



BLACK YOUTH AND THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT: EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOUTHERN NEGRO YOUTH CONGRESS (SNYC)

Aouia BADJIOU

Université Joseph KI-ZERBO, Burkina Faso

Michel PODA

Université Joseph KI-ZERBO, Burkina Faso

Lalbila Aristide YODA

Université Joseph KI-ZERBO, Burkina Faso

Kodjo AFAGLA

Université de Lomé, Togo

ABSTRACT

The Black Freedom Movement has seen the contributions of all the segments of the black community. Young, adults and children have shown up to demand the end of racism and discrimination. Even before the 1950s and 1960s with the establishment of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the black youth has always been a decisive factor in the battle for equality and social justice. The Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), for example, was one of the pioneer organizations, which contributed to the burgeoning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Seeking to unearth the pioneering contributions of this civil rights organization, this essay uses a content analysis approach to uncover the decisive contributions of black youth to the Black Freedom Movement with three set objectives: (1) to show how these young African Americans of the SNYC successfully drove black churches and their ministers to join the fight against racism and discrimination; (2) to show how they organized Southern black workers by creating the Tobacco Stemmers and Laborers Industrial Union (TSLIU) to fight for better working conditions; and (3) to highlight how their pioneering activism inspired the movement afterward.

Keywords: Black youth, pioneer, black churches, black freedom movement

RESUME

Le mouvement pour la liberté des Noirs a bénéficié de la contribution de tous les segments de la communauté noire. Jeunes, adultes et enfants se sont mobilisés pour exiger la fin du racisme et de la discrimination. Même avant les années 1950 et 1960, avec la création du Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), la jeunesse noire a toujours été le fer de lance dans la bataille pour l'égalité et la justice sociale. Le Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), par exemple, est l'une des organisations pionnières qui a contribué à l'essor du mouvement des droits civiques dans les années 1930 et 1940. En vue d'élucider les rôles pionniers de cette organisation de défense des droits civiques, cet essai utilise une approche d'analyse de contenu pour dévoiler les contributions décisives des jeunes Noirs au mouvement pour la liberté des Noirs et se fixe trois objectifs : (1) montrer comment ces jeunes Afro-Américains du SNYC ont réussi à pousser les églises noires et leurs ministres à rejoindre la résistance contre le racisme et la discrimination ; (2) montrer comment ils ont organisé les travailleurs noirs du Sud en créant le Tobacco Stemmers and Laborers

Industrial Union (TSLIU) et d'exiger de meilleures conditions de travail ; et (3) souligner comment leur activisme pionnier a inspiré le mouvement par la suite.

Mots-clés : jeunesse noire, pionnier, églises noires, mouvement des droits civiques

Reçu le: 07 avril 2025;

Accepté le: 15 mai 2025,

Publié le: 15 juin 2025

INTRODUCTION

The movement for the advancement of African Americans has called forth the commitment of the different components of their community, more importantly, their young dynamic and uncompromised people. Before the boom in the creation of civil rights organizations characteristic of the mid-twentieth century, young Blacks foresaw the necessity to channel their actions toward the uplift of their race amidst crippling racism and discrimination. However, when it comes to black youth commitment to the Civil Rights Movement (CRM, hereafter), most people tend to locate it in the 1960s under the auspices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) without looking back to the precursors of the 1950s. Using a documentary research method or a content analysis approach, this essay elaborates on the historical contributions of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), a pioneering civil rights organization to the burgeoning CRM. Precisely, it expands on the roles of young African American activists in sustaining the early civil rights activities of the 1930s and the 1940s.

This investigation is structured around three major sections. While the first section discusses the creation and the *raison d'être* of the SNYC, the second one highlights its diverse contributions to the CRM. The last one uncovers the legacy of this pioneer civil rights organization for the 1950s and 1960s events.

1. Creation and *Raison d'être* of the Southern Negro Youth Congress

In assessing African American youth commitment to the Black Freedom Movement a recurrent mistake is made in spotlighting the timeframe of the 1960s movement, precisely through the SNCC advent. Actually, the involvement of young African Americans dates back decades before the mid-twentieth century. Unearthing the monumental contributions of the black youth in the shaping and sustaining of the revolt against discrimination and racism remains a botched job if one does not excavate the grassroots work of these young men before the great upheavals in the 1950s and 1960s. The SNYC was established during a critical period. The fervor of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s illuminated the fate of both rural and urban Blacks. This intellectual and cultural revival characterizing the period equally campaigned for a renewed consciousness of the African American community by promoting socialist or progressive politics. Many organizations – such as the National Negro Congress

(NNC), the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) – and leaders (such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Sterling Allen Brown and Thelma Dale Perkins) came out of the movement to successfully lead African Americans to fight for the rights of the New Negro.

