

CHAPTER 10

“WHAT THAT MEANT TO ME”

SNCC Women, the 1964 Guinea Trip, and Black Internationalism

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On September 11, 1964, a group of eleven Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists boarded a Pan Am flight in New York City, settling in for a transatlantic flight to Guinea, by way of Senegal. The trip, with the financial backing and support of entertainer Harry Belafonte and the encouragement of Guinean president Ahmed Sékou Touré, was envisioned as “an exploratory one” and an “attempt to strengthen bonds” between African Americans and “their brothers in Africa.”¹ For the women on the trip—Prathia Hall, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dona Richards, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson—visiting Africa and meeting Guinean men and women had profound and lasting effects. At a time when Pan-Africanism, African nationalism, and black internationalism were often defined in masculine terms (think even of the trip description, about bonding with “African brothers”), the SNCC women who traveled to Guinea embodied black internationalism as African American civil and human rights activists traveling to the African continent. These women’s experiences on and resulting from the trip illustrate some of the myriad ways that women were practitioners and advocates of black internationalism. For some SNCC women, internationalism actually took place internally, through claiming and honoring their African heritage and beauty and proudly identifying as part of a Pan-African community. For other SNCC women, internationalism was something to be promoted at an organizational level, a push for SNCC to make concrete activist ties with African organizations, establish an “African Department,” and more fully involve itself in transnational activism.

The Birth of SNCC

Founded in April 1960 in the midst of the Southern student sit-ins, SNCC was a leading force in the civil and human rights struggle in the United

States by the time of the Guinea trip. In its first years of existence, SNCC had involved itself in numerous activities, including the 1960 student sit-ins, the 1961 Freedom Rides, the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the 1963 Freedom Vote, local campaigns of nonviolent civil disobedience, voter registration, and community organizing. In the months immediately preceding the Guinea trip, SNCC undertook perhaps its most ambitious campaign, spearheading the Council of Federated Organization's (COFO) 1964 Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer. The Summer Project was a three-pronged attack on racial segregation and discrimination, consisting of a campaign (1) to register voters, (2) to establish Freedom Schools to teach literacy and citizenship to African Americans, and (3) to organize communities across the state of Mississippi, all with the help of local people as well as black and white volunteers from around the United States. An additional component of the summer was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), founded by COFO in April 1964 to capitalize on the broader voter registration activities that had been occurring in the state, and to challenge the undemocratic all-white regular Mississippi Democratic Party at the August Democratic National Convention (DNC). While numerous successes were achieved on all of these fronts, Freedom Summer was also a time of great stress, turmoil, fear, and violence, capped off with the discovery of the bodies of three murdered civil rights workers and the failure of the MFDP to unseat the all-white Mississippi delegation at the DNC in Atlantic City.²

Belafonte, a prominent civil rights supporter, was well aware of the toll exacted on SNCC by the Summer Project and saw that a need existed for at least some members of the organization to take a break from the stresses of the summer. Belafonte and Guinean president Touré, with whom Belafonte was working to support artistic and cultural endeavors in the relatively new country, extended an invitation for SNCC to visit Guinea. Belafonte wanted the SNCC group's "hiatus" to be in Guinea because he was "taken by the young spirit of the country," and he thought "the clearheadedness [*sic*]" of Touré "held great promise for Africa's future."³ Many peoples' attention was drawn to Guinea and Touré in 1958; that fall, France offered its West African colonies a referendum that would allow the territories the opportunity for more self-government as part of a new French Community (Communauté Française d'Afrique), though France would still maintain overall control. Guinea was the only French colony to vote down the referendum, instead declaring itself independent, and an angry France immediately withdrew all support, governance, personnel, and infrastructure from the country. Guinea's act of standing up to a European colonial power, with Touré as

the face of Guinean independence, proved deeply inspiring to many African Americans fighting for civil and human rights. Well aware of the symbolic impact of Guinea, Belafonte and Touré wanted the SNCC activists to be in “an African environment” in a “country that was noted for its political progress and for its ideas in where it was going.”⁴ With independence, Guinea, under Touré’s leadership, proclaimed itself nonaligned, seeking a third way of democratic or African socialism, despite the traditionally bipolar Cold War world. While the US government disagreed with any way or side different from their own Cold War position, many newly decolonized countries were trying to navigate their own path, and SNCC looked to these “unacceptable” options with interest. As SNCC activists grew increasingly disillusioned with the US commitment to democracy and freedom, both domestically and internationally, and as they searched for new directions after what they felt was the failure of the MFDP challenge in changing American society from within, Touré and Guinea served as symbols of possibility for many in the organization.

