

**ELLA BAKER, "ADDRESS AT THE HATTIESBURG FREEDOM DAY RALLY"
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Abstract: Ella Baker's 1964 address in Hattiesburg reflected her approach to activism. In this speech, Baker emphasized that acquiring rights was not enough. Instead, she asserted that a comprehensive and lived experience of freedom was the ultimate goal. This essay examines how Baker broadened the very idea of "freedom" and how this expansive notion of freedom, alongside a more democratic approach to organizing, were necessary conditions for lasting social change that encompassed all humankind.

Key Words: Ella Baker, civil rights movement, Mississippi, freedom, identity, rhetoric

The storm clouds above Hattiesburg on January 21, 1964 presaged the social turbulence that was to follow the next day. During a mass meeting held on the eve of Freedom Day, an event staged to encourage African-Americans to vote, Ella Baker gave a speech reminding those in attendance of what was at stake on the following day: freedom itself. Although registering local African Americans was the goal of the event, Baker emphasized that voting rights were just part of the larger struggle against racial discrimination. Concentrating on voting rights or integration was not enough; instead, Baker sought a more sweeping social and political transformation. She was dedicated to fostering an activist identity among her listeners and aimed to inspire others to embrace the cause of freedom as an essential element of their identity and character. Baker's approach to promoting civil rights activism represents a unique and instructive perspective on the rhetoric of that movement.

Ella Baker is one of the forgotten voices of the civil rights movement. Although she did not seek publicity for herself, her tremendous influence on the movement and her group-centered leadership approach teaches lessons still relevant today. As a role model and mentor for an entire generation of activists, Baker's influence extended far beyond the immediate impact of her organizational efforts. Fellow activist Stokely Carmichael once said in an interview: "The most powerful person in the struggle of the sixties was Miss Ella Baker, not Martin Luther King."¹ Baker represents an understudied yet highly significant figure in the history of civil rights, particularly among women involved in leadership of the movement.

A consideration of Baker's life and her "Address at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day Rally" is only the beginning of inquiry into her life's work. Nevertheless, it does help us to recognize Baker's collectivist understanding of the civil rights movement, illuminating two important

aspects of that perspective. First, Baker saw progress in the struggle for civil rights as dependent on communal action: progress could not be brought about by charismatic leaders alone, but had to arise out of the efforts of the entire community. This emphasis also demonstrated Baker's dedication to freedom as an essential element of identity and character. Second, Baker broadened the scope of the movement far beyond the immediate priorities of voting rights, education, and economic opportunity for African Americans. While not ignoring these important goals, she pushed beyond them, envisioning a movement that was concerned with the well-being and moral progress of all races as well as the dignity of the human spirit.

In this essay, I take a close look at Baker's speech in Hattiesburg, Mississippi on January 21, 1964. This short speech reflected her larger social and political vision and described the way that Baker believed social change ought to work. Her expansive image of freedom, which moved beyond the immediate future and even racial demarcations, alongside her emphasis of democratic and group-centered organizing, was a necessary condition for the ultimate goal of the movement: a "deep sense of freedom" (4).² Based on my analysis, I argue that Baker represented an alternative approach to civil rights activism that encouraged democratic participation and engagement at all levels, but that went well beyond that to articulate a vision of freedom for all human beings. Even though this approach sometimes put Baker at odds with the charismatic leaders at the time, including Martin Luther King, Jr., she was steadfast in her commitment to fighting for this comprehensive vision of equality. The Hattiesburg address emphasized how her democratic model of civil rights organizing could succeed. For Baker, a democratically organized structure was a necessary condition for her ultimate goal of a "deep sense of freedom." Her model required all people, not just leaders, to participate and to aspire to the crucial goal of *feeling* free. That is not to say that Baker did not fight for integration and civil rights, but those goals were only part of her long-term vision. She envisioned leaders and community members working together to empower others to solve local problems and collaborate for greater social change.

I begin by recalling Baker's life and career, focusing on some of the early influences that shaped her approach to civil rights activism and helped her define her role in the movement. Then I offer a close reading of her speech at the Freedom Day Rally in Hattiesburg, illuminating how she argued for approaching equality not by advocating particular issues but by cultivating a broader freedom of the human spirit. Finally, I briefly reflect on Baker's legacy as a civil rights activist, arguing that her legacy might be seen in later generations of activists who emphasized identity and moral character over particular political goals, as well as in those who stressed a democratic approach to community organizing. Baker's address demonstrated her commitment to cultivating the whole personality of both activists and citizens as morally and spiritually "free" human beings.