Founded in 1935 to catapult the movement for the advancement and emancipation of Black Americans, the NNC was a coalition of black civil rights organizations that wanted to spearhead the emancipationist black fight in the 1930s. To believe Daren Salter (2007, p. 1), the organization comprised “civic, civil rights, labor, and religious groups from across the nation. In February 1936 over 800 delegates representing 551 organizations and over 3 million constituents congregated in Chicago, Illinois, for the first NNC convention, to unite black and white workers and intellectuals in the fight for racial justice.” From this national coalition of black organizations, the black youth wanted to create an organization that can take up the issues of Southern Blacks. As a response to the NNC’s call for actions against racial injustices, some young Southern Blacks who attended the above Chicago congress created the SNYC in 1937 in Richmond, Virginia, at the Fifth Baptist Church. As it were, the SNYC is an outgrowth of the NNC. Thus, its “origins exist in the social, political, and economic ideology of the National Negro Congress” (Gellman, 2012, p. 2). Consequently, both organizations “sought to organize on class, race, and gender in an attempt to dismantle and obliterate the ever-widening wave of fascism in the world while subsequently expanding social programs enacted by the New Deal, thus promoting racial equality” (Gellman, 2012, p. 2).

The SNYC was established with a tripartite mission: (1) to mobilize young African Americans to join the burgeoning resistance against racism and discrimination; (2) to empower those young African Americans; and (3) to promote interracial collaboration in the fight against racism and discrimination. Or, as Johnetta Richards (1987, p. 23) nicely puts it, the SNYC wanted to empower young African Americans “to fight for their rights and envisioned interracial working-class coalitions as the way to dismantle the southern caste system.” More precisely, throughout its history, the SNYC has laid its foundation on four points: citizenship, education, jobs and health. To trust Alvin C. Hughes’ (1987, p. 43) theorizing, the movement attracted acceptance from both African Americans and Southern Whites, thanks to its adoption of these points.

A coalition of Southern young African American men and women’s programs and organizations that sought to address the economic, social and political plight of Southern Blacks, the SNYC consisted of young leaders originating not only from the NNC such as William F. Richardson, Edward Strong, C. Columbus Alston and James A. Cox (Richards, 1987), but also comprised students hailing from the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Boy and Girl Scouts, young steel workers and members of the Young Men’s Christian Association – YMCA – (Hughes, 1987, p. 45).

As an emanation of the NNC, the SNYC was highly influenced by its communist or socialist ideals. The activists of the NNC and the SNYC were imbued with the communist worldview as capitalism was subjecting Blacks to discriminatory practices. As the theory went back then, uniting black and white workers to oppose power relations in the United States was key to ending capitalism. Thus, the emergence of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) in the 1930s was a godsend in their long opposition to American capitalism. The CPUSA became the training ground for many young activists who were disillusioned by Blacks' meager progress. To believe Herbert Aptheker (1977, p. 701), communism attracted Black Americans "only because traditional American conditions with race prejudice, economic enslavement, lack of opportunity, and discrimination of all sorts have made the Negro susceptible to any doctrine, which promises a brighter future, where race and color will not be a penalty." From the massive enrolment of Southern black workers, Richards (2008a, para. 3) notes, the organization "formed chapters in ten southern states with a total membership of 11,000 at its peak. Over those years the organization encouraged southern Blacks to join the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)". The CIO featured itself to be a federation of unions that sought to organize unskilled workers whose cases were not appropriately dealt with by other trade unions such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