Some of the impetus for the Guinea trip came from SNCC itself. From its very beginning in 1960, the fledgling organization asserted, “We identify ourselves with the African struggle as a concern of all mankind.”⁵ For some time, one of the ways in which a number of SNCC activists—most notably Chair John Lewis and Executive Secretary James Forman—sought to identify with Africa and African struggles was through pushing for SNCC representatives to travel to Africa. As Lewis explained, “I think that such a trip would be good for SNCC and for me personally.”⁶ Inspired by the major transformations taking place with decolonization in Africa, SNCC activists wanted to learn from other young people and leaders in different parts of the world who were fighting or had won their fight against white supremacy and imperialism. Belafonte was aware that SNCC activists and other African American leaders were talking “about the emerging Black leadership in Africa, hoping that America would fall in place with the . . . Jomo Kenyattas [Kenya] and the Tom Mboya [Kenya] and the Kwame Nkrumah [Ghana] and the Sekou Toures and the Julius Nyereres [Tanganyika] who were emerging.”⁷

Belafonte allowed SNCC to determine who should travel to Guinea, and eventually Julian Bond, James Forman, Prathia Hall, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bill Hansen, Donald Harris, Matthew Jones, John Lewis, Robert “Bob” Moses, Dona Richards, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson were selected to “provide a broad representation of leadership.”⁸ Of the four women selected, Georgian Ruby Doris Smith Robinson had worked with SNCC for the longest period, entering the group as a teenager shortly after its founding through her work

with one of its precursors and then affiliates, the Atlanta-based Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR). Robinson participated in numerous nonviolent direct-action protests against segregation, traveled on the Freedom Rides, served jail terms for civil disobedience of discriminatory laws, and worked with SNCC as a fieldworker and administrator in many different Southern states. In 1963 she began working at SNCC's Atlanta headquarters, where she was largely responsible for keeping the organization going; a SNCC press release termed her the "heartbeat" of the group.⁹

Mississippian Fannie Lou Hamer and Pennsylvanian Prathia Hall both started working with SNCC in 1962, though they came to their civil rights work from different backgrounds. Hamer, a generation older than the other women, was a former sharecropper and timekeeper on a plantation in the Mississippi Delta. After attending a mass meeting on voter registration held by COFO in August 1962, Hamer herself attempted to register to vote, and she began working on campaigns for civil and human rights with SNCC and the other COFO groups. Quickly held in high esteem by SNCC activists, she



Fannie Lou Hamer at the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 1964. (Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

came to national prominence in 1964 when she delivered a powerful and impassioned speech on behalf of the MFDP at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Prathia Hall, on the other hand, grew up outside of the Deep South in Philadelphia. She began volunteering with SNCC in mid-1962 after participating in nonviolent direct-action protests to desegregate Maryland's Eastern Shore, and quickly transitioned to working full time for SNCC, primarily in Georgia. In January 1964 Hall began directing SNCC's activities in Atlanta. The last of these women to join SNCC was New Yorker Dona Richards, whose primary involvement commenced in the fall of 1963 on the Freedom Vote. Her efforts in Mississippi carried over the following year, as she worked on the Freedom Summer campaign and the MFDP's challenge to the all-white regular Mississippi Democratic Party. In January 1964 she married Bob Moses, one of the most prominent organizers in SNCC.¹⁰