For Baker, the struggle for civil rights included transforming the systems of racial oppression and structural discrimination. This included, according to Baker, learning "to think in radical terms," "understanding the root cause," and teaching others to do so as well.³ In pursuit of that, she encouraged understanding of the laws, structures, and institutions that oppressed

African Americans and urged her listeners to engage in active resistance. The type of change she envisioned required a steadfast and vigorous process of struggle, reflection, discourse, and debate.⁴

Radical change, for Baker, required involving local, ordinary people. Relying too much on famous or charismatic leaders, like Martin Luther King, Jr., was, in Baker's view, a strategic mistake. She believed that social change would not come about from eloquence, but rather, through working with community members.⁵ Baker was recognized as an exceptional orator, but, she was skeptical of eloquent speakers as a mechanism for organizing and mobilizing the movement. In a 1970 interview, Baker described how she "felt it was a handicap for oppressed peoples to depend so largely upon a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight."⁶ She continued by saying that charismatic leaders presented a danger when "such a person gets to the point of believing that he *is* the movement. Such people get so involved with playing the game of being important that they exhaust themselves and their time and they don't do the work of actually organizing people."⁷ Furthermore, as Cornel West described, Baker was suspicious of the "charismatic man that people submit to and defer to."⁸ In contrast to these "messianic modes of leadership," West characterized Baker as not "pontificating" but instead having "horizontal" conversation.⁹

Baker valued grassroots organizing as a catalyst for change, arguing that individuals needed to realize their individual and collective powers. Through this approach, she believed that those individuals could shape their lives and futures in a more just world. Throughout her life, Baker advocated a democratic approach to activism where all activists and community members could contribute. Additionally, Baker believed that individuals ought to "participate in decisions that affected their lives."¹⁰ The emphasis on involving ordinary people in the struggle was at the core of her philosophy of activism. Her political philosophy led her to turn to oppressed communities themselves for models of social change. Baker acknowledged that progress depended on a thorough understanding of institutional systems. Yet the emphasis in her theory of social change and political organizing was also on the individual. Her activist career was rooted in a philosophy of radical, democratic change that required not only protracted and systematic engagement of the institutions of oppression, but also personal transformation of the activists themselves.¹¹

Baker's political ideology and strategies reflected her experiences with the Baptist church, her educational background, and the culture of Harlem. These influences, combined with a mix of northern and southern sensibilities and both religious and secular ideas, shaped Baker's political identity. Baker's familial and educational experiences were foundational to her political and public life. In her early years, Baker's devoutly religious mother was her moral anchor, providing her with a sense of social responsibility and intellectual curiosity. The sense of moral responsibility she inherited from her mother stuck with her throughout her life.¹² But so, too, did the ideas, commitments, and passions she developed as a young woman, working with some of the earliest civil rights organizations. The experiences she had as a young activist and the people

she met along the way help to account for the development of her unique and influential philosophy of political activism and grassroots organizing.

The Life and Career of Ella Baker

Born on December 13, 1903, Ella Baker was raised by her deeply religious family in Littleton, North Carolina.¹³ Her extended family's home was on the very land her grandparents once worked as slaves.¹⁴ After graduating valedictorian from Shaw University in Raleigh, she began her career as an activist in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. Here, she experienced and learned about the predicament of blacks during the stock market crash of 1929, and she, alongside George Schuyler, formed the Young Negroes' Cooperative League (YNCL) in 1930. The purpose of this organization was to empower blacks to assume control of their own finances and to provide education about the power of cooperative buying. The YNCL restricted membership to those thirty-five years of age or younger, as one of its founding principles was that young people should be at the vanguard in the struggle for change—an idea that foreshadowed Baker's later involvement with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).¹⁵

The YNCL had a short life. Baker left the organization with a wealth of experience and a new understanding of collective black self-determination. In October 1936, Baker began a year of work as a consumer education teacher for the Workers Education Project (WEP). The WEP was a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which was one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal agencies. The WPA created government-funded jobs to rectify the extreme unemployment during the Depression. Whereas the YNCL showed Baker progressive politics and helped her to refine her goals, the WEP familiarized her with the means to reach her goals.¹⁶

Baker took a job with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1941 and remained with the organization for nearly six years. For the first three years, Baker worked as a field secretary where she was quickly recognized for her skill in organizing black youth. She also delivered nearly ten speeches a day while traveling.¹⁷ During this time, she traversed the South and established a network of connections with local leaders. These connections furthered her commitment to grassroots and local organizing. Baker was known for her ability to relate to local people and build relationships, and she saw great value in incorporating these local activists into the mission of the NAACP.¹⁸ In 1943, Baker became the Director of Branches. This marked the highest-ranking role that a female officer achieved.¹⁹ During her time with the NAACP, Baker worked to democratize the organization by emphasizing grassroots methods and shifting the authority to local and regional leaders.²⁰ However, this vision was not shared by all and tensions developed between Baker and other group leaders. Baker consistently fought for a democratic model of organization in the groups she was involved with.

The rigid organizational hierarchy of the NAACP frustrated Ella Baker. She was also dissatisfied with the lack of attention to local problems and the NAACP's focus on increasing membership rather than encouraging activism by its members. Furthermore, Baker and the head of the NAACP, Walter White, often did not see eye-to-eye. In May of 1946, she resigned from her position with the NAACP.²¹ Baker gave three reasons for her resignation: "I feel that the Association is falling short of its present possibilities; that the full capacities of staff have not been used; and that there is little chance of mine being used in the immediate future."²² Baker concluded her statement with: "I came to the Association because I felt that I could make a contribution to the struggle for human justice and equality. I am leaving because I feel that there must be some way to do this without further jeopardizing one's integrity and sense of fair play."²³ Although tensions existed between Baker and the NAACP, she remained a supporter of the organization. Her resignation letter also demonstrated her dedication not only to justice for African Americans, but to human justice. This theme was still relevant to Baker nearly twenty years after her Hattiesburg address.