2. Sustaining the Burgeoning Civil Rights Movement

The SNYC was part of the pioneering civil rights organizations that championed the fight for equality and equal opportunities in the 1930s and 1940s. Before its creation, Hosea Hudson (1972, p. 2) reported that "black people didn't have no [sic] mass organization in the South before then. Nobody said nothin' [sic]. Police shoot down a Negro - it's just a Negro shot down. Some may have grumbled among themselves, but nobody said nothin' [sic]." The birth of the SNYC changed this gloomy situation, as this new organization strove to publicize race-based crimes that have been unnoticed so far. Indeed, thanks to its activist actions, the organization held "organized protests that brought attention to the system of Jim Crow justice. Petition campaigns, telegrams, letters to the editor, and, where possible, articles in local newspapers often aroused interest and pressured government officials" (Richards, 2008b, p. 199). The youth civil rights organization took advantage of the moment to champion the revolt against discriminatory practices in many cases. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the SNYC drove the anger and determination of various Southern Blacks to oppose their continual objectification and subjugation whether in their workplaces or society in general. Richards (2008a, para. 4) notes that "the organization made extraordinary progress in making rural southern black people aware of their rights and in teaching strategies for protest."

In tandem with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the SNYC opposed both police brutality and racial crimes in its fierce fight against discriminatory practices. This organization provided the platform for Southern Blacks to oppose racism as it channeled their anger against police brutality and other racial injustices. Richards (2008b, p. 193) shines the instrumentality of the SNYC as follows:

With the creation of the Southern Negro Youth Congress, such events [police brutality, racial crimes, discriminatory practices in workplaces] would be investigated and publicized to bring about justice. For the first time, southern Blacks would have a vehicle to take action and bring about change. SNYC's first congress put forth some resolutions including repeal of the poll tax law, universal Negro suffrage, equal treatment before the law, modification of the sharecropping system, economic security, and more federal aid to Black southerners through public works and school programs.

To reach these set goals, the SNYC organized various boycotts against discriminatory working environments, campaigned for the registration of Blacks, organized unions and assisted Southern rural Black Americans in their legal cases.

The first important action of the newly established civil rights organization was to amplify the role of the black church, a core institution in the history of African Americans. These young people knew that enlisting both black ministers and the black church was vital to the success of the global fight against racial injustices as they would provide spiritual and political support for civil rights activists. Thus, they invited the black church and their ministers to take their due place in the empowerment of African Americans. Granted, the mid-twentieth century witnessed a pioneering role in igniting and sustaining the revolt against discrimination and racism with organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the United Defense League (UDL) and key leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Theodore Judson Jemison and several other leaders. However, way before this period (i.e., the mid-twentieth century), young African Americans, through the SNYC, had already invited the black church to take up the challenge in the fight against discrimination and racism. For instance, Hughes (1987, p. 40) holds that during its first conference on February 13-14, 1937, the SNYC included a seminar in its opening activities on "The Role of the Negro Church in Solving Social and Economic Problems of the Negro Youth." Conducted by Herbert M. Smith, the said seminar concluded that "the Negro minister must become interested in the bread-and-butter issues of church members if the church is to remain articulate as the greatest instrument of social enlightenment" (Aptheker, 1977, p. 654).

The surge in the numbers of black churches, ministers and church-related organizations that supported the movement from the 1940s onward aptly justified the soundness of their call. Aldon Morris (1984, p. 156) observes that from the 1940s onward, the black church became "the institutional center of the modern civil rights

movement, churches provided the movement with an organized mass base; a leadership of clergymen largely economically independent of the larger white society and skilled in the art of managing people and resources." During King Jr.'s years, the importance of the black church to the ongoing fight against African American discrimination was even greater as many churches and their leaders championed the revolution against racism and discrimination. Churches such as the Fifth Baptist Church, Mount Zion Church, Holt Street Baptist Church and several others are parts of the historiography of the CRM with their heavy involvement in the great upheavals of the 1960s. The black church, however, was not a monolithic and uniformly effective force: some conservative churches or ministers were wary of political involvement and distanced themselves from the CRM. Despite their shaky criticisms sustaining their refusal to support the civil rights movement (Savage, 2008, p. 65), the said church was instrumental in assisting in the struggle for equality, as it became an "institutionalized financial base through which protest was financed [and the] meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle" (Morris, 1984, p. 156).