The Journey to Guinea

From the very beginning, the journey to Guinea had a deep impact on the entire SNCC delegation. En route from New York, the group stopped over in Dakar, Senegal, and then headed to their final destination by way of an Air Guinée flight. Flying on an African national airline provided them a totally new experience. Fannie Lou Hamer explained that, until this time, she "had never seen a black stewardess on a plane." Upon seeing black flight attendants and black pilots in the cockpit, "right away," Hamer declared, "this meant that it was going to be different from what I had been [used to], what had been taught to me."¹¹ Throughout the group's stay in Guinea, the reality *was* different. As Ruby Doris Smith Robinson pronounced, "Blacks [*did*] everything. Everything."¹² Black Africans were not only flying the airplanes; they were also in charge of the other forms of transportation, of banks and businesses, of running the government of the entire country. The SNCC visitors gained insight into this all-black government, meeting with various government representatives, including a handful of formal and informal gatherings with President Touré. Throughout these meetings, the Africans and Americans discussed civil and human rights occurrences in their respective countries, the similarities and differences between the problems in Africa and America, and how to help each other.¹³ With SNCC in a transitional moment, questioning its methods and even its goals, witnessing firsthand an all-black government, economy, and society provided new visions of what was possible.

Having rarely, if ever, seen black people in positions of control on such a large scale, the group found the whole experience "just remarkable," in

Hamer's words. Seeing black people in widespread positions of power was a "revelation," allowing the SNCC travelers to create for themselves a positive historical identity and self-image.¹⁴ This realization of human dignity and worth, and the reconceptualization of African-ness as an honorable rather than disgraceful heritage had long been aims of SNCC. Throughout its existence, the group's repeated calls for the attainment of human rights and human dignity for all people, its emphasis on learning and teaching African and African American history and culture, and its efforts to develop strong grassroots leadership were all directed toward that goal. Seeing Guineans creating and running their own country presented a new picture of what was possible in a society and new ways to view being black.

For Hamer, a former sharecropper with little formal education, a woman described by one reporter as "hefty . . . weighing 200 pounds," with a "streaming brow" and a "husky, powerful voice"—not attributes typically viewed as feminine or womanly in the dominant American society of 1964—this reidentification of herself was particularly powerful.¹⁵ Poor, black, and a woman, though not fitting into society's idealized notions of "feminine," Hamer had multiple counts against her. Being able to reconceptualize her African-ness as a positive inheritance and identity rather than as a disgrace, as something to distance oneself from as much as possible, changed things. While in the past she had been taught that Africans were "‘heathens,’ ‘savages,’ and they were just downright stupid people," meeting the black president and the all-black government of Guinea proved the fallacy of such teachings. After this, Hamer explained, "I could feel myself never, ever being ashamed of my ancestors and my background."¹⁶ Seeing oft-repeated falsehoods about Africans—and, by extension, African Americans—put to rest signified more than Hamer could put into words, as she declared, "You don't know what that meant to me."¹⁷

In a television interview the previous July, SNCC's James Forman addressed this need for black Americans to reidentify themselves and their past. Asserting that African Americans had been denied "self-expression" for most of their history, Forman explained that black Americans were starting to undertake a long process that amounted, in a sense, to "counter-brainwash[ing]," to creating a positive identification of blackness and pride in that identity.¹⁸ Black Americans needed to learn to celebrate their African and African American heritages and to know that black was beautiful.

On the Guinea trip, these lessons were personalized for the SNCC group, particularly for the women of the group, who found new affirmations of African pride and black beauty everywhere they looked. While the latter years of the 1960s and the 1970s would see the "Black Is Beautiful" ideology

widely promoted as part of the Black Power movement, in 1964 there were just inklings of this cultural shift. Celebrations of black and Afrocentric beauty were not common or widely promoted ideas in mainstream US culture at this time, even within the dominant African American culture. Popular African American magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet* still included abundant advertisements for skin lighteners and hair straighteners, products that were, to use psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint's phrase, "selling 'whiteness'."¹⁹ Advertisements for any product, not just beauty products, often featured models who were slim and light-skinned with straightened hair and the thinner facial features viewed as more "white" and less "black." In 1964 American society and culture were still spreading the message that to be beautiful, one had to be white, or at least look as white as possible. This racialized notion of beauty had detrimental effects on the psyche of many women of color. In an interview Robinson expressed her frustration with "how the whole world had this white idea of beauty . . . not mine." The inability to find her "African kind of beauty—. . . thick lips and kinky hair—in a picture anywhere" made her strongly dislike white women for a period of time and "nearly made [her] crazy." For Robinson, society's adulation of white beauty and denigration of black beauty meant she "los[t]" her "self-respect," until she realized she "had to find a new sense of [her] dignity."²⁰ The trip to Guinea helped her find this new dignity, a new sense of pride and self-worth.