Baker cared deeply about making the organizations she was involved in more democratic. She attempted this in the NAACP by advocating that local branches be given more autonomy. She also believed that the organization itself—at all levels—could be run more democratically. For Baker, the top-down structure of the NAACP was undemocratic and strategically ineffective. This also was reflected in her resignation letter when she wrote that none of the three reasons she submitted for leaving the NAACP "would induce me to resign if I felt that objective and honest discussion were possible and that remedial measures would follow."²⁴ For Baker, a democratic organization required deliberation and willingness to listen to others' opinions. Another area Baker was concerned with was working with local people. She believed that success would come from developing community members into local or national leaders.

After resigning from the NAACP, Baker moved back to New York City. She became a fundraiser for the National Urban League, worked with the New York Cancer Committee, and volunteered with the New York branch of the NAACP. As her influence and popularity with the New York NAACP members grew, she was rehired as a branch president in the early 1950s.²⁵ In 1956, alongside Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin, Baker helped form a fundraising organization called In Friendship. This organization directed economic aid to grassroots activists in the South, as well as to organizations like the Montgomery Improvement Association, the anti-segregation organization formed in the wake of the Rosa Parks incident in 1955. Interestingly, Parks attended a civil rights workshop led by Baker at a Highlander Center just before her decision to challenge transportation segregation.²⁶ Baker, Rustin, and Levinson also collaborated to discuss how to sustain the momentum gained from the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which ended in 1956. Eventually, this trio came together with Martin Luther King, Jr. and his colleagues to plan and organize. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was born out of these efforts. Baker and Rustin collaborated to help write the agenda for the January 1957 founding meeting in Atlanta, and Martin Luther King, Jr. called upon Baker to become the

executive director of the SCLC.²⁷ Baker stayed on with the SCLC for two years as its first full-time staff member.²⁸

As with her experience at the NAACP, Baker became dissatisfied with the SCLC's leader-centered approach. Favoring a grassroots model of social activism at the local level, she often clashed with the leaders of the SCLC on a variety of different issues. First, she was frustrated by their resistance to focusing on voter registration at the local level. Second, she met opposition to her efforts to get teachers across the South involved in educational programs designed to help community members pass the literacy tests needed to vote.²⁹ Third, she felt that too many SCLC ministers were trying to turn Martin Luther King, Jr. into a "national icon."³⁰ According to communication scholar Mittie K. Carey, Baker felt that the "SCLC's exultation of its charismatic leader—King—was counterproductive to the development of those local leaders who, from Baker's viewpoint, were necessary if the needs of the indigent Black residents were to be met."³¹ Lastly, Baker faced sexism in the mostly male SCLC. As Baker herself stated, she knew from "the beginning that having a woman be an executive of SCLC was not something that would go over well with the male-dominated leadership."³² She went on to say that "my personality wasn't right, in the sense I was not afraid to disagree with the higher authorities. I wasn't one to say yes, because it came from Reverend King."³³

Her tendency to speak her mind created a strained relationship with many of the male leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr.³⁴ Carey noted that "over the course of her 50 years of civil rights activism," Baker "critiqued and challenged patriarchy and sexism" within the movement," which did not always go over well in an organization "steeped in secular traditions of patriarchy and sexism" and led mostly by male Baptist ministers.³⁵ Many of these ministers were not comfortable being challenged or questioned by a woman, and they were shocked by her criticism of Martin Luther King, Jr. But as Joanne Grant, a friend and biographer of Baker noted, Baker had real differences with King: "King saw the need to mobilize the masses, but he did not understand the need to organize them. Baker did her best to try to turn him into an organizer."³⁶ Baker's concern for involving more people and helping them to take action on their own was a consistent theme throughout her life. In her 1969 speech, Baker reasoned that "we cannot lead a struggle that involves masses of people without the people to understand what their potentials are, what their strengths are."³⁷ Moreover, Baker and King focused on different, even opposing, objectives. King's goals with the SCLC grew out of his concern with national recognition and the permanence of the organization. Baker, on the other hand, was more concerned with the development of a mass movement and cultivation of local leadership.³⁸ Not only was Baker, at times, critical of King's approach, but also of the ministers and the organization of the SCLC.

The 1960s student lunch counter sit-ins inspired Baker. Although she saw great potential in the direct action, she worried about the lack of coordination between the groups. In April of that year, she arranged for a youth conference at her alma mater, Shaw University. This conference led to the genesis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This group would be instrumental in organizing the Hattiesburg Freedom Day Rally, where Baker

would speak four years later. At the conference, she urged the students to avoid aligning themselves with messianic and patriarchal models of leadership and instead “encouraged the participants to see themselves—not their parents, teachers, ministers, or recognized race leaders—as the main catalysts for change.”³⁹ SNCC aspired to the democratic model of civil rights organizing championed by Baker and she was the “resident elder and intellectual mentor” of SNCC for six years.⁴⁰ From 1960 to 1966, Baker’s philosophy and approach characterized the organization that she helped found.

