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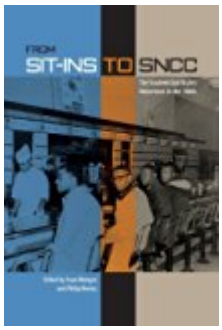

Iwan Morgan, Philip Davies, eds.. *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 212 pp. $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8130-4959-5.

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Commissioned by Amy J. Johnson (Brown University)

Although the tug-of-war between adherents to the traditionally drawn civil rights movement and proponents of the long civil rights movement currently appears to be leaning toward the latter, the issue at the root of the debate has left its mark on recent civil rights historiography: who should be included when we discuss the movement? In this collection of ten essays, editors Iwan Morgan and Philip Davies include historians who look outside of the South for actors and influence as well as those who argue for the special significance of the classical movement of the 1950s and 1960s to trace the genesis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to the student sit-ins of the early 1960s. While the authors find a renewed sense of optimism in the goals of the previous decade's integrationist civil rights movement, an optimism buoyed by the youth-driven, easily replicated, grassroots nature of the sit-ins and early SNCC activism, the chapters rely heavily on the grassroots history of John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (1995), and Clayborne Carson's seminal *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (1995), itself an institutional history of SNCC.

In close detail, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC* examines specific aspects of the sit-in movement to develop a fuller and more complicated snapshot of SNCC, which had grown out of this early student-driven trend. Contributors track the movement from its first wildfire bursts in 1960 (Morgan); through white segregationists' ideological, legal, and physical reactions to student protests (John Kirk, George Lewis, Clive Webb); to SNCC's changing membership, vision of community, and use of Cold War rhetoric (Peter Ling, Joe Street, Simon Hall); before finally crossing the pond to explore the group's transnational exchange of ideas with student leaders in the United Kingdom and newly emerging African democracies (Stephen Tuck).

In "Another Side of the Sit-Ins," Kirk convincingly argues that the Supreme Court's reluctance to extend the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause to privately owned businesses gave segregationists at the state and local levels the op-

portunity to enact anti-protest laws. On the surface, these were simply color-blind anti-trespassing laws, but statutes like Arkansas's Act 17 and Act 226 carried fines and jail time for anyone "creating a disturbance or breach of the peace on any public school property, school cafeteria, or any public place of business" (p. 25). In effect, these laws were specifically designed to prohibit sit-ins and punish those who dared engage in them. In 1960, as student protestors prosecuted under these new laws watched their cases move up through the courts, their lawyers carefully watched the civil rights rulings coming out of the Supreme Court. While the Court previously struck down local ordinances mandating segregation on the grounds that they could only be enforced by police--a clear violation of the Fourteenth Amendment--it also steadfastly refused to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment in a way that would make racial discrimination by private business owners unconstitutional. Yet before ***Lupper v. Arkansas*** (1964)--which challenged the Arkansas anti-trespass law specifically aimed at sitters-in--made it to the Supreme Court, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, explicitly outlawing discrimination by private entities. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that although the Arkansas protestors were charged prior to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the law could be retroactively applied thus overturning the charges against the students.

While Lewis's and Webb's chapters about white segregationist responses to the sit-in movement appear a more natural pairing with one another (indeed, the chapters are placed back-to-back) than with Kirk's chapter, both serve as a natural outgrowth of Kirk's terrific legal history of the Equal Protection clause and private discrimination. In a fantastic argument for including a tactical and ideological analysis of the sit-ins' opposition, Lewis states, "restoring Jim Crow's defenders as three-dimensional historical actors reinforces the scale of the challenge facing the civil rights protestors in their campaign to overthrow it. More importantly, only when that correction of focus is made can a key facet of the sit-ins' lasting historical impact be fully understood" (p. 42). Both Lewis and Webb find that black opposition to segregation undermined the central tenet of the segregationist argument that African Americans were far too content with the status quo to ever challenge it on their own without the significant support of outside northern agitators. In turn, the dismantling of these myths forced its former believers to overwhelmingly shift tactics away from the violence of earlier generations. Their response evolved as quickly as the protestors' and shifted from the early targeting of white protestors--the same alleged outside agitators who instigated the trouble in the first place--to the use of law and law enforcement to protect Jim Crow. The language of segregationist arguments also shifted away from race-based appeals to arguments for the rights of private business owners to choose their own clientele. As legal and public challenges to discrimination succeeded, Lewis asserts, the student sit-in movement defeated both long-held customs of discrimination and the pervasive myth of paternalism.