Secondly, the SNYC contributed to the establishment of the Tobacco Stemmers and Laborers Industrial Union (TSLIU). Establishing the TSLIU was the SNYC's other patent success. Organizing black workers was of a paramount importance to the SNYC, for the plight of black workers was an integral part of its socialist agenda. Thus, the organization contributed to the unionization of Southern African American tobacco stemmers whose working conditions were outrageously dehumanizing. In 1937, for example, Richards (2008, p. 194) notes that "90% of all Black workers in the tobacco industry were stemmers. Wages were based on the weight of the stems removed from the leaves. These workers complained of very low wages, poor ventilation, lack of toilets, lack of dressing rooms, and child labor." Black women's working conditions were awful: they were not allowed to go to the toilet or bathroom at their convenience during their menstruation. One woman reported that "there are times in the month you need to go to the toilet, and sometimes you think you can plan things very nicely, but nature surprises you, and you need to go to the toilet." This woman must undergo and support this painful and humiliating situation "because if you went to the toilet, you would be fired" (Richards, 2008b, p. 194).

Created amid the two strikes organized by the Tobacco Workers' International Union (TWIU) respectively on April 16, 1937, against the Carrington & Michaux Tobacco Stemming Company and on May 7, 1937, against the I. N. Vaughn & Company, the SNYC set itself the mission of organizing adequately Southern black workers as their peculiar cases were downplayed in the existing labor union. Under the leadership of C. Columbus Alston, James Jackson and several members of both the SNYC and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the SNYC established the TSLIU and helped draft a list of grievances, including "low wages, long working hours, and bad working

conditions” (Hughes, 1987, p. 44). The determination of the workers, combined with the strong support of the SNYC, crowned these demands: the TSLIU members were “granted pay increases ranging from 10 to 20 percent, an eight-hour day and forty-hour week with time-and-half for over-time” (Hughes, 1987, p. 44). Seizing the fire of the moment, young activists furthered their cause, according to Esther Jackson and Constance Pohl (2000, p. 17):

In the wake of this success, young organizers fanned out to places like Winston-Salem, Durham, and Raleigh to help create locals of the union. SNYC-assisted efforts to unionize domestics in certain communities expanded. In addition, worker’s education classes [taught] reading, writing, and basic civics as well as the benefits of trade unionism alongside these organizing efforts.

Exhilarated by these successes, the SNYC extended its actions to other crucial issues, including carrying out diverse activities and implementing various strategies – organizing workers, protesting segregation and registering voters – that proved to be effective in mobilizing and sustaining the ongoing fight against race-based injustices. The organization contributed to raising African American awareness by educating them about the necessity to stand up for change. To trust Richards (2008b, p. 200), “under the SNYC’s leadership, Blacks in rural areas began to understand that they had to organize, vote, and work to advance their political and economic interests. Many of the ideas of continued protest, use of the mass media, educational programs, and non-violent direct action were tools for change that the SNYC used well.”

Thirdly, the organization stood against the continuous lynching of African Americans. Having settled in the South, the SNYC witnessed the daily terror Blacks were undergoing at the hands of law enforcement agents, white supremacists and other racist groups that were against granting civil rights and equal opportunities to Blacks. Setting itself the goal of exposing the horrors of domestic terrorism that Blacks endured in the Southern States brought the organization to concentrate on ending the lynch terror against Blacks by teaming up with the NAACP, the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW) and many other organizations (Richards, 1987). Subsequently, it reported many police brutalities against African Americans, including the cases of Edgar Thomas, Jesse Hytower and Ed Day Gary. These three African American men were all victims of the same police officer: Dewey Bradley (Hampton, 2023). While Thomas and Hytower were fatally shot, Gary was seriously wounded. The SNYC then used these cases as epitomes of anti-black racism and ferociously denounced them. To believe Donnae Hampton (2023, p. 18), the “SNYC’s work was important in exposing the horrors of police brutality and domestic terrorism because they knew for change to happen, they had to publicize the truth about what Black southerners faced. Exposing the horrors of police brutality in the South later becomes a vital tactic in the Civil Rights Movement.”

Fourthly, the organization opposed the unlawful incarceration of African Americans. The criminalization of African Americans compels the youth organization to stand up against their continuous massive incarceration. Championing the legal defense of Nora Wilson, a black domestic worker from Elmore County, Alabama, who was jailed for using abusive language to address a white woman (Richards, 2008b), the SNYC then used her case to sustain the campaign against the objectification of Blacks. For Wilson's liberation, the organization deployed various tactics: "telegrams, letters, and petitions were sent to Alabama's Governor Frank Dixon, and the Justice and Solicitor of Wetumpka, Alabama. Publications produced by SNYC solicited support for Nora and kept readers across the nation informed on her condition" (Richards, 2008b, p. 198). The successful campaign led to her release and the dropping of her different charges.