Baker encouraged the student activists in SNCC to expand their objectives beyond lunch-counter sit-ins to include broader advocacy on behalf of civil rights. One of Baker’s unique contributions was her role as a didactic mentor for younger activists. Many students in the newly formed group referred to her as “Miss Baker,” and she also acquired the nickname “Fundu”—a name borrowed from the Swahili word for a person who teaches and inspires the next generation.⁴¹ In so recognizing Baker, her contemporaries acknowledged one of her most important contributions to the civil rights movement: her forward-looking vision. Besides enacting the role of mentor, she also lived by the vision she articulated. She was steadfast in her commitment to help stir younger activists and local people to action, and she was committed to democratic processes for effecting change.

After 1966, SNCC underwent a substantial transformation in vision and structure. Although Baker distanced herself from SNCC at this time, she never fully severed ties and continued to support the group. SNCC dissolved in the late 1960s. Afterwards, Baker devoted her time and talents to numerous other organizations and causes, continuing to work for a more just and free world for all.⁴² She was a determined organizer, jumping in wherever she thought she could help.

Ella Baker led a robust life as an activist. Her dedication stemmed from her belief that racism underlay every significant social, economic, and political problem of the twentieth century. In total, Baker was involved with more than 30 different organizations and political campaigns and was a talented, yet reluctant, orator.⁴³ From 1975-1995, Baker received a dozen awards for her work in human rights.⁴⁴ Even though she played a pivotal role in the three most prominent black freedom organizations of her day (NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC), she was more invested in coalition building, educating, and grassroots organizing than establishing herself as an iconic leader in the movement. Baker remained something of an outsider within the community of civil rights leaders. She frequently expressed skepticism toward the predominantly male leadership of the movement, and she objected to how civil rights groups were often run undemocratically. These elitist tendencies, she believed, led the movement to value loyalty to particular leaders and groups over critical thought and action.⁴⁵

For Baker, her closest political associations were not with the well-known men she worked with, but rather a powerful but largely invisible group of influential women. These women included Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Clark, and Mary McLeod Bethune, among many others. This group of women worked together to challenge both those who belittled their involvement, and the gendered norms that relegated these women to certain roles within the

movement. They worked to resist this model of organizing and leadership practices that placed them on the periphery and devalued their contributions. In Baker's case, she often inserted herself into leadership roles where others did not think she belonged.⁴⁶ Baker's transgressive female identity, moreover, provided an example where traditional norms could be upended. Barbara Ransby, in her biography of Baker, wrote: "It was long her contention that the political was inherently personal long before it was a slogan for Second Wave Feminism."⁴⁷ Baker's commitment to freedom being something that is lived and felt—not just acquired—was prescient for future activists.

Besides being a skilled grassroots organizer, Baker was an "organic" intellectual.⁴⁸ Although she learned a great deal from her schooling, she learned even more from her practical experiences. Baker thought it was necessary to better understand the world to change it. One of the ways she did this was through conversation with ordinary citizens in the oppressed communities where she worked. Additionally, she practiced a radical pedagogy that she hoped might empower those she taught. Baker considered this pedagogical process reciprocal and deeply valued what she learned from others' experiences and knowledge. Her radical democratic pedagogy blurred the lines between teacher and pupil.⁴⁹

Baker participated in the movement during tumultuous times—the 1960s. By the time she gave her address at Hattiesburg, the tumult of the 60s was in full swing, with the famous Freedom Summer of 1964 on the horizon. Previously, the 1950s had witnessed such major civil rights events such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. The early 1960s added to the list of momentous events, from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Meanwhile, an all-out fight for voting rights occupied the time and attention of most leaders of the civil rights movement. Although some legal progress had been made, voting rights still faced stubborn political obstacles. Many states enacted laws that were specifically designed to make it harder for blacks to vote. These laws included poll taxes and, even more perniciously, literacy tests. These laws threatened to severely limit black involvement in the democratic process.⁵⁰

Baker's Freedom Day Address

January 22, 1964 was Freedom Day in the medium-sized city of Hattiesburg, located in the southeast quadrant of Mississippi. Freedom Days were events organized by civil rights groups to encourage black voter registration. Hattiesburg had a tradition of civil rights activism, most notably an effort by Medgar Evers and Vernon Dahmer to establish a youth chapter of the NAACP in the late 1950s. Despite these efforts, not much progress had been made. Black disenfranchisement was so rampant in Hattiesburg that the federal government at one point indicted the local registrar, Theron Lynd, for refusing to register qualified voters. These circumstances provided a strong rationale for SNCC to organize a Freedom Day in Hattiesburg in January 1964.⁵¹

The evening before Freedom Day, Ella Baker delivered an address at a mass meeting of activists, residents of Hattiesburg, and nearly fifty ministers and rabbis. The group hoped the clergy would draw media attention as well as help stave off violence. “Every seat [was] filled, every aisle packed, the doorways jammed; it was almost impossible to get in,” as Howard Zinn described it.⁵² Although Freedom Day was scheduled for the very next day, Baker did not focus on the main theme of the event: voting rights. Instead, she used this opportunity to remind everyone in attendance of the movement’s larger principles and ambitions. She emphasized that, ultimately, real freedom would come not through the ballot and by defeating Jim Crow, but through cultivating a more universal freedom of the human spirit.⁵³