In Guinea cultural ideas and standards of beauty were different from those in the United States, and the SNCC women were particularly impacted by these differences. Hamer remembered that she "looked . . . so much" at the African women who "were so graceful and poised."²¹ In part, this may have been because women in post-independence Guinea had taken on a new role that was more political, more powerful, and more visible than before. As James Forman explained about the trip, "There is much emphasis placed on the rights of women. Before Independence women were almost slaves."²² The SNCC women's reaction to their counterparts in Guinea was also due to the fact that the Guinean women were not trying to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals; they appeared secure in their own skin. Hamer identified with these women: they reminded her of her mother and grandmother, and she could also see herself in the Guinean women. Ruby Doris Smith Robinson emulated one of the visions of beautiful black womanhood that she saw around her by having her hair braided into cornrows. While commonplace as a hairstyle today, that was not the case in the early to mid-1960s. Robinson's fellow traveler Julian Bond remembered that during their time in Guinea, the SNCC delegation made "little day trips out in the rural areas,"

and it was on one of those trips that Robinson had her hair braided. Bond “had never ever seen that anywhere before. . . . But [*Robinson*] got her hair corn-rowed in an African village. ‘Wow, oo, look at that.’”²³ According to Robinson’s biographer Cynthia Griggs Fleming, Robinson “was acutely aware of how she looked. . . . Her appearance had always been important to her,” so it is likely that she was well aware that one’s appearance can have deeper meanings and can greatly impact how one is perceived by others.²⁴ In copying Guinean hairstyles and in positively identifying with Africans and their African heritage, Robinson and Hamer showed new understanding of their racial consciousness as African Americans and as diasporic peoples. As sociologist Belinda Robnett asserts, those on the Guinea trip “experienced a growing sense of identity that was rooted in one’s Blackness, one’s dark skin, one’s kinky hair, and one’s culture.”²⁵

The SNCC women brought this new sense of an African identity with them when they returned to the United States from Guinea. Through ways small and large, personal and political, those who went on the Africa trip, in SNCC’s Charlie Cobb’s words, “made Africa a little less alien” to those in the United States.²⁶ One way they did so was by sharing the words and names from different African languages and countries. For example, the year after the Africa trip, Robinson paid homage to her Guinean stay and the group’s African host when she gave birth to her son, naming him Kenneth Toure Robinson, in honor of Guinean president Sékou Touré. In later years Dona Richards changed her own name to Marimba Ani and gave her daughter a Ghanaian name, Dzifa. Throughout the late 1960s and beyond, other SNCC activists and Black Power advocates followed suit and changed their names; still others gave their children names with African origins or meanings. These acts created a politics of naming, a way for people to reclaim and take pride in their African heritage and to revoke one of the vestiges of slavery.

The aftereffects of the Guinea trip were also evident in the conversations and organizing that some of the SNCC women engaged in upon their return. SNCC staff coordinator Worth Long remembered that upon Robinson’s return, “she talked about how Pan-Africanism could be important within the United States.” Robinson thought that SNCC needed to make diasporic alliances, suggesting that the organization “should explore the possibility of establishing Friends of SNCC groups in Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe.”²⁷ Robinson, however, was unable to fully follow up on these ideas as after she returned from Guinea, her time was quickly taken up with finishing her college degree, caring for her newborn son, and fulfilling her SNCC administrative duties. In 1966 she took on additional responsibility

when she was elected executive secretary of SNCC, the first woman to hold such a high-ranking position in the organization. Then, just two years after returning from Guinea, Robinson became ill with cancer, succumbing to the disease in October 1967 at the age of twenty-six.

