

# SNCC Digital Gateway: Our Voices

## Internationalism: An International Consciousness

### Clip 1: Courtland Cox “More Personal than Political”

**Courtland Cox:** My mother, who lived in the United States for over 40 years while she was an American citizen, she was always Trinidadian and made it very clear... So my, and even though I lived in the projects in the Bronx, I mean, where a lot of the young people didn't graduate from high school, her only frame of reference was what are your cousins doing? Whether they were in Trinidad, whether they were in Jamaica, wherever they were, my frame of reference with her was my cousins. So, for me being in the international arena, thinking internationally, when I was at Howard along with Stokely and others had good relationships with the Caribbean students and the African students, and Howard at that time had a lot of students from Iran, Iraq, the Caribbean, Africa, so my so my sense of an international piece was always more personal than political in a lot of ways. I think that probably I started going back to into the international arena probably representing SNCC probably at the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal.

### Clip 2: Jennifer Lawson “Growing International Awareness”

**Jennifer Lawson:** That we started reading things that led us to be a lot broader in our world view and were thinking about more international topics and then as James Forman, Cleve Sellers, and Bill Winky Hall, William Winky Hall and other SNCC people began to come on to Tuskegee's campus, and now we're talking '64, '65 and particularly '65, '66 around what was going on around Lowndes County, the Selma to Montgomery March that you had a lot more interaction between Tuskegee students and SNCC and you also had a much, much greater awareness of the international scope of things and the whole question of people of color in other places of the world and part of this was the writings and influence of Malcolm X and people like that who we were reading and we too had questions about the issues of Martin Luther King versus the thinking of Malcolm X and Malcolm X was of course much much more global international in perspective.

**Charlie Cobb:** And if I could just make a note here also within SNCC people are reading Fanon at this time, the big hit film popular inside SNCC *The Battle of Algiers*, so there's tremendously expanded, if you will, and that might not be the right phrase, international consciousness specifically consciousness of liberation struggles and movement in SNCC which I assume is also affecting you all.

**Jennifer Lawson:** Absolutely and the most influential and for me this was around 1965 and later, the writings of Fanon. And we were aware of C.L.R. James of some of the other Pan-African writers like Padmore and others and I don't know quite I don't recall how those first came to my consciousness but I do know that we were aware of George Padmore and that we also the whole notion of Negritude. We also, for us, this was a cultural issue as well as a political one and it was the whole notions of what did it mean Senghor and Negritude so we had lots of discussions as students in our little student group about those and Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as well as *The Wretched of the Earth* those two books were extremely important to us and things we would go through again and again and have discussions about. My awareness of the film *The Battle of Algiers* didn't come until later but it was a very important work. When I became aware of it. Then I left Tuskegee and left school to work full time in SNCC and once when I was working full time in SNCC then of course our discussions in Lowndes County when we were

working on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, we were living in the Freedom House there that we would have a lot of discussions about international issues and discussions about what did it mean to what did Black Power mean or what does it mean to if you become in control of the county government, what are the limits of your power? And how can you expand that power. What's the next level of authority and that would just of course lead you to think what's the next level and the next level and how you needed allies, you needed to be a part of a much, much larger world and it was fascinating to think about the world of Africa and the Caribbean where people were in the majority, and how when you added yourself in as a part of that world, you were no longer a minority. You were a minority only if you thought of yourself within limited within an American or U.S. context but once you started looking at Brazil and all of the many places where there were people of African heritage, that people of color, you suddenly became a part of a majority world.

### Clip 3: Courtland Cox "Facing the Draft Board"

**Courtland Cox:** I mean Charlie, since he's here, Charlie asked, he was prepared to consider the draft if he was able to get questioned the draft board as to why they wanted to draft him. Willie Ricks said, "If you could give me a rifle to go fight the Vietnamese, I will take that rifle to shoot these crackers who threaten my mama," they said, "No, we need to move on." With Rap Brown, after they finished with him, they told him he couldn't even join the South Asian Army. And when Stokely and I had the same draft board and we were called the same day and so there were three questions - were you a drug addict, were you a drunk, and were you homosexual. So those were the questions that we chose not to answer. So, they looked at us and said well you don't look like drunks or drug addicts but are you gay? And Stokely's response was you ought to know you raised the question. They sent us to the psychiatrist 3 or 4 times. They usually send you to the psychiatrist to try to play games with you but my sense is that while SNCC did deliver that statement, I think the more profound piece was the challenge the ability of SNCC staff at that point to challenge these boards. I mean those things, and that was an initiative in terms of the whole war effort. And so my sense is that there are a number of concrete things that we did all along the way that had very important consequences that were either challenging at the time were taken, influential both in terms of the country and the world, or informative in terms of what we did. And so my, and this may be a bad way to look at it, I tend think of myself in a lot of ways at the center of things and thinking okay how am I trying to solve this issue. How do I need not to say to the boss in the morning, "See you in the morning"? Because I don't want to see him in the morning.

### Clip 4: Courtland Cox & Charlie Cobb "First Trip to Africa"

**Courtland Cox:** I mean I think the first trip that I took to Africa was after the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal and, you, Charlie Cobb, and I traveled down. We went down from, we went down through Spain, I think, went down through Spain and then got over to Tangiers, Morocco, and then we went and it was a time when in '67 when the war with between the Palestinians between Arab countries.

**Charlie Cobb:** Arab Israeli War

**Courtland Cox:** Arab Israeli War

**Charlie Cobb:** in '67

**Courtland Cox:** And then we went down from we went from Morocco, we went from Tangiers to Casablanca, then from Casablanca to Dakar and spent some time there, went from Dakar to Guinea, I

remember, and then went from Guinea to Monrovia, Liberia, and then we had to, because of some circumstances.