Baker’s address at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day Rally gave expression to her political philosophy and helped explain her unwillingness to associate herself with any one organization. Throughout her life, Baker worked indefatigably with a variety of groups fighting for equality. One of the most important parts of this speech is the way it manifested that particular aspect of her involvement with the movement: her refusal to embrace an approach that did not consider the personal identity of all those involved. This address encapsulated a political and social philosophy that reflected her varied experiences working with different groups within the broader civil rights movement. It also reflected her collectivist and democratic understanding of activism. Her view was that the success of any movement was largely dependent upon its ability to support and embrace members from many backgrounds—and to work on behalf of all human beings.

Baker’s lack of a long-lasting association with any one civil rights group reflected her view that what really mattered was not the organization or charismatic leader, but the larger cause. For Baker, this cause extended beyond the binaries of racial politics. The problems facing society encompassed all races and required acknowledgement of the importance of the human spirit and individual identity. In the introduction to her Hattiesburg speech, Baker declared: “I have always tried to work for a cause, and the cause to me is bigger than any organization” (1). Here, the central issues and ideas of the movement—the “cause”—took precedence over anything and everything else. This was no small matter for Baker, as it meant not only refusing to ally with particular organizations, but also defining the problem as “bigger than any group of people (1).” For Baker, the cause was “the cause of humanity (1).” Racial oppression was a problem for all.

By implicating all of humankind in the problem of inequality, Baker emphasized how liberty was a human and natural right. Baker indicated that since God gave everyone “life,” each individual also had “liberty.” The absence of liberty was unnatural and contrary to the will of God, because “if we don’t have liberty it is because somebody else has stood between us and that which God has granted us” (2). By prohibiting one from exercising her natural right to liberty, the oppressor took away a human right and acted contrary to God’s will. Baker also collapsed traditional distinctions between human, natural, and religious rights by introducing the discussion casually, saying: “I always like to think that the very God who gave us life gave us

liberty” (2). By introducing an important philosophical point in such an unpretentious way, Baker worked to avoid depicting herself as the sort of authoritative leader she opposed.

Since liberty was a natural right given to humans by God, it was only natural for those who no longer had liberty to fight for it. This also implied that those who did not experience liberty were denied their full humanity. The struggle for liberty was natural because all were “entitled by virtue of being children of the Almighty,” and this endowment opened up the possibility for children of God “to grow and develop to the fullest capacity” (2). The idea of developing oneself to his or her “fullest capacity” was a central theme in the speech and in Baker’s larger worldview.

Baker’s religious background was manifested throughout, but perhaps most notably about halfway through the speech. Here she improvised on one of her favorite thoughts in scripture: “For now we are nearer than when we first believed’ . . . let us ‘cast aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light’” (7). In this moment, Baker’s religious upbringing revealed itself in striking metaphors of light and dark. Although a central theme from Baker’s speech is that the freedom struggle is just beginning, this passage offers another perspective on progress of the movement. Instead of how far they are from achieving their goals, Baker here reassures her listeners that the movement has made great strides. This paraphrasing of Epistle to the Romans (13:12) emphasized the urgency of continued dedication to fighting for freedom; regardless of how near or far the end may appear.

In addition to establishing her religious background, Baker demonstrated her prominent role with the civil right movement by discussing the murder of Medgar Evers. Hattiesburg, Mississippi was obviously familiar with Evers and his activism in the city, and most were outraged by his murder. By mentioning Evers, Baker situated herself in a narrative of brutality and violence that was all too familiar to her audience. Returning to the night of the murder, she recalled how she and other members of the movement visited the police station to grieve together. One of the other activists present that night was “one of the leading civil rights leaders” (3), but she refrained from identifying the name. Her refusal to name the individual reflected her resistance to focusing on leaders. Instead, one of Baker’s main concerns was of action and organizing community members. Baker described how this unnamed leader remarked: “We are in the final stages of the freedom struggle” (3). Distancing herself from that sentiment, she declared: “We are not in the final stages of the freedom struggle. We are really just beginning” (4). By so boldly pronouncing that civil rights leader wrong, Baker implicitly conveyed her refusal to automatically defer to the wisdom of the movement’s most famous leaders. This statement also further demonstrated her long-range, future-oriented perspective.

Baker situated her view of the civil rights movement as one that moved beyond merely winning rights and having those rights actualized. In claiming that the movement was really just beginning, Baker suggested that much more was needed before victory could be claimed. For Baker, the end of the movement would come only when the individuals involved realized their own freedom of the human spirit. To be truly free, one had to *feel* free and fully embrace his or her freedom in society. Even if “every vestige of racial discrimination were wiped out,” she

argued, African Americans would still not be free until they were “free enough” to “associate with all the people we wanted to associate” with (4). Until that day, she concluded, “we still are not free” (4). From her perspective, equality required more than an eradication of discrimination; it demanded self-actualization. “We aren’t free until within us we have that deep sense of freedom,” she declared (4). Thus, the role of the individual was to fight for political freedom while simultaneously struggling to achieve a personal sense of freedom that comes from within.