Prathia Hall was interested in telling African Americans about the trip and making contact with Africans visiting the United States. For example, in the spring of 1965, she spoke about the Guinea trip to a Freedom Workshop held at Highlander Folk Center in Tennessee. Her passion for the African visit came through, a conference participant avowed, in the way Hall made “you believe [*sic*] that you were there.”²⁸ A representative of the African-American Institute’s Women’s Africa Committee contacted SNCC later that same spring, asking if someone from SNCC might be available to speak to a group of fifteen Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean women attending an institute program. A SNCC staff member replied that Hall “would be most interested in the events you plan . . . Last year she traveled to Africa along with other SNCC people. For this reason she is particularly interested in meeting with groups of Africans.”²⁹ For all of the women on the trip, this need to further connect with Africans, both personally and organizationally, became particularly important, as they now more strongly identified themselves as part of a Pan-African community and their civil and human rights struggle as part of a global struggle. As Hamer biographer Chana Kai Lee states, the trip produced the “internationalization” of the SNCC contingent that traveled to Guinea and “linked [*them*] to a worldwide movement and community.”³⁰ Hamer was especially affected by the personal effects of seeing oneself as part of this international community, and she encouraged other African Americans to travel to Africa if possible. One of Hamer’s key takeaways from the trip was, as James Forman explained, the “psychological importance” of African Americans visiting black-majority countries with black people in charge of all aspects of the country. In her autobiography Hamer wrote of what an “inspiration” it was to see black people “just doing everything that I was used to seeing white people do.”³¹ Hamer wanted other African Americans to travel to Africa, to see nonsegregated societies, societies with black people in positions of power, and to experience the same psychological transformation that she had in Guinea.

In different ways the importance of building stronger bridges between the movements in Africa and the United States was clearly evident to those on the Guinean trip, particularly for Dona Richards. In early September 1965, Richards declared the need for SNCC staff to “immediately put into effect the often-made SNCC proposal to have an African Affairs Department.” Profoundly affected by her time in Guinea the previous fall, Richards drew

up a plan containing research, education, and political components. She called for the proposed department to both study what was happening in African countries and US policy around the continent and disseminate this information in a staff newsletter. SNCC should then use these materials to “plan actions . . . urging the [US] government to take certain actions in Africa,” such as economic sanctions. Richards explained that SNCC could also use these materials to understand which US actions to protest, such as those aimed at fulfilling US goals rather than benefiting the masses of African people, with American intervention in the Congo crises as prime examples of the former.³²

SNCC also needed to “develop relations” with African individuals and governments, Richards declared, while assessing that this was an area where some SNCC activists—namely, James Forman, Donald Harris, and John Lewis—had “already made substantial beginnings.”³³ When the majority of the SNCC contingent left Guinea in October 1964, Lewis and Harris remained in Africa and traveled around the continent for two additional months, during which time they met with numerous African students, activists, and leaders. Harris also had connections from working in Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia) in 1961 with the service organization Operation Crossroads Africa. Forman had developed contacts with Africans when he studied under Pan-Africanist historian and sociologist St. Clair Drake at Roosevelt University in the mid-1950s and when he began a graduate program at Boston University, a popular destination for African students and Africanist scholars. When he began working with SNCC, Forman continued to work on connecting the organization with Africans and African affairs. While these connections were a good start, Richards wanted SNCC to do more. She encouraged SNCC to further educate its members about Africa and African affairs by meeting with Africans visiting the United States, as the organization had periodically done throughout its existence.³⁴ It would be smart to take advantage of these visitors, Richards said, as the African leaders, students, and artists who came to the United States could all educate SNCC and black Americans in general about African history and current affairs as well as “bring their culture to the young people.”³⁵

Exposing black Americans to African culture held a particular resonance for Dona Richards. During her time in Guinea in 1964, the people Richards met there led her to feel “that they had something which we have been taught not to have . . . a cultural heritage to learn about and to be proud of.” In opposition, African Americans had “real problems of identification.” Richards sought to rectify this situation by teaching African Americans about Africa, African affairs, African independence, and African culture. In

Guinea, Richards witnessed firsthand Fannie Lou Hamer “come alive as she discovered the ground where her ancestors had stood.” Richards wanted SNCC’s African Department and Africans themselves to help other black Americans feel similarly, positively identifying with their African heritage and ascertaining “what it really means” to be African American.³⁶

