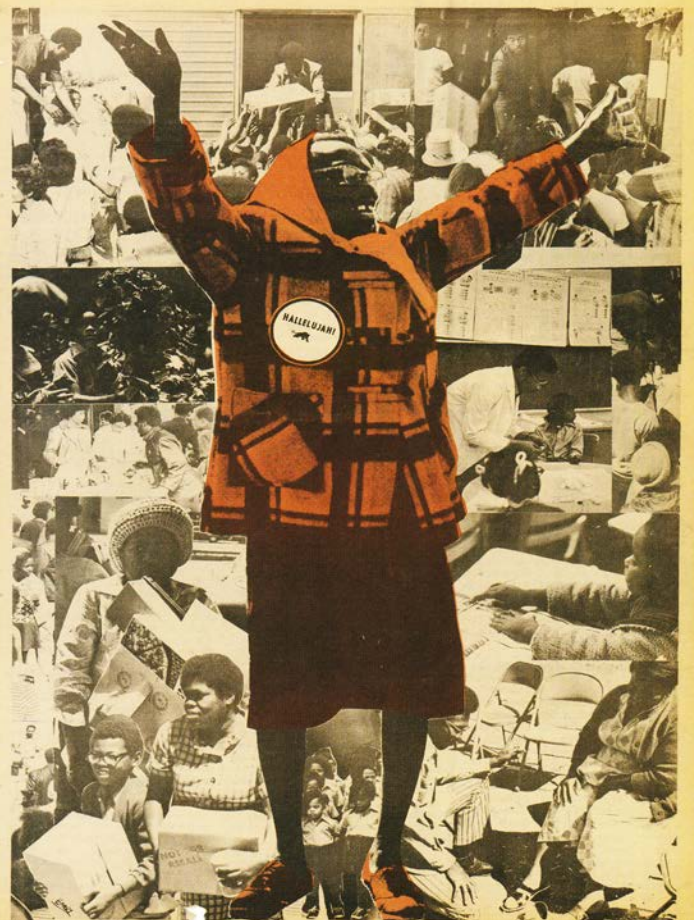
CHILD, WHEN I LOOK AT THE REALITY OF OUR SITUATION,
AS IT REALLY EXISTS, I CAN SEE THAT BLACK PEOPLE NEED
A CERTAIN CHANGE



WHEN IT RAINS WE HAVE VERY LITTLE SHELTER;
WHEN WE'RE HUNGRY WE HAVE NOT ENOUGH FOOD;
BUT WHEN WE COME TOGETHER FOR OUR SURVIVAL,
WE WILL HAVE FREEDOM - AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!



MIXED MEDIA: PEN AND INK LINE DRAWING, PHOTO CUT-OUTS, AND SCREENS



Act 3

[In which literacy education yields new civic agency. In which we see narrated the emergence of an ethos of place in a man's dawning awareness of his camaraderie with a sub-nation moving in tandem with his own actions. In which we arrive at a medium showing African Americans as actors, not victims. In which we see that there is no one organization leading the movement. In which we see filmstrips redefine the nature of leadership and the spaces in which communities take action. In which we see the construction of communal leadership by narrating the story of communities organizing on their own around their needs.]

filmstrips, ethos

Flickering up on the parish hall walls were photographs of Mexican American union organizers and field workers being assaulted by white growers and hauled away to jail by white law enforcers. When the strip ended, there was a long silence. In the audience was an older gentleman who had worked all his life on a plantation in Tennessee and was now homeless, evicted as a result of his participation in the movement. He rose up and with tears in his eyes said, "you don't know how it feels to know that we are not the only ones."

- Maria Varela, Unpublished Memoir





In this rather dramatic moment of catharsis, relief, and joy, Varela narrates the emergence of an ethos of place in this man's dawning awareness of his camaraderie with a sub-nation moving in tandem with his own actions. The flickering narrative, the portrayal of local people organizing a union, the dissemination of shared knowledge, the embodiment of local spaces, the identification with a larger strata of communities all help to theorize how the filmstrips help structure an ethos of place.