Baker thus argued that freedom was not solely an African-American problem. Rather, the struggle for freedom affected everyone in society. It extended beyond racial distinctions and infiltrated the heart of every citizen. Baker emphasized that she was “talking about people,” and not only about one race (5). This drew attention to the importance of recognizing that racism was everybody’s problem. If one person did not have freedom, every citizen’s liberty was weakened. This idea was not new for Baker. In her 1960 article “Bigger Than A Hamburger,” which she wrote after the founding of SNCC, she claimed that the student activists were fighting for more than the integration of lunch counters. The cause, she explained, was “something much bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized Coke.”⁵⁴ Baker described how SNCC was concerned with “seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination—not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life.”⁵⁵ The all-encompassing type of freedom Baker advocated in her Hattiesburg Address was also reflected in her article. Furthermore, she wrote that it was repeatedly emphasized at the founding conference that “the movement was concerned with the moral implications of racial discrimination for the ‘whole world’ and the ‘Human Race.’”⁵⁶ This sentiment emphasized her commitment to the idea of inequality as a predicament for all; it was a problem that extended beyond racial binaries. It also highlighted her perspective that what the activists were truly fighting for was “the freedom of the human spirit” (10).

Baker often evoked abstract terms, such as liberty, freedom, justice, and peace, but she consistently paired the abstractions with pragmatic examples. When she discussed how freedom could not be realized without peace, she explained that “peace is not the absence of war or struggle, it is the presence of justice” (5). Baker then turned to concrete examples of how equal access to social and economic opportunities represented freedom through justice. Her examples included equal access to job opportunities, voting, and basic human needs such as food. Baker argued that all citizens needed access to these fundamental elements of life for justice to prevail.

In short, freedom was not just the acquiring of civil rights; it had to be internalized and felt in an atmosphere of justice. She argued that even if “we were able to vote our full strength,” freedom could not be fully achieved “until we recognize that in this country in the land of great plenty and great wealth there are millions of people who go to bed hungry every night” (5). Voting rights alone would not be a panacea for suffering, and peace did not mean merely the “absence of war or struggle.” Liberty and peace would require still more sacrifices and would not come easily. This harkened back to the earlier part of her speech where she argued that the movement was really just beginning. Much work remained to be done.

At first, it might seem ironic that Baker would downplay the importance of voting the night before a voting rights rally. However, Baker’s failure to even mention the upcoming rally

reflected her view that more fundamental problems plagued the black community. The real irony, she emphasized, was that many still suffered economically in this “land of great plenty and great wealth.” Baker was not the first to use irony to critique American racial politics, of course. Frederick Douglass’s “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” employed a similar rhetorical strategy to condemn the institution of slavery. For Baker, like Douglass, voting rights alone would not solve the problems faced by blacks, because racism—in fundamental contradiction to American ideals—permeated all aspects of America’s political and economic system.

Baker insisted that the movement needed to take a broader perspective. She argued that everyone involved had to understand that “the only group that can make you free is yourself, because we must free ourselves from all of the things that keep us back”(6). This repetition demonstrated how fundamental this notion was to her philosophy—the importance of self-realization of the human spirit’s capacity to enact freedom. This showed that, for Baker, the individual “groups” and organizations that made up the civil rights movement were not as important as the cause; it was not just one problem, like voting, that mattered. All the problems associated with racism required attention. And for Baker, those problems would be solved only by acknowledging that individuals had to set themselves free mentally and spiritually.

Baker’s vision of freedom was further illuminated by her description of “songs” and “study.” Music, of course, played an important role in the black Baptist church. The use of a call-and-response style of music in the church was significant for Baker, as it meant that everyone participated in the service, not just the pastor. The church provided one example of the sort of communal engagement Baker thought important. In addition to the inspiration that came from church music, Baker emphasized that “we also must have the information that comes from lots and lots of study” (6). Baker elaborated on her claim that “singing alone will not do it for us” by announcing that “we are going to have to have these freedom schools and we are going to have to learn a lot of things in them” (8). Giving expression to freedom through song had to be accompanied by active and thoughtful work to better the self and find ways to work together in the struggle for freedom.

Freedom schools were a new idea within the movement at this time. These schools emphasized practical lessons, as they prepared African Americans to pass voter registration tests. They taught basic literacy, as well as more detailed lessons about U.S. history and the Constitution, combining political education with traditional academic lessons. Baker also advocated for teaching community organizing in these schools. The struggle for equality required hard work, according to Baker, and young blacks needed to be educated to do that work. In her Freedom Day address, Baker emphasized that point: “We are going to have to be concerned about the kinds of education our children are getting in school” (8). Education, for Baker, was a tool of empowerment. Furthermore, Baker believed that education was fundamentally necessary for equality to be achieved.