**Charlie Cobb:** We didn't have any money.

**Courtland Cox:** We had to come back to the United States. So, I mean, I think the -- but I do think on that trip, we saw a number of things. We saw [36:30] how the Africans who swept the streets of Paris and so forth, how they actually lived. How they, you know, took their resources and husband their resources take back material things back to the country. That they lived in. That, in fact, they, as I think about it, traveled 4th class in a ship that only had 3 classes. And so the other thing that we did --

**Charlie Cobb:** And I should say that that class of passage was specifically for the Africans who were working in Europe to travel back home with. It was dormitory class. 60 men to a room and only men.

**Courtland Cox:** So we didn't have to do any research on it. We just lived it. So we could report on it. And I wrote back home, and I wrote back saying that I returned to Africa in the way I left, in the hull of a ship.

### Clip 5: Jennifer Lawson "Cuba & the Meaning of Revolution"

**Jennifer Lawson:** And that I would when I go to these little villages throughout Cuba I would ask people with translators of course, what did the revolution mean to you? And people particularly in Oriente and the places that were the poorest places, people would say oh the revolution was just so important. Before the revolution, we had there was no hospital, there was no clinic there was nothing here and that after the revolution they had then medical facilities, they had schools, they had transportation, public transportation, electricity, so was really interesting to see how the revolution meant this improved conditions of life for people and I felt that was something that we were thinking of in much more of an abstract way that wasn't necessarily as connected to people's day to day lives. [1:27:58] and it made me think about what work I would do in the future that might then connect more to people's day to day lives in the economic realm because I felt we were with what we had done in Lowndes County and other places that we were connected to people's political lives but that I thought the economic side this to me that the economics of life meant so much more.

### Clip 6: Tony Bogues "Afros and the Black Freedom Struggle"

**Tony Bogues:** Thinking of the late sixties, because then I'm a high school student. And what we saw unfold in the screen on the Jamaican television - we then had one television station. We just got independence in '62 so there's not you know. And we're looking at American television primarily. But a few things from print. The thing that I recall most is - and this may sound strange to all of you - but the thing I recall most was wearing afros. And young lady's afros. And I tell you why I remember that: I remember that because there was a young lady at one of our elite high schools who got expelled by the headmistress for wearing an afro. And I was then the vice president of the student movement in high school and I and another group of people organized a massive demonstration against the headmistresses. She actually virtually had a heart attack after the demonstration because it was reputed that I threatened to burn the school down. I didn't. There was another person at the demonstration called Tony who said it was me. That demonstration led us into a confrontation with the police in a place called Crossroads. And in that confrontation, we were joined by ordinary community people but who were not not protesting about afros but were protesting against police brutality. And I saw the opportunity to join a group of people who were marching. And I remember it very well because at that moment - I was like fifteen, sixteen - that moment I connected questions of police brutality to an afro

hairstyle. And that led me personally to begin to think about those sort of things. But we had a thing about what African Americans were doing, and the hairstyle became very important to us because the afros - you know the young people - afros were the new kind of thing and also those of us who could grow beards grew beards and so forth. And it was also part of rebellion against what we now can call neo colonial government and so on. The second incident is even more important. That a group of us, high school kids again from an elite school which I attended, decided to go to into the very inner city of Jamaica, a place called Trenchtown. Where Bob Marley and all these people come from. And we decided to run a school because we had heard somewhere in our heads somewhere about Freedom Schools - schools in the summers people were having in the United States. Alright? [09:34] We're not quite sure, but it seemed to us a good idea. And a group of us went and did this school. It was a school where we were teaching kids the rudiments of arithmetic and writing and so on - usual stuff. But we also had a course on Black History because I had read somewhere and I can't remember where that people were teaching Black history in these schools. And I thought it was important to in our country begin to teach Black History. So we did the usual things in the morning, arithmetic and so on. And in the afternoon we would do Black History. And we did something that was unusual because I had also heard about it - and I didn't hear this from SNCC, I just heard - I heard that these young people from universities were living in communities. That's what I heard.

### Clip 7: "At the Centers of Power"

**Courtland Cox:** We were focused at the centers of power as we understood it in the United States. And also given the United States was a center of power around the world that the attack on it was seen at every corner of the earth. So I do think that while it'd be interesting to see, as Tony is talking about its impact in Jamaica, we probably could go around the world and have the same kind of story in various parts of the world.

**Geri Augusto:** To pick up on something else that Tony's contribution points out, is that there are particular things that came out of the SNCC experience, first the organizing experience in the South that the model of that thing itself travels, without people knowing exactly what it is or how to do it. So one of those that comes up often is the Freedom Schools. And I mean comes up often as is I heard it in South Africa, you hear it in Brazil, and what they would get is just the faintest idea, probably from some publication, that there is there was something called the Freedom Schools and basically how you might do it. Or there's something called the 10 Point Program -- that's not exactly SNCC but you know how you might do it. Or the nonviolence discussion versus violence or how you deal with even the discussion that seems like a larger discussion, which it is, of state power, what you do when you take state power -- even that was influenced by the struggles around the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Lowndes County, because what travels is the model itself in the barest of descriptions and then people make of it what they need to where they are.

**Jennifer Lawson:** Sometimes the barest of descriptions is helpful because it gives room for the imagination. When there are no specifics, people imagine it and imagine it in ways that are more useful for their circumstance.

**Geri Augusto:** Which is what happens to Black Power I mean the phrase or Freedom School, alright let's go with that and I think that's really important when thinking about the influence, the international influence.

**Tony Bogues:** I think Courtland is absolutely right that what you because I remembered the discussions that we had about those operating and using that word in the belly of the beast and if those if these young people could do these things in the belly of the beast, then what we who were from that beast, what is it that we should what is it that we could and should do.