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EYES ON THE PRIZE, 1965 - 198?
Program #201: "Emerging Voices, 1965 - 1966"

APPROACH

The first series of programs for EYES ON THE PRIZE ended with a triumph. Black and white citizens of America came together to march the fifty-four miles of highway 81 connecting Selma, Alabama to the state capital of Montgomery -- the cradle of the Confederacy. The issue was voting rights. The cause was justice. The result was the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

By law, all United States citizens now had the right to vote, especially black residents of Southern cities and towns where that right had been denied them for so long. No wonder 25,000 marchers stood in the rain that day, March 25, 1965, and cheered Dr. Martin Luther King as television reported the event. But the television crews went in search of a new story, the crowds went home and laws don't enforce themselves.

By 1965, laws and Supreme Court decisions were nothing new to the black community. There had been Civil Right Acts in 1957, 1960, and 1964. With passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one staff member for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

believed their work was done. "There is no more civil rights movement. President Johnson signed it out of existence when he signed the voting rights bill." He was wrong.

It would take more than legislation to reverse years of discrimination and racism which had built segregation into major institutions of America. When white Americans sensed social and economic threats in the areas of school, housing and employment, resistance was enormous. In response, the Movement needed to develop new goals and create new strategies.

In the south, nonviolent direct action had been the strategy of the civil rights movement for the past eleven years. The nation was familiar with images of large groups of peaceful blacks who protested for their rights by praying, marching, and sitting in. But, during the next fifteen months, some members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) found new ways to challenge the contradictions of American society. They created independent political parties, shifted from passive resistance to self-defense, and questioned the role of whites in the movement. In June of 1966, during a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, Stokely Carmichael calls for "Black Power" -- a phrase both exhilarating and ambiguous, a phrase that set off a wave of controversy within the Movement and throughout America over its hidden meanings and hidden threats.

Program #201 documents that shift toward Black Power. It was a logical shift, born of the disillusionment of civil rights workers who toiled long and hard for modest results; whose efforts were frustrated, indeed thwarted, by southern violence and national ambivalence. We focus primarily on the efforts of SNCC a group of young people who pursued the American Dream. They had campaigned in many southern communities armed with legal rights and moral persuasion. But that's not enough. The law fails to protect them and American morality is a sometime thing.

Since the early 1960's, several SNCC members admired Malcolm X's philosophy. He, in turn, felt "the students" (as he called them) were the most radical of the civil rights organizations. We show how SNCC begins to change in 1964, a consequence of Mississippi's Freedom Summer. The change escalates the following fall when several of its members tour Africa. An intimate association with Malcolm X shortly before his assassination enriches SNCC philosophy. The emergence of a new leader, Stokely Carmichael, gives the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee a fresh perspective, one which finds expression in the call for Black Power during James Meredith's March Against Fear.

A portion of the film re-introduces Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This helps us re-establish EYES ON THE PRIZE where we left off with

the original series. Dr. King provides a foil for Stokely Carmichael when they come together on the March Against Fear. Ultimately, Carmichael becomes the symbol for black power, forged by SNCC's experiences with both King and Malcolm X; and King provides the yardstick by which we measure the changing mood of the traditional civil rights movement as his dream turns into the nightmare that Malcolm X predicted.

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

SEQUENCE ONE: Tease

Fade up on scenes of the March on Washington, August 28, 1963. We hear Martin Luther King's famous words.

M. L. KING:

I have a dream....

Fade under immediately.

NARRATOR
In 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. described his vision of America. But not everyone agreed with his view.

MALCOLM X
No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are victims of democracy. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American Dream; I see an American nightmare. These 22 million victims are waking up.

STANDARD OPEN

SEQUENCE TWO: Setting the Scene (2-3 minutes)

We open with a series of images from the original programs. The first image will be SNCC students in Selma chanting "Freedom, freedom, freedom...."