In general, personal empowerment was the central theme in Baker’s philosophy and this was reflected in her ideas about education. According to Baker, not only did black people need to

be better educated, but so too did the white people “who have kept us in bondage” because, lacking sufficient education, “they did not know any better” (8). This reflected Baker’s belief that racism was something that was taught and learned. Proper education, for Baker, could help people unlearn racism. As she put it in her Hattiesburg address, white people also had been “fooled” by those who told them the “big lie” that African Americans were inferior and deserved to be relegated to second-class status. The “big lie was to the effect that they could do what they wanted in Mississippi with the Negro question. And you know what? The rest of the country for a long time tacitly agreed.” (9). Indeed, everybody who tolerated the “big lie” was guilty of perpetuating injustice, according to Baker, because “they didn’t do anything about it” (9). Again, Baker thereby suggested that racial progress was not just a race problem, but an all-encompassing social, political, and educational problem across the U.S.

Baker began the conclusion to her Freedom Day address by stating that “all of us stand guilty at this moment for having waited so long to lend ourselves to a fight for the freedom, not of Negroes, not of the Negroes of Mississippi, but for the freedom of the American spirit, for the freedom of the human spirit” (10). Here, Baker summarized her main argument: that the fight for true freedom was larger than the struggle for voting rights, and that each and every individual had to be involved in the struggle to free the human spirit. She pointed out that, at the time, few activists and organizers had such a holistic understanding of the struggle for freedom. Furthermore, she repeated her claim that oppression and injustice was not just a racial problem, but a human problem. Baker’s moral and political compass was oriented around this larger notion of the “freedom of the human spirit.”

This theme remained central to Baker’s activism throughout her career. In her 1969 speech, “The Black Woman in the Civil Rights Struggle,” Baker contended, “There were those who saw from the beginning that it [freedom] was part of the struggle for full dignity as a human being.”⁵⁷ Throughout her life, Baker focused on an expansive notion of freedom as an essential element of identity and character. This also connected to her perspective of extending the movement beyond racial concerns. Freedom was a fundamental aspect of humanity, and racism was a problem for all. In a sense, Baker was less concerned with race than with this more expansive notion of human freedom. This was reflected in her Hattiesburg address when she argued for the “human spirit for freedom” (1) and the “freedom of the American spirit” (10) but added: “I’m not talking about Negroes, I’m talking about people” (5). Later, she reiterated the point, calling for a “larger freedom that encompasses all mankind” (10). Not only was this expansive notion of freedom at the heart of Baker’s philosophy, but it helps to account for her efforts to involve people of all races in the movement.

Baker closed her Freedom Day address by praising all the young people “who had worked and given their bodies in the movement for freedom.” She pointed out that they were involved not just because “they want to see something take place just for the fun of it” (10). She reminded her listeners that many had sacrificed and endured violence so they could hold such events like voting rights rallies. Yet, again, she pivoted to her larger vision of true liberation, suggesting that those young activists who fought for equal rights already understood that “the

freedom which they seek is a larger freedom that encompasses all mankind” (10). Joining in common cause with those young activists, Baker pledged that until that day—until *all* people were truly free—“we will never turn back” (10). They were preparing for a long struggle for freedom that would liberate not only African Americans but all human beings. The freedom she fought for was an all-encompassing freedom—a freedom of the human spirit that transcended both race and the moment.

After Hattiesburg: Freedom Summer and Beyond

Baker’s fierce independence and her philosophy of activism were clearly on display in her “Address at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day Rally.” However, her legacy is not restricted to the reception and recollection of this one particular address. As a grassroots activist, orator, mentor, and organizer, her influence was expansive. She sought to inspire activists and citizens alike with her democratic perspective on the movement and her vision of what it could achieve. Her address at the voter registration event demonstrated her commitment to the movement, which entailed reminding people what they ultimately were striving for: freedom.

More than 150 local African-American citizens participated in Freedom Day in Hattiesburg. In the pouring rain, these citizens marched to the courthouse, intent on registering to vote. Some determined participants protested on the courthouse steps for most of the day. Although few were ultimately successful in registering to vote, the organizers were satisfied with the determination demonstrated by the members and the amount of participation from the town.⁵⁸ The next day many returned to the picket line outside of the courthouse. This trend continued and it was soon known as the “Perpetual Picket,” which continued until attention shifted to the Freedom Summer.⁵⁹

The Freedom Summer of 1964 was a massive effort to register as many African-American voters as possible in Mississippi. Organized by SNCC, CORE, the NAACP, and the SCLC, the effort involved hundreds of student volunteers, many of them white, who traveled to state to help with the project.⁶⁰ Baker helped lead a two-day SNCC meeting before the volunteers arrived where she outlined the goal of Freedom Summer: “One of the reasons we’re going to Mississippi is that the rest of the United States has never felt much responsibility for what happens in the Deep South. . . . If we can simply let the concept that the rest of the nation bears responsibility for what happens in Mississippi sink in, then we will have accomplished something.”⁶¹ During Freedom Summer, Baker reprised her usual roles, coordinating logistics and reminding the activists of the group’s plans and goals.⁶² Her commitment as a movement teacher and organizer is perhaps her great legacy.