Black Americans needed to “gain strength” from “identification” with African liberation struggles too. It was not only for reasons of culture and self-pride or self-respect that Richards thought SNCC needed an African Department. She also saw her proposed department as a way for SNCC to broaden the questions it asked and the issues with which it was involved. “By following African affairs,” Richards explained, SNCC could “view issues of Economics, Peace, Culture and international questions in general.” Taking a further interest in African happenings would also force SNCC to strengthen its critiques of US foreign policy, particularly with regard to Africa, and to connect “our own exploitation in this country” with “American international attitude and policy.”³⁷

Over the next few months, Richards continued to push the topic of an Africa Bureau or Africa Project with SNCC, because she believed it was “long overdue” to “link . . . the struggle for self-determination of black peoples abroad and the struggle of black people in the United States against exploitation.”³⁸ In October 1965 she and her husband, Bob Moses (then going by Bob Parris), again traveled to Africa, spending time in Ghana and attending the annual meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Accra from October 21 to 26. From her initial proposal, Richards had developed further suggestions for SNCC and the African Department. One such suggestion was a series of conferences on the topics of “cultural, historical, and ‘movement’ aspects,” bringing together SNCC, Africans, educators, and community members. Richards also reiterated the need for SNCC to educate itself about African affairs. Richards informed SNCC that she and Gwen Robinson, another SNCC activist, had begun collecting books for an African library for the group’s Atlanta headquarters, and she hoped that the collection would grow and that everyone could read it. Richards suggested that some SNCC people put together “simple facts . . . pictures and drawings” about African nations to create a primer on the continent, “because there are virtually no books on Africa for children in this country.”³⁹

Richards’s stress on education reflected one of SNCC’s efforts from the previous year’s Mississippi Summer Project, when SNCC and other COFO organizers emphasized teaching African and African American history to Freedom School students. This proved to be a highlight of the schools for both students and organizers. The editors of SNCC’s newspaper, *Student*

Voice, declared that as black students' pasts were traditionally wiped out of the history books, the Freedom Schools' emphasis on teaching African history and putting black Americans' stories and histories back into American history and culture was revolutionary, "possibly the most valuable legacy of the Freedom Schools this summer."⁴⁰ The students began learning about black history by looking back to Africa, by understanding African American history as taking place within a larger diasporic history. By teaching this history, the Freedom Schools helped black Mississippians not only understand their history but also take pride in their blackness and heritage and (re)gain their human dignity. In her autobiography Fannie Lou Hamer shared a similar message, expressing the need to "teach black children to be proud of themselves and to learn all about the true history of our race." She said that as a child, the only thing she learned about black history was the fictional "Little Black Sambo . . . a simple, ignorant boy." Hamer asserted that this was not okay, declaring, "We have gone through too much blood and grief in this movement to let our children be educated to still thinking black is inferior."⁴¹ Through the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project, SNCC activists and other Freedom School teachers confirmed the psychological empowerment that resulted when black Americans took pride in their African and African American heritage. Learning about this heritage and history and traveling to Africa had similar psychological impacts: they helped to revoke feelings of black inferiority and instilled new pride in being a part of the African diaspora. All of the SNCC women who traveled to Guinea experienced this and encouraged other African Americans to make such a trip, as, to use Richards's words, there was "probably nothing comparable as a learning experience."⁴²

In October 1965 Richards and her husband again wrote to "SNCC-people" from Accra. With the OAU meeting around the corner, the city was buzzing over the topic of African unity. Many Africans believed that the continent needed to form a sort of United States of Africa, unifying politically and economically in order to develop Africa's new countries, shake off colonialism and its remnants, and gain a global position of strength. Richards and Moses shared these sentiments with those back home, writing of the scene on the ground: people wore OAU T-shirts, the streets were hung with information about the African leaders and countries, and "slogans also line these streets; such as, 'Africa must unite' and 'One people, One destiny, One continent,' and 'Down with Neo-Colonialism.'" The impending OAU gathering made Accra an exciting place to be, and Richards and Moses wanted SNCC to be a part of it, "working to get official 'observer' recognition" for the OAU conference.⁴³