Finally, the SNYC made a decisive contribution to voting rights. With the different disenfranchisement methods used to prevent Blacks from getting and using their voting rights, the organization stepped in to help African Americans secure their voting rights. To successfully counter literacy tests, grandfather clauses, poll taxes and fraud, the SNYC launched diverse campaigns to sensitize and prepare Southern African Americans. Sara Elizabeth Rzeszutek (2009, p. 83) notes that the organization held frequent community forums in the 1940s "to educate citizens on how to answer likely questions, how to register, and the time and places of registrations." Additionally, SNYC members "sponsored the *Caravan Puppeteers*, a political puppet show, to explain how rural Blacks could secure the right to vote" (Richards, 2008a, para. 3). Above all, to get as many black registered voters as possible, the SNYC established the "Citizenship Campaign" as a way to mobilize huge numbers of Blacks to register to vote through editorials, pamphlets, leaflets and manuals that sought to harness Blacks' desire to vote (Richards, 1987). By emphasizing voting power in the early 1940s, the organization was underscoring the intrinsic tie between voting power and the empowerment of Southern rural poor Blacks. The SNYC knew that if African Americans were to count on the political scene, they could decisively rewrite and change race relations in the U.S. This campaign will be a defining strategy of the 1950s and 1960s.

The SNYC has equally worked toward sustaining the ideals of civil rights. Besides their pioneering roles in opposing lynch crimes, police brutality and disenfranchisement, the SNYC was instrumental in raising African American cultural and political awareness. The organization believed that cultural revival was a powerful instrument that could promote the causes of Southern Blacks. Through poetry and drama, the SNYC projected the realities of Southern black youth and successfully mobilized around both their situations and the global battle for equality. For instance, the SNYC created *Cavalcade: The March of Southern Negro Youth*, a literary publication, and a creative association named the Association of Young Writers and

Artists (AYWA) (Richards, 1987). *Cavalcade* was both an artistic and political platform at the hands of Southern Blacks to denounce anti-black racism and promote the Black Freedom Movement. These initiatives reacquainted Southern Blacks with their culture and heritage and contributed to mobilizing them to join the fight for equality. As Jackson (1953, p. 19) nicely sums it up, all these initiatives contributed to “train leaders for the deliverance of [Black] people, through militant action, from every semblance of racial and class oppression.” However, both internal and external factors led to the SNYC’s demise; the internal dissension regarding the inclusion of Whites in these difficult periods marked by heightened racism. Most importantly, its association with communist ideals, culminating in the increased surveillance and harassment – as it was perceived as radical or subversive – led to its disbandment in 1949. These challenges proved to be too heavy for these naïve young people, who were willing to dismantle racism and its longstanding consequences.

3. The Legacy of the Southern Negro Youth Congress

The SNYC had a tremendous impact on the Black Freedom Movement. It contributed to mobilizing and organizing huge numbers of Southern Blacks to adhere to the ongoing fight for equality during its thirteen years of existence. The anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and interracial perspectives of the SNYC crossed the boundaries of many organizations. Many civil rights organizations and activists embraced its ideals and perspectives to catapult the resistance against racism and discrimination into new dimensions. Jackson and Pohl (2000, p. 382) were right in the following observation:

Before King and Malcolm and Wilkins and Carmichael, James Farmer, H. Rap Brown, and Fannie Lou Hamer, there had been the Old Left when it was young with its interracialism, its Louis Burnhams and Ben Davises calling for economic empowerment of the poor, its civil libertarian precocity in the first hours of Scottsboro and its path-breaking Southern Negro Youth Congress.

By nourishing young civil rights leaders or organizations, the SNYC demonstrated clearly how young African Americans can lead their community to campaign for change. Amid the prevarication of the established civil rights and their organizations, the SNYC showed the way by breathing a new dynamism into the fight for freedom and equal opportunities. To trust Hampton (2023, p. 5), “the black communist organization is at the foundation of both the overall moderate Civil Rights Movement and black leftist movements in the mid to late-twentieth century. The Southern Negro Youth Congress serves as the antecedent of both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1950s and 1960s.”