Crossfade to music -- "Marching on to Freedom Land" -- and we are in the final march from Selma to Montgomery. Narration sets the scene, the end of a long struggle in the South against the evils of jim crow -- in buses, at lunch counters, in the polling booth; a nonviolent struggle against violent opposition....

The music for the march continues as we dissolve images and slip back in time. Narration quickly guides us through high points of the original series -- Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy brutally murdered because he said "Bye, Baby" to a white clerk in

a general store; hundreds, thousands of black residents who refuse to ride segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama; lunch counters, Freedom Rides, and Birmingham with its water hoses and police dogs.

Suddenly, jarringly, the music ends as a new voice intrudes, a voice critical of what we are seeing. It is Malcolm X. He scoffs at the use of nonviolence, criticizes the use of children, and challenges the manhood of those who would do such things.

Probably all scenes in this section of the film (except Malcolm X) will come from EYES I master tapes. No interviews are planned.

SEQUENCE THREE: Malcolm X and the North

Through interviews and historical footage we document the emergence of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. The Nation has been in existence since the mid-´30´s under the leadership of Elijah Muhammed. By the early ´60´s, total membership exceeds 250,000.

Some blacks are slow to accept Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. The goal, to them, has always been integration and the Nation´s separatist preachings are too radical. As they hear more from Malcolm, however, they discover his ideas, especially those around racial pride, are very appealing. [We may ask EYES II

Teams to include a standard question in each of their interviews: "What was your first awareness (impression) of Malcolm X?"] Sonia Sanchez says it was like sunlight coming through a window.

SONIA SANCHEZ

> And you know how sometimes the sun comes in and you rush to pull down the shade and you don't quite pull it down in time and some sun gets through? Well, that's what happened. I got ready to click him off and I heard part of what he said.

White response is captured in a 1959 documentary entitled "The Hate That Hate Produced." Produced by Mike Wallace with Louis Lomax, it presents Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam as preachers of racial hate.

It is not hate that Malcolm X preaches. He points out the futility of black lives if they wait for the white man to solve their problems for them. He exhorts black people to take responsibility for themselves and to protect themselves from the white man's laws and the white man's promises. Through a series of sound bites, we hear Malcolm articulate many of the concerns that black Americans feel. (In fact, this portion of the film provides, through Malcolm X, an introduction to the series themes of EYES II.) This section builds to a 1962 speech that Malcolm X gives to students at Howard University. The speech has a memorable effect on Stokely Carmichael and Cleve Sellers, members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Continuing the filmic style of Sequence Two, we present additional highlights of series I to bring the chronology forward. The March on Washington and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham provide more opportunities for Malcolm to express his criticism of the southern movement and of the federal government.

In November, 1963, President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. Malcolm describes the violence as "the chickens coming home to roost." The comment draws censure and eventual expulsion from the Nation of Islam. The expulsion actually has a liberating effect on Malcolm. He no longer speaks for Elijah Muhammed, he becomes his own man and speaks for himself. He has fifteen months to live and during that time, he makes a series of bold steps which expand his role as a philosopher and leader for black Americans.

On March 8, 1964, Malcolm X announces the formation of a new organization -- the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) -- to work for black unity and freedom in cooperation with other civil rights groups. He makes two trips to Africa and is soon viewed by the African nations as a statesman, a representative of black America. A pilgrimage to Mecca broadens his view of brotherhood which now includes whites.

Meanwhile, political solutions garnered by the civil rights movement fail to solve the economic plight of the black masses in the north. By summer, urban rebellions break out in Harlem, Rochester, New York, and Patterson, New Jersey.

The Players:

Sonia Sanchez

Mike Wallace

Stokely Carmichael

Floyd McKissick

Cleveland Sellers

Maya Angelou

SEQUENCE FOUR: SNCC and Malcolm X

We cut to Mississippi and recall the work of Freedom Summer. Their nonviolent work is seen in sharp contrast to the northern uprisings.