While educating the stateside SNCC people about what was happening in Africa, Richards also kept in mind the development of SNCC's own African Department or Project. She found children's books "which should help us a lot back home" to educate both African American children and adults who had received little formal schooling. Richards wanted to get SNCC subscriptions to Ghanaian magazines, and she and Moses made plans to meet with university students and expatriate African Americans while in Accra. In addition, Richards told SNCC that Ghanaians and Africans in general needed information about what was happening in the United States; the lines of communication and education needed to go both ways.⁴⁴ Richards worked to further educate herself on Africa and the African diaspora, learning from renowned Pan-Africanist scholar John Henrik Clarke, who "allowed some of [the] young people who worked with SNCC to literally sit at his feet in his Brooklyn apartment in 1965–66 and drink of his wisdom and knowledge concerning the history of the Pan-African world." This growth in knowledge further "developed [her] passion for the realization of the Pan-African vision."⁴⁵

In the years following the Guinea trip, Dona Richards worked tirelessly to make SNCC more involved in African affairs and to link the civil and human rights struggles in the United States, Africa, and the rest of the African diaspora. Eventually, after years of SNCC people working on international and transnational issues, at SNCC's May 1966 staff meeting the organization formed a Committee for International Affairs. Initially directed by John Lewis from SNCC's Atlanta headquarters, the committee aimed "to strengthen [SNCC's] ties with black struggles in Third World countries."⁴⁶ Within a year, James Forman took over leadership of the International Affairs Commission, basing it out of New York City. For those like Richards, Forman, and Lewis, who had long been encouraging SNCC's further movement into international affairs, this new organizational commitment to global struggle represented a great achievement.

Conclusion

For Prathia Hall, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dona Richards, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, the 1964 Guinea trip was transformative, and it helped them all contribute to SNCC's growing black internationalism and Pan-Africanism. They experienced the act of being black internationals, of crossing national boundaries and traveling to another country in the diaspora. For some, the strongest effects of their time in Guinea were personal: they internalized and claimed African beauty—black beauty—as their beauty; they positively

identified with their African heritage; they took pride in being *African* American. For others, the trip cemented the need for transnational and Pan-African activism and alliances, for a civil and human rights fight unbounded by national borders. While black internationalism meant different things to different people, for all of them it was positive, something they wanted to share with others in SNCC and in the African American communities in which they organized.

Well before SNCC chair Stokely Carmichael's oft-quoted call for "Black Power" in June 1966, these four women experienced, articulated, and advocated what would soon become many of the key elements of an embryonic Black Power movement. They embraced black beauty, extolled pride in their African heritage, promoted the study and teaching of African and African American history, experimented with new forms of black political power, practiced African cultural traditions, positively identified as part of the African diaspora, and pushed for transnational activism and Pan-African alliances. SNCC women, including Guinea sojourners Hall, Hamer, Richards, and Robinson, contributed to the organization's black internationalism, Pan-African consciousness, and move toward Black Power. These women pushed African Americans, particularly those involved in SNCC, to contest the global color line and to confront internalized color lines, creating new forms of racial consciousness.

NOTES

1. Minutes, SNCC Executive Committee Meeting, September 4, 1964, reel 3, frames 0340–0351, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959–1972 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1994), microfilm (hereafter referred to as SNCC Papers). See also Harry Belafonte, "Postscript: 'A Trip to Africa,'" in *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*, Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 204–206.

2. In addition to SNCC, COFO included the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

3. Belafonte, "Postscript: 'A Trip to Africa,'" 204.

4. Interview with Harry Belafonte, conducted by Blackside Inc. on May 15, 1989, for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965 to 1985*, Henry Hampton Collection, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Libraries.