I would like to return to my earlier comments about how the filmstrips offered a rhetorical position largely unavailable in the popular media by redefining the spaces in which African Americans were taking action and by offering an alternative model of leadership. Popular media produced an endless rotation of images of African Americans as subjects of of brutal violence or in chaotic confrontations with institutional forces. news reports often framed their discourse around a centralized leader, a figure like, for example, Martin tLuther King. As I said these representations presented a faceless body of people, spoken for by a charismatic leader, suggesting that they were unable to speak for themselves or act independent of that leader's directions.

In contrast to these portrayals, the differences in the filmstrips, Varela said, is "that we were shooting the people as actors, not as victims" (Interview). The filmstrips redefine the notions of leadership and space in which the communities were taking action. Focusing on local efforts, the filmstrips emphasize that "There is no one organization organizing this movement; there is no one group of elite leaders creating its program"(Report 2). Instead the filmstrips illustrate the construction of communal leadership by narrating the story of communities organizing on their own around their needs. Detailing this process also offers a richer conception/redefinition of the nature of resistance communities are engaged in. Instead of focusing on the staging of protests, pickets,

or sit-ins, the filmstrips “communicate the specifics of how to do something”(3). Principally the filmstrips tell the stories of local communities acting to take control over the political-economical institutions that make decisions affecting their lives. One film for example narrates how local farmers can be involved in nominating and electing candidates to the ASCS Committee, a committee historically run by white men that has favored assigning any extra allotments for each county to the larger, white farms, a process that has managed to maintain the disparity in wealth between white and African American farmers. Again, the filmstrips redefine a model of leadership by showing how authority is constructed communally through collaborative efforts.

The images in the filmstrips also redefine the nature of the spaces in which African Americans were taking action. By focusing on how communities are engaging institutional discourse, the filmstrips show African Americans in social spaces participating in civic practices - holding and participating meetings, nominating candidates, interviewing African American candidates. Instead of showing spaces in which African Americans are subject to violence, the films show how local subjects are acting to participate in and exert influence in civic process governing their lives.

In each of these instances the filmstrips portray values and conditions critically important to establishing an ethos of place: they project agency in depicting the ordinary person taking action; they project images of people as actors, not victims; create an embodied sense of community efforts and struggles by producing an imagined/real sub-nation; they show people as active citizens; they employ and privilege local language practices and rhetorical traditions; they are the result of local people deciding what to document and discovering where pockets of the movement exist.





from local to public (a conclusion or resting point)

In a recent interview, Maria Varela spoke of Ella Baker's advice to SNCC organizers. She suggested that SNCC organizers:

“should be listening to what she called the semi- public discourse of resistance, that which you might find in barber shops family get-togethers things like that where she said you could determine what people that were in Resistance were against and maybe how far they would go.”

The new literacy practices seen in the filmstrips reflect just that attention. Barber shops, churches, and living rooms have often served as “hush harbor sites¹” in the African American community - local sites of activism, celebration of African American language traditions², and resistance to the overdetermined hegemony of a dominant white culture. The filmstrips Varela discusses draws on the strengths of that tradition. By capturing that discourse and sense of resistance, the filmstrips introduce a communality to the discourse, where previously it may have been constrained to local currents, to “semi-public” discourses.

These new literacy practices help evoke an ethos of place from which disenfranchised African Americans are able to navigate dominant discourses, re-narrate dominant discourses, and produce counter linguistic practices that effectively authorize African American voices in democratic practices that had historically privileged white citizen. While providing an intergroup sanctuary in which multiple voices circulate, the social space born of an ethos of place produce new, differently articulated “agitational” and arguably liberatory alternatives to the hegemonic stratification of social relations, as can be seen in the rise of multimodal literacy practices in response to the specific social needs of African Americans in the South.

"We should be listening to what she called the semi-public discourse of resistance, that which you might find in barber shops family get-togethers things like that where she said you could determine what people that were in resistance were against and maybe how far they would go."







"We marched through valleys of dread, reflections in two centuries of tears . . . not knowing where we would sleep or if morning would come . . . not knowing, would it do any good?"
- Maria Varela

