

Chapter Four: SNCC

In Chapter Four, titled "SNCC," the narrative explores the formation and early activities of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) amid the civil rights movement, particularly focusing on the Nashville sit-ins. The chapter begins by highlighting the sit-ins' successful desegregation efforts in Nashville, while simultaneously strengthening the bonds of trust and community among activists like John Lewis and his peers. In April 1960, they gathered at the Highlander Folk School—known for its role in civil rights training—for a retreat that drew eighty-two sit-in activists from various colleges. Highlander, founded by Myles Horton, emphasized the need for disenfranchised individuals to address their own political issues in an interracial setting.

Lewis had previously attended Highlander, where he was inspired by leaders like Septima Clark, who initiated citizenship schools for African Americans. Discussions at the retreat addressed the potential formation of a South-wide student organization. A significant amount of time was spent deliberating on nonviolence, which divided participants. Lewis's group advocated for nonviolence as a moral principle, while others viewed it as a tactical approach.

The chapter recounts meetings and discussions about the role of students in the civil rights struggle and the students' desire for autonomy from established organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Ultimately, the students formed the Temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which quickly became known as SNCC. Their mission centered around the core value of nonviolence, derived from Judeo-Christian traditions.

As the Nashville movement continued to address integration issues, events escalated to protests targeting local businesses. Lewis and others organized further sit-ins, facing violent responses from establishment owners and white crowds. These protests solidified their camaraderie, while the Nashville group gained recognition and respect within the broader civil rights movement. The chapter concludes on a high note, celebrating the successful integration of Nashville's movie theaters as an early victory for SNCC and the ongoing struggle for civil rights.