There are three specific points to be made in this section. 1) Many northern whites who come south for Freedom Summer are getting plum assignments and taking over organizing roles while blacks get less desirable jobs. There is also a clash of cultures as the northern students laugh at or show lack of respect for the ways of indigenous southerners. Bad feelings develop among the workers. 2) The murder of three workers (Chaney, Goodman and

Schwerner) has a chilling effect on many of the SNCC regulars. Cleveland Sellers reports that not only are those three bodies discovered, other body parts are found as well, but none of this is reported to the nation. The threats and attacks push them all to their emotional limits. 3) As the summer ends, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party tries, without success, to get their integrated group accepted as the official Mississippi delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, in place of the all-white regulars. But their delegation is rebuffed by the credentials committee of the Democratic Party.

For the SNCC workers who are part of this challenge, it´s been a long hard summer. SNCC leader Jim Forman calls Harry Belafonte and asks for his help. Belafonte finds a group of young people completely burned out from the strain of what they´ve been doing. He raises the money to send them abroad for a period of quiet reflection. A group is sent to Guinea where the students have an opportunity to witness black people governing themselves.

At the end of the tour, John Lewis and Donald Harris meet unexpectedly with Malcolm X in Nairobi. During several conversations, Malcolm X criticizes American civil rights organizations for their neglect of African affairs. He also speaks of his need to work with the radical groups within the civil rights movement and to link OAAU with these groups.

The result is the forging of links between Malcolm X and SNCC. Through archival film, we show moments when Malcolm X and SNCC come together during the next several months: December, 1964, Malcolm X speaks at a MFDP Harlem rally and, in return, Fannie Lou Hamer and the SNCC Freedom Singers speak to his OAAU rally; December 31, 1964, in Harlem, he speaks to 37 teenage SNCC workers from McComb, Mississippi. In February 1965, he addresses blacks at a voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama.

On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X is assassinated in New York City. CORE and SNCC are the only two major civil rights organizations which attend the funeral.

The Players:

John Lewis

Cleveland Sellers

Harry Belafonte

Hollis Watkins

Stokely Carmichael

SEQUENCE FIVE: The Aftermath of Selma

Reprise music: "Marching on to Freedom Land." We are at the end of the Selma-Montgomery march and Martin Luther King finishes his speech. Through interviews with SCLC and SNCC members we learn how things stood for both organizations at that point in time,

especially in view of tensions and disagreements that had existed during the march. There is an obvious conflict between SNCC and SCLC who have had numerous disagreements during the Selma campaign. But there is also a split developing within SNCC. John Lewis has been too obvious in his participation in marches that SNCC agreed not to support. One staff member complains, "John, being a chief executive of SNCC, can do as he pleases.

Following the march, members of SNCC go in several directions: Stokely Carmichael settles into Lowndes County, Alabama to help local leaders with voter registration; Cleveland Sellers alternates his time between voter registration in Mississippi and helping Carmichael in Lowndes County; John Lewis is involved with the campaigns in Selma and Mississippi.

The African trip six months earlier continues to stir SNCC members. Some of them, realizing the importance of Africa, travel to New York City that spring to protest outside the South African Counsel General. They are all arrested (John Lewis: "It was the only time I was ever arrested in the north.") and subsequently bailed out by Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier.

Dr. King travels the country on a speaking tour but is also searching for a northern location where SCLC can launch a dramatic campaign. In his speeches, King becomes more and more vocal

about the problems of poverty in America. He also denounces the war in Vietnam which escalates dramatically in July. His comments about the war incur the wrath of President Johnson -- at the signing of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in August, 1965, LBJ shakes the hands of those attending the event but conspicuously avoids King.

Only a few days after the signing of the VRA, the Watts section of Los Angeles erupts. It is a rebellion unlike any the country has witnessed in the past few years. President Johnson warns that continued violence of this sort could take away many of the gains of recent civil rights legislation. King calls Johnson to say the riots are "a class revolt of underprivileged against privileged." But Johnson doesn't hear him, using the call to chide King for his criticisms of the Vietnam war. King is further stunned by the realization that the people of Watts don't recognize him as a leader who can speak for them.

