

SNCC and CORE

Read about the two civil rights groups that organized nonviolent protests during the 1950s and 1960s.

Overview

- The **Congress for Racial Equality (CORE)** was formed in 1942 as an interracial organization committed to achieving integration through nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience.
- The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, formed in 1960, focused on mobilizing local communities in nonviolent protests to expose injustice and demand federal action.
- CORE and SNCC—together with other organizations such as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—led the Civil Rights Movement's campaigns of the early 1960s, which included sit-ins, Freedom Rides, voter registration drives, and the **1963 March on Washington**.
- By the late 1960s both CORE and SNCC became disillusioned with the slow rate of progress associated with nonviolence and turned toward the growing Black Power movement.

CORE

CORE was founded by a group of white and black students on the campus of the University of Chicago in 1942. Its founders had been active in the interfaith, pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, and drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's practice of nonviolent civil disobedience. CORE sent some of its members to help in the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#), and supported student sit-ins at lunch counters across the South.

In 1961, CORE's national director **James Farmer** organized an effort to integrate interstate bus stations and buses in the Deep South with a series of **Freedom Rides**. Freedom Riders were groups of white and black civil rights activists who rode buses to challenge segregation in interstate transportation in southern states.

The first Freedom Riders left Washington, D.C. on two buses that traveled into southern states. Freedom Riders were met with brutal violence by whites opposed to racial integration. An unidentified white person threw a fire bomb through an open bus window outside Anniston, Alabama, and Freedom Riders were beaten by a white mob after exiting the burning bus. One rider suffered permanent brain damage from a beating. In Birmingham, Alabama another rider required more than fifty stitches after being struck by a metal pipe.

The first two Freedom Ride buses were terminated after ten days. But during the summer of 1961, the Freedom Rides were carried on by more than a thousand Americans. John Lewis, who would soon become a celebrated civil rights leader, wrote at the time that he would "give up all if necessary for the Freedom Ride, that Justice and Freedom might come to the Deep South." The Freedom Rides were widely covered in the press, and remain one of the most memorable events in [Civil Rights Movement](#) history.

CORE activists also contributed to the voter registration drives in the Deep South that became the focus of the civil rights movement in late 1961, and contributed to the voter education and registration drives during 1963 and 1964 in Mississippi and elsewhere. CORE cosponsored the 1963 [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#), the gathering of some 250,000 Americans at which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

By 1966 CORE increasingly embraced black separatism and black power, and lent its support to the anti-Vietnam War movement.



Figure 1: James Farmer, co-founder of the Congress of Racial Equality and president during the Freedom Rides of 1961. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

SNCC

SNCC—pronounced “snick”—grew out of student **sit-ins** at lunch counters that had begun in February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina.



Figure 2: Ella Baker, civil rights activist and grassroots organizer who helped to found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

In April, **Ella Baker**, the executive secretary of the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)** and students from the sit-ins met on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina and founded SNCC. SNCC, as its name suggests, endeavored to coordinate efforts among students—both black and white—in direct action, nonviolent efforts in the movement for civil rights. SNCC conducted lunch-counter sit-ins, contributed participants to the 1961 Freedom Rides, cosponsored the 1963 March on Washington, and contributed to voter education and registration drives across the South. During the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer three young SNCC activists were murdered in their efforts to register black voters.

In 1966 **Stokely Carmichael** was elected to head SNCC. Carmichael embraced the Black Power Movement, which included black separatism and the use of violence in self-defense. In June 1966, Carmichael declared at a rally that “1966 is the year of the concept of **Black Power**. The year when black men realized their full worth in society—their dignity and their beauty—and their power—the greatest power on the earth—the power of the right.”

With its commitment to nonviolence dropped, Carmichael renamed the organization the Student National Coordinating Committee. In 1967, **H. Rap Brown** took over as SNCC chairman and moved the organization further toward black separatism.

By the late 1960s, the broader Civil Rights Movement fragmented in the wake of the April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and rioting in major American cities. By the early 1970s, SNCC had dissolved.

What Do You Think?

1. College-age students were principal founders of both CORE and SNCC. In what ways did student voices advance the movement for civil rights? In what ways might college-aged students' perspectives have been limited?
2. What were the successes and challenges of the direct action, nonviolent protest strategy that both CORE and SNCC employed in the early 1960s?
3. Why did both CORE and SNCC increasingly turn away from nonviolence by the late 1960s? Do you think this turn was a good idea? Why or why not?