Although the 1950s and 1960s CRM was drowned in the moderate perspective of King Jr., Hampton (2023, p. 5) holds that the work of prior organizations such as the SNYC “paved the way for organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party (BPP) to reach the successes of the mid-20th century.” The SNYC was the original “snick” before the creation of the SNCC in the 1960s. Both the SNCC and the BPP subscribed to the Marxist anti-capitalist politics of the SNYC. In so doing, these two organizations trained and inspired some of the most vocal spokespersons of the black community, including, among others: Diane Nash, Stokely Carmichael, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bobby Seale and Kathleen Cleaver. These students have drunk of the SNYC’s inclination to grassroots and radical activism. SNYC activists “are the foundation of why successful progress happened,” Hampton (2023, p. 6) maintains, further claiming that against repression, harassment, threat and surveillance, Black Communists “are vital to the foundation of the revolution that happens within the next twenty years for both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.”

The SNYC equally inspired the culture of radicalism visible within the framework of the young civil rights activists, namely of the SNCC and the Black Power in the 1960s. According to Hampton (2023, p. 29), “the primary focus of the Congress [SNYC] was black Southern youth and to educate and organize young black college students and workers to fight for civil liberties.” The same conceptual framework, it can be observed, was applied in the 1960s within the SNCC and the Black Power. The involvement of young African Americans in the fight for civil rights dear to the SNYC was channeled through the SNCC in the 1960s. David Cameron Rothmund (2018, p. 2) uncovers the SNYC’s successful strategy that inspired Southern black college-aged youth with a progressive radical view:

SNYC provided an educational path to equality, which included Black, poor white, men and women. SNYC attracted minority communities due to the militant approach it had to implementing social, economic, and political change. From 1937 to 1949 the SNYC created a culture of radicalism in the American South while also making global connections to revolutionary movements through its association with the Communist Party, USA.

The SNCC equally emulated the SNYC organizational style. Like the SNYC, the SNCC was a loose network of local councils, organizations and clubs led by local youth leaders that were implementing anti-lynching, voter registration, civil rights, educational, health and recreational campaigns. Thus, the SNCC activists took up the torch where those of the SNYC left it off and carried it to the next generation of civil rights activists in the 1970s and 1980s through the Black Power movement. The SNCC materialized the SNYC’s ambition of turning young African Americans into agents of social change. For example, with the Children’s Crusades, James Bevel, a SNCC activist “strategized to use children as protestors and put them at the forefront to join the movement as protesters on the front line” (Cook and Racine, 2005, p. 31).

The SNYC influenced a great deal of key civil rights leaders from the 1950s onward. In addition to inspiring the different organizations and trends of the movement, the SNYC was equally the training ground for various leaders who became decisive

figures twenty years later. The list includes, among others: Louis Everett Burnham, Sallye Bell Davis, Julian Bond and Edgar Daniel Nixon (Swindall, 2014). No wonder Bond, Nixon and several others have their ideological and political roots in the defunct SNYC. Also, these figures turned out to be decisive drivers in the movement decades later. For instance, Nixon championed the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the 1950s (Hatch, 1992). The SNYC was equally a training ground for Angela Davis, a key figure of the movement from the 1960s onward, following the assassination of the key male leaders. Davis contributed to instilling the communist ideals of the SNYC to the young generations of civil rights leaders. More importantly, to trust Hampton (2023, p. 33):

[The] SNYC influenced the future generations in most ways that are not tangible, however, one example of influence is the periodical, *Freedomways*. The magazine lasted from 1961-1985 and during its time it published works from black and Pan-Africanist activists like Kwame Nkrumah, James Baldwin, Paul Robeson, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, and Nikki Giovanni. The magazine served as a connection between the radicalism of the Left and the struggle of Black people. Just like the SNYC, the literary forum operated within the space of Black radicalism focusing on fighting the injustices that Black people domestically and the oppression of colonized people endured globally.

In addition to Nixon, Bond and Davis, the organization equally honed diverse civil rights activists who turned out to be the key drivers from the 1930s up to the 1960s and even beyond. These civil rights activists, in turn, contributed to the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, the outlawing of “separate but equal rules,” the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, for example. James E. Jackson, Esther Victoria Cooper Jackson, Dorothy Challenor Burnham, Louis Burnham, Maenetta Steele, Florence Castile, Ethel Williams and Rose Mae Catchings, to name but a few, were key figures in the SNYC. They occupied diverse positions and contributed to the ongoing revolt against discrimination and racism through the SNYC or even within other platforms after its official demise in 1949.