The Players:
Andrew Young, executive director of SCLC at the time
John Lewis
Cleveland Sellers
Stokely Carmichael
Harry Belafonte

SEQUENCE SIX: The Changing Face of SNCC

Gloria House is sitting in jail in Hayneville, Alabama when she hears about Watts. "It made us feel like we were part of something very big." She is, in fact, a part of something that will be historic. The demonstration that led to her arrest is part of a SNCC campaign in Lowndes County -- a project headed up by Stokely Carmichael in cooperation with local leader John Hulett.

Several months earlier, John Hulett was the first black to register in Lowndes County. Now, as the leader of the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCMHR), he is preparing to take on the county's white power structure. Although blacks represent 80% of the Lowndes County's population, no blacks were registered to vote until this year (1965). On the other hand, 118% of the white population is registered.

The work is agonizingly slow -- only 50-60 people were registered between March and August. Now, with passage of the Voting Rights Act, the first federal registrars enter the county and registration increases. So does white resistance. Black tenant farmers complain of loan foreclosures and evictions. Many demonstrators are arrested.

One of the big issues SNCC has to confront in Lowndes County is the carrying of weapons. Robert Strickland, a resident, carries a gun and, despite Carmichael's best arguments won't give it up. "You turn the other cheek and you'll get handed half of what you're sitting on." Many other residents also carry guns and before long some members of SNCC do the same.

And there is violence. On the day that Gloria House is released from the Hayneville jail, she walks down the street with a ministerial student, Jonathan Daniels and a Catholic priest, Father Richard Morrisroe, both of whom are white. Suddenly a Lowndes County deputy sheriff appears nearby wielding a shotgun and fires at them without provocation. Daniels dies immediately. Fr. Morrisroe is severely wounded. An ambulance is summoned, but is slow to respond. Fr. Morrisroe lies in an expanding pool of blood for a long time, moaning in pain. Gloria House says she will never forget that sound as long as she lives. The moment also has a powerful effect on Stokley Carmichael who had recruited Daniels. Cleve Sellers says, "I think that was probably the most traumatic thing Stokely ever experienced."

Lowndes County voters question whether they really want to be part of a Democratic Party which has kept them second class citizens. In addition to these acts of official violence, the Democratic Party has been consistently and openly hostile to

black Alabama residents: the party emblem contains the words "White Supremacy" and the party leader, Governor George Wallace, had several years earlier uttered the famous words "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever." More recently, when the party learned that blacks were thinking about running for political office, they raised the filing fees from $50 to $500.

Through research, SNCC discovers an obscure Alabama law which allows residents of a county to form an independent political party. The Lowndes County Freedom Organization becomes official in March, 1966. The party chooses a black panthers as its emblem. According to John Hulett, "The black panther is an animal that, when it is pressured, it moves back until it is cornered. Then it comes out fighting for life or death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for black people to come out and take over."

May 3, 1966, the Alabama Democratic Party holds its primary. On the same day, 900 black Lowndes County residents, many traveling 20-25 miles to attend, come together for the first LCFO convention. They elect a slate of seven black candidates for local county offices. Participants describe their excitement at seeing so many black people involved in this burgeoning political movement.

Five days later, an event occurs which signals a change in direction for SNCC. At a SNCC retreat held at Kingston Springs near Nashville, Tennessee, John Lewis is defeated by Stokely Carmichael in his bid for re-election as national chairman. On the surface, the issue is Lewis' role in Selma, but it goes much deeper.

SNCC, in this same meeting, is coming to terms with Black Consciousness, a new black value system geared to the unique cultural and political experience of American blacks. In Lowndes County, SNCC made a new commitment to independent politics. The impact of this shift raises the question of whether the group should pursue integration or separatism, both politically and organizationally.