Together, the chapters written by Ling, Street, and Hall complicate the traditional narrative of the movement's splintering and decline in the late 1960s. Street builds on Carson's work to reinterpret the traditional narrative of decline that often marks movement history. By contrasting the early organization's idea of an interracial "beloved community" defined by activism to its later embrace of the "imagined community" marked by blackness, Street finds that the latter developed out of the former. As SNCC became larger, activists of disparate backgrounds lost the bonds of brotherhood cherished by the organization's founders; black members increasingly felt that "SNCC's attempt to bring about a post-racial community was unrealistic and resulted in the organization becoming a 'closed society,' alienated from the African-American community it purported to be organizing" (p. 127). Hall sees the same experi-

ence-based shift toward nationalism in his study of SNCC's changing use of Cold War rhetoric. Early activists framed their appeals for civil rights in anti-communist language; defeating the specter of Jim Crow at home would prove the righteousness of American democracy abroad. However, the experience of fighting racism in the trenches transformed SNCC's young activists. According to SNCC leader Jim Forman, "five years of struggle had changed many individuals from being 'idealistic reformers to full-time revolutionaries. And ***the change had come through direct experience***'" (emphasis in original, p. 143). Increasingly radicalized members now identified more with the Third World freedom fighters of Asia and Africa, denouncing U.S. military actions in Vietnam and abroad. The same activists who previously worked toward the beloved community now viewed Africa, and not the United States, as home.

Here, Ling disagrees with Street and Hall. In "SNCCs: Not One Committee, but Several," Ling examines membership lists and conference attendance throughout the organization's history to determine continuity among members. He argues, "SNCC was a protean, volatile entity composed of a fluctuating membership" (p. 82). While he addresses the methodological challenge of determining who was "in SNCC but not of it" (p. 86), he found that of the 891 people who attended the organization's conferences between 1960 and 1963, 779 attended only one event; just 89 attended two, and a mere five attended five of the eight conferences. Ling uses this data to counter Street and Hall's assertions that the lived experience of activism drove SNCC members to radically change their goals and philosophy. Instead, Ling insists that SNCC simply found greater success in recruiting new members than retaining old ones. Specifically addressing the claim that a rush of white volunteers during the Freedom Summer of 1964 undermined the notion of "beloved community," he writes, "an influx of outsiders was precisely what SNCC was used to.... The damage inflicted by Freedom Summer had less to do with the arrival of newcomers into a bonded clan and more to do with their failure to go away" (p. 93). Thus, according to Ling, changes in organizational ideology reflected the influence of different people rather than the shifting mindsets of the group's founders.

Later chapters cohere less to the major themes of the book, but add to its complexity, albeit in uneven amounts. Tuck's exploration of pub sit-ins in Britain is tremendously interesting and serves as a reminder that no matter how broadly we draw the American civil rights movement, it did not exist in a vacuum. In arguing for the influence of SNCC and American culture on British reformers, Tuck warns that "the story of the sit-ins in Britain also shows the limits of this influence, suggesting that the transnational transfer of protest tactics and ideas was anything but a simple, direct, one-way process" (p. 160). Black Britons chose American protest strategies sparingly; before the American movement was widely publicized in Britain, immigrants from other Commonwealth nations often looked to examples from their home countries when establishing their own civil rights organizations. Additionally, Americans stayed abreast of civil rights developments in Britain. After a 1958 riot in Britain, a British reporter asked Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus about racial turmoil in his own state to which the governor snapped back, "What about that shindy in Nottingham? We have sympathy for you" (p. 165).

In "SNCC's Stories at the Barricades," Sharon Monteith mines the fictional writing of SNCC for evidence of the mood--not the ideology--of the group. While her study of a James Forman manuscript and Michael Thelwell short story do unearth some insight to the inner workings of SNCC--armed self-defense and the struggle inherent in propagandizing the deaths of dear comrades for publicity are two particularly fascinating leads--studying just two works prevents Monteith from drawing fully formed conclusions

about the genre's importance to movement studies.

Finally, while the rest of the book directly focuses on the student sit-in movement, the epilogue diverges to describe developments that have occurred since the sit-in movement's end. "Still Running for Freedom: Barack Obama and the Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement" describes the political successes of the civil rights movement as a whole, outlines still-existing economic and social inequality, and rehashes the progression of Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. As a result, the epilogue by Stephen F. Lawson feels out of place in a compilation that otherwise adheres to the broader themes of ideological shifts and responses to SNCC and the student sit-in movement. Perhaps instead, Lawson could have focused on the responses of sit-in activists toward ideas of post-racialism accompanying Obama's presidency; the shift of former civil rights activists toward conservative politics during an age of unparalleled diversity in the federal government; or an exploration of ideological and tactical overlaps between the sit-in movement and more recent youth movements, like Occupy Wall Street and its local incarnations.

The strength of *From Sit-Ins to SNCC* lies in precisely what it is not. Its authors eschew both a traditional narrative of the sit-in movement and the more common avenues of long civil rights movement inquiry; sit-ins in the North and West, the rejection of nonviolence among sitters-in, and the role of women in the sit-in movement are barely discussed here. Instead, the authors offer fresh perspectives of the movement and notably, the opposition against it. Its inclusion of the movement's legal history, transnational ties, demographic and ideological shifts over time, and impact on segregationist responses make *From Sit-Ins to SNCC* a worthwhile read for scholars of the long civil rights movement.

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