

*Mississippi Movement - Freedom Summer 64  
Ed King Speculations - Bonhoeffer, Notes,  
Hammer*

Reality of Change. By the end of 1964 all people knew that Change had come to Mississippi. This was a start; it would not be totally wiped away. The content of that change would be determined in the future. It might be little, it might be great. But the past order had been overthrown, or overcome. Something new could and would be built now.

By the end of 1964 the struggle for Freedom was now on two fronts. The old battles against the old system had to be continued. The fight might still take many years but no longer did people wander in the wilderness waiting for the Time to come. In the Freedom Summer the black people of Mississippi moved out of the Wilderness and across the River Jordan. After the Summer they were firmly camped on the other side. "Never" had finally been beaten. Now a second battle was being fought, to determine the content of Change.

The fact was recognized, secure; the meaning was still to be defined. By the end of 1964 the traditional leaders of the old black community were quite aware of the two-fold nature of the struggle. With no thanks and scarcely concealed contempt for SNCC and the Movement that had fought and won this victory, the traditional leaders seized the opportunities they had been waiting for to reassert their leadership, to save their position, and bring themselves more wealth, power, and prestige if possible, but chiefly power. By the end of 1964 there was now struggle within the black community between the traditional leaders, now affirming all the slogans of Freedom, and the new leaders developed at the call of SNCC but with their own confidence and following created in the midst of battle. At the end of 1964 there were continuing battles between the various black communities and the

*2nd battle  
still in  
6/4*

various white communities, for the victories of the Movement that year had also produced the anticipated divisions in the white world. But the end of 1964 was a very different Mississippi, a very different world than that talked by the SNCC plotters of the Resistance Movement in the Delta on the winter nights of January.

As the year of struggle ended, the band of brothers and sisters, the happy few, the warriors of SNCC were truly "outsiders." The tired, bitter men and women who had fought with bodies, souls, and minds, their spirits and dreams, did not understand Mississippi, did not understand their own great victories, did not understand their own defeats, did not understand themselves. They had new understandings of important things, about America and the world, about racism, and about poverty, but they were not ready to join (much less lead) the new wars. And few other people, satisfied in the present victories and opportunities even wanted to ask questions about new wars.

So, in Mississippi, at the end of 1964, Change was secure. Now new black leaders fought old black leaders; new white leaders fought old white leaders; everywhere blacks fought whites. But the weary warriors of SNCC, the confused men and women who had once produced such amazing understanding and vision, had somehow moved outside the arenas of the new struggles. They no longer had the will nor the strength to plan new strategies or to join combat with any one of their enemies, in the black or in white worlds of Mississippi. They could no longer listen patiently to the people of the communities or even assist their friends, the new leaders that they had helped find in the black communities of

Mississippi. SNCC and the Movement had dreamed, had planned, had fought the battles of Freedom Summer of 1964 for the right to organize the communities, the black people of Mississippi, so that the people could speak for themselves, could say what they needed, could band together to win and use what they needed. In the battles of Freedom Summer SNCC and the Movement finally won the right to organize.

*fighting hard!*  
*to long hard* ((

In the Fall of 1964 SNCC was not able to do that organizing, to claim the victory. The enemies SNCC faced, from the Delta and the swamps, and banks of the Mississippi River to the swamps and banks of the Potomoc River were far more powerful, devious, and evil than ever imagined. The struggle would take much longer than imagined. The years of warfare leading up to the Summer had taken a toll that no one realized. Sacrifice was more demanding than anyone understood. SNCC had willingly, as an organization and as individuals, believed in the necessity and the power of self sacrifice. This sacrifice was made in the Freedom Summer. It brought Victory. But those who joined the sacrifice and yet survived never realized how much of their life they had given. SNCC emerged from the Freedom Summer like a decimated company of stragglers, a battalion of Russian peasant soldiers, staggering away into the forests after the Battle of Borodino, lost, leaving dead comrades behind on the battlefield, themselves wounded, their banners shattered, leaderless, and, above all, convinced that their suffering was meaningless, that everything had been lost. The battle had been so fierce, so long, so demanding that the survivors could not comprehend that the victory was theirs.

We all should have turned again to the writings of a man who so often inspired and challenged us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a Nazi prison and in failure, full of doubts yet still respected by some, had wondered, "Who am I?" and asked:

... is there something within me still like a beaten army  
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved? 1

SNCC had faced the worst the racist white South could offer but was now betrayed, deserted and damned, by the liberal powers that had once seemed friendly allies. SNCC was praised by the black people of Mississippi and by many young Americans they had helped radicalize. But SNCC and many of us in the wider Movement fellowship made possible by SNCC no longer had the confidence or wisdom to affirm to affirm with Bonhoeffer:

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions  
of mine.

Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God,  
I am thine. 2

So, at the end of Freedom Summer, there was no leader, no prophet, no Moses. No one could understand their pain, their fear, their doubt, their hate. No one could remind them of their love, their dreams, their courage, their hope. Fannie Lou Hamer in song often compared the people of the Movement to the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses. Now they had crossed the Jordan River, even marched around the walls of Jericho, but no one understood what happened to Moses. Long ago that other Moses died before

entering the Promised Land, and the people had to move on without a Moses; but everyone knew that Joshua was there to lead them in the next battles. In Mississippi the SNCC survivors and all the Movement wondered why Bob Moses withdrew, changed his name to Bob Paris, quickly moved away from Mississippi, slowly away from the Movement. And Jane Stembridge would write from Tougaloo, Mississippi, "My friend, the quiet one, has disappeared himself." 3