Membership is one-fourth white and, during discussion, some members question whether whites should be used as organizers in black communities. As the split widens between black and white, emotions begin to show. Sellers says that several people leave the discussions with tears welling in their eyes. Carmichael, coming off the success of Lowndes County, seems committed to moving SNCC in a more radical direction, a way more suited to growing views of Black Consciousness. He becomes the new national

chairman and Cleveland Sellers continues as program secretary. One month later, the significance of this change will be demonstrated in Mississippi.

The Players:

John Lewis

Stokely Carmichael

Bob Mants

John Hulett

Gloria House

SEQUENCE SEVEN: Black Power

June 6, 1966. James Meredith is shot in Mississippi while leading a "March Against Fear." All the major civil rights organizations rush to his cause with promises to continue the march for him.

Conflicts quickly develop. SNCC's new chairman, Stokely Carmichael, and Cleveland Sellers take a militant stand on several specific points. They argue that white participation is unnecessary in the march. King disagrees with this position and during rallies along the way he welcomes white supporters. Nonetheless, the role of whites is deemphasized and they are less visible than in the past.

Carmichael and Sellers also insist that the Deacons for Defense provide armed protection for the marchers. Dr. King tolerates the Deacons' presence, but is fearful that their particpation may provoke even greater white violence. "I'm sick and tired of violence. I'm tired of the war in Vietnam. I'm tired of war and conflicts in the world. I'm tired of shooting. I'm tired of hatred. I'm tired of selfishness. I'm tired of evil. I'm not going to use violence, no matter who says it."

Although King and SCLC and Floyd McKissick of CORE try to work with the SNCC demands, Roy Wilkins (NAACP) and the Whitney Young, Jr. (Urban League) abandon the march immediately. With fewer national civil rights leaders participating, the march takes on a quality unlike previous marches. McKissick recalls "This was a march of the common people. We had people who had never taken part in demonstrations before. But they'd see us walking by and they'd join in."

Along the way, voter registration becomes an ongoing part of the daily program in each city and town the march passes through. One of the most emotional moments in the march occurs in Batesville when El Fondren, a 106-year-old retired farmer, registers to vote. He is promptly lifted on the shoulders of marchers in a triumphant gesture.

June 16. Stokely Carmichael excites an audience in Greenwood, Mississippi with shouts of "Black Power." The phrase catches on among the marchers. King is concerned that the phrase may drive an even deeper wedge between the civil rights movement and white supporters, already fearful since Watts. Ironically, his fears appear justified by an event taking place in California: in the gubernatorial primaries, Ronald Reagan wins overwhelmingly on the Republican ticket -- a sign, political observers believe, of a conservative trend sweeping America.

June 21. The march stops in Philadelphia, Mississippi to observe the second anniversary of the disappearance of the three civil rights workers who died during Freedom Summer (Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner). The marchers are attacked by a crowd of whites. Local police do nothing to stop it until blacks begin fighting back. Two days later, June 23, state troopers use tear gas when marchers try to set up tents on school grounds in Canton, Mississippi. King is heard to say, "The government has got to give me some victories if I'm going to keep people nonviolent."

The March Against Fear finally ends in Jackson on June 26. 4,000 blacks in Mississippi have registered to vote, the most successful voter registration effort the state has yet seen. While SNCC supporters affix "Black Power" bumper stickers to Jackson police cars, leaders address the 12,000 to 15,000 singing marchers who

crowd around the State Capitol. Dr. King wearily admits that his "dream has turned into a nightmare." Stokely Carmichael is cheered when he declares that blacks must "build a power base so strong that we will bring whites to their knees every time they mess with us." As SCLC marchers take up a chant of "freedom, freedom," SNCC supporters shout back "Black Power."

The Players:

Floyd McKissick

Stokely Carmichael

Cleveland Sellers

Andrew Young

Willie Ricks

Hollis Watkins

John Lewis

John Doar