The SNYC was a formidable civil rights organization. From its inception up to its demise in 1949, the organization participated in almost all the events and activities denouncing the continuous discriminatory practices against Blacks. It trained and prepared young African Americans to be at the cutting edge of the movement for equality decades later. Though it was a coalition of young African American organizations, the organization decisively contributed to the battle against discrimination and racism in the United States Armed Forces in the 1940s. Together with the NAACP, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the National Urban League (NUL) and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Cars Porters (BSCP), they successfully lobbied for the passing of the *Executive Order 8802* that banned discriminatory practices in defense industries.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis has shown that the SNYC has greatly contributed to making black youth political agents prior the 1950s. The SNYC's commitment to making young African Americans the cornerstones of the revolution against racial injustices stood the test of time. From the CRM to the Black Power Movement up to today's Black Lives Matter Movement, the involvement of the black youth was and is still key to the decisive victories the African American community is winning. More importantly, this essay has established the SNYC's steadfast participation in the strategic reorientation of the fight for equality. Unlike the prior organizations that wanted to do the job for Blacks, the SNYC contributed to turning rural and inexperienced young African Americans into huge instruments and agents of social change. The willingness to make Southern Blacks the instruments of their own liberation was then transferred to the CRM which successfully used grassroots strategy and local communities to push for the great changes.

This civil rights organization has contributed to organizing inexperienced black stemmers by establishing the Tobacco Stemmers and Laborers Industrial Union. Through this union, black workers decisively resisted their dehumanizing working conditions and successfully gained tolerable working hours and pay increase. The organization has equally paved the way for a growing presence of the black church in the Black Freedom Movement. In so doing, the SNYC cleared the ground and readied young Blacks for the upcoming battles in the 1950s and 1960s. Definitely, the decisive roles of Nixon, Bond and Davis, among others, locate the instrumentality of the defunct SNYC in maturing and nurturing young African American men and women.

REFERENCES

- Aptheker, H. (1977). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, Vol. 3*. Secaucus: Citadel Press.
- Cook, E.; Racine, L. (2005). The Children's Crusade and the Role of Youth in the African American Freedom Struggle. *OAH Magazine of History*, 19 (1), 31-36.
- Gellman, E. S. (2012). *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hampton, D. (2023). *Preceding Footsteps in Revolution: The History of the Southern Negro Youth Congress*. Available at <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/etd-collection/76> (accessed date: January 23, 2024)
- Hatch, J. V. (1992). Interview of Esther and James Jackson. New York, NY: Hatch Billops Collection.

- Hudson, H. (1972). *Black Worker in the Deep South: A Personal Record*. New York: International Publishers.
- Hughes, C. A. (1987). We Demand Our Rights: The Southern Negro Youth Congress, 1937-1949. *Phylon*, 48 (1), 38-50.
- Jackson, E. C. (1953). *This is My Husband: Fighter for his People, Political Refugee*. Brooklyn, New York: National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership.
- _____; Pohl, C. (eds). (2000). *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Morris A. D. (1984). *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Richards, J. (1987). *The Southern Negro Youth Congress: A history*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation: University of Cincinnati.
- _____. (2008a). Southern Negro Youth Congress (1937-1949). BlackPast.org. Available at <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/southern-negro-youth-congress-1937-1949/> (accessed date: January 23, 2024)
- _____. (2008b). Fundamentally Determined: James E. Jackson and Esther Cooper Jackson and the Southern Negro Youth Congress, 1937-1946. *American Communist History*, 7 (2), 191-202.
- Rothmund, D. C. (2018). *The Southern Negro Youth Congress: Legacies of SNYC and the Southern Radical Tradition*. Unpublished Master thesis: College of Charleston, South Carolina, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Rzeszutek, S. E. (2009). *Love and Activism: James and Esther Cooper Jackson and the Black Freedom Movement in the United States, 1914-1968*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation: Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey
- Salter, D. (2007). National Negro Congress (1935-1940s). BlackPast.org. Available at <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-negro-congress/> (accessed date: January 23, 2024)
- Savage, B. D. (2008). *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Swindall, L. R. (2014). *The Path to the Greater, Freer and Truer World: Southern Civil Rights and Anticolonialism*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.