5. Recommendations of the Findings and Recommendations Committee, April 15–17, 1960, reel 1, frame 0011, SNCC Papers.

6. John Lewis to Bayard Rustin, June 2, 1964, reel 1, frame 0597, SNCC Papers.

7. Interview with Harry Belafonte, *Eyes on the Prize II*.
8. Minutes, SNCC Executive Committee Meeting, September 4, 1964.
9. "SNCC Establishes Memorial Fund," *Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1967, 5.
10. Though Richards was married to Moses at the time of the Guinea trip (they later divorced), she most often used her maiden name; therefore it is used throughout this essay.
11. As quoted in "Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer by Dr. Neil McMillen, April 14, 1972, and January 25, 1973, Ruleville, Mississippi; Oral History Program, University of Southern Mississippi," in *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, ed. Maegan Parker Brooks and David W. Houck (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 158.
12. As remembered by Stanley Wise in Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 146.
13. See "SNCC Staffers Are Guests of Guinea's Sekou Toure," *Jet*, October 29, 1964, 10; and James Forman, "Brief Report on Guinea," box 20, folder 15, James Forman Papers, 1848-2005, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
14. As quoted in "Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer by Dr. Neil McMillen," 158-59.
15. As described in Nan Robertson, "Mississippian Relates Struggle of Negro in Voter Registration," *New York Times*, August 24, 1964, 17.
16. J.H. O'Dell, "Life in Mississippi: An Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer," *Freedomways* 5, no. 2 (1965): 234; and "Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer by Dr. Neil McMillen," 159, respectively.
17. O'Dell, "Life in Mississippi," 234.
18. Transcript of National Education Television, "For Freedom Now," July 23, 1963, located at reel 21, frames 1070-1084, SNCC Papers.
19. Alvin F. Poussaint, "Education and Black Self-Image, No. 4, 1968," in *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country*, ed. Esther Cooper Jackson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 224.
20. As quoted in Josephine Carson, *Silent Voices: The Southern Negro Woman Today* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 202. Carson used the pseudonym "Sarah T." for Robinson.
21. Fannie Lou Hamer, *To Praise Our Bridges: An Autobiography of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer*, (N.p.: KIPCO, 1967), 23.
22. James Forman, "Brief Report on Guinea," box 20, folder 15, James Forman Papers.
23. As quoted in Elizabeth Gitter, Oral History Interview with Julian Bond, November 1 and 22, 1999, interview R-0345, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
24. Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry*, 55.
25. Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 174.

26. Charles Cobb Jr., "From Atlanta to East Africa," in *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950–2000*, ed. William Minter, Gail Hovey, and Charles Cobb Jr. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 102.

27. As quoted in Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry*, 148.

28. "Freedom Workshop News," April 1965, Congress of Racial Equality, Mississippi 4th Congressional District Records, 1961–1966; Historical Society Library Microforms Room, micro 793, reel 2, segment 21; WIHVC239G-A; Freedom Summer Digital Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15932coll2/id/41361>.

29. Mary Britting to Shirley Barnes, June 1, 1965, reel 45, frame 0062, SNCC Papers.

30. Chaina Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 103.

31. James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 408, and Hamer, *To Praise Our Bridges*, 21, respectively.

32. Memo from Dona Richards to SNCC Staff, reel 17, frames 0383–0385, SNCC Papers. Following quickly on the heels of Congo's June 1960 independence, the region was wracked by crises and civil war for several years, and Congo served as a proxy battlefield for the Cold War superpowers.

33. Memo from Dona Richards to SNCC Staff.

34. For example, SNCC met with Alphonse Okuku, younger brother of Kenyan political and labor leader Tom Mboya in the fall of 1960; A.K.P. Kludze, president of the National Union of Ghana Students, in fall 1963; and Oginga Odinga, Kenyan minister of home affairs, in late 1963.

35. Memo from Dona Richards to SNCC Staff.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Dona Richards, Memo 2, to SNCC Staff, reel 51, frames 0171–0172, SNCC Papers.

40. "Freedom Schools Mississippi," *Student Voice*, August 5, 1964, 3.

41. Hamer, *To Praise Our Bridges*, 18.

42. Dona Richards, Memo 2, to SNCC Staff.

43. Dona and Bob to SNCC-people, October 10, 1965, reel 17, frame 0371, SNCC Papers.

44. Ibid.

45. Marima Ani [Dona Richards], *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1994), xxi.

46. John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 386.