Baker also helped establish Freedom Schools. These alternative classrooms were one of the biggest accomplishments of Freedom Summer. Baker’s early experience with the WEP helped guide her involvement in this project. Furthermore, her horizontal leadership style and pedagogical philosophy were manifested in the schools.⁶³ Her input and her style of teaching and learning left a significant mark on Freedom Schools. During this time, Baker was also involved

with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Baker helped found this organization and was a part of the group that went on to challenge the all-white Mississippi delegation for seats at the Democratic National Convention in 1964. Baker's role in the MFDP thus served to extend her influence beyond the state and even the South.

Contemporaries often viewed Baker as the voice of a new generation of civil rights activists, particularly in her work with SNCC. Julian Bond, writing about Baker's 1960 article "Bigger Than a Hamburger," declared that Baker's message had been "a real eye opener" for younger activists. Bond particularly highlighted Baker's resistance to what she saw as the stultifying influence of Martin Luther King Jr., noting that "She didn't say 'don't let Martin Luther King tell you what to do' . . . but you got the real feeling that that's what she meant."⁶⁴ Baker was instrumental in invigorating and intensifying the civil rights work of numerous young activists throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As her entry in *American National Biography* succinctly notes, "Hundreds of young people became politically active because of her respect and concern for them."⁶⁵ One of the central characteristics of Baker's legacy is how her leadership influenced future generations of activists.

Baker's reputation as a highly influential figure in the civil rights movement has not been reflected in anthologies or collections of her work. This is partly due to Baker's reluctance to record her views on race relations, democratic representation and participation, and other issues in any systematic form.⁶⁶ As Christa Buschendorf points out, "while she [Baker] held concise theories of social change and political action, she never put them down in writing. There is no memoir; there is no collection of essays. There are just speeches, a few newspaper articles, and interviews, but apart from that, we rely on the biographers who consulted her papers and spoke to the people who knew her personally."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, her legacy is substantial. As Cornel West pointed out in *Black Prophetic Fire*, "in many ways Ella Baker is the most relevant of our historic figures when it comes to democratic forms of leadership."⁶⁸ Cornel West also connected Ella Baker to the Occupy Wall Street movement. In an interview, he described how Baker and Occupy share the common theme of being "leaderless and leaderful at the same time."⁶⁹ She may not have left a lot of records, but her commitment to the freedom of the human spirit, as well as her democratic model of activism, have had a significant and long-lasting impact on the civil rights movement.

On her eighty-third birthday (December 13, 1986), Ella Baker passed away in her sleep at her Harlem apartment. Yet her legacy lives on. An organization founded in Baker's name, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, carries on political activism and social justice campaigns modeled on Baker's work with SNCC and other political organizations. The Center describes itself as inspired by an "unsung hero of the civil rights movement who inspired and guided emerging leaders. We build on her legacy by giving people opportunities and skills to work together to strengthen our communities so that all of us can thrive."⁷⁰ The Center's website further states that they "believe the best way to honor Ms. Baker's legacy is to inspire people to imagine new possibilities, lead with solutions, and engage communities to drive positive change."⁷¹ The Center's website also includes a blog, "Ella's Voice," where members reflect on

their work, discuss race-related issues, and provide updates on ongoing projects.⁷² Notably, the Center describes itself as working for human rights rather than the rights of African Americans or any other particular group. The influence of Baker's broad outlook, reflected in her "Address at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day Rally," can be seen in the organization's emphasis on grassroots organizing to promote human rights.

Baker's legacy also lives on in other organizations, lecture series, and training centers that are named after her. Many of the institutions that bear her name are concerned with mentoring young people—something that Baker was known for and cherished. Examples include the Ella Baker Intern Program of the Center for Constitutional Rights. This program was created in 1987 "to honor the legacy of Ella Baker, a hero of the civil rights movement, and to train the next generation of social justice lawyers." It focuses on teaching law students how to work with social movements and community organizations.⁷³ Like Baker herself, this program combines theory and practice, supporting 22-28 interns working with local social justice groups in four cities (New York, New Orleans, Miami, and Boston). Other reflections of Baker's legacy include the Harvard Divinity School's Ella J. Baker and Amzie Moore Memorial Lecture Series, the Ella Baker School, an elementary school in New York, the Azusa Christian Community's Ella J. Baker House in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and the Ella Baker Child Policy and Training Institute in Clinton, Tennessee, a project of the Children's Defense Fund. The University of Michigan even put Ella Baker in the company of one of the most famous human rights activists in world history when it created the Ella Baker–Nelson Mandela Center for Anti-Racist Education.⁷⁴

Baker's voice thus reframed and reinvigorated the cause of civil rights in America in ways that remain relevant. Although she has received far less attention than many other leaders of the civil rights movement, her memory continues to influence scholars, organizers, and community members today. By broadening the very idea of "freedom" and advocating a more democratic approach to organizing for change, Baker paved the way for future leaders who emphasized questions of identity and less hierarchical models of leadership in social justice movements. She also foreshadowed movement leaders who emphasized education and mentoring as a strategy for change. In all these ways, Ella Baker had a significant influence on how social justice advocates fight for lasting social and political change.

Author's Note: Nikki Orth is a graduate student in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at the Pennsylvania State University. The author wishes to thank J. Michael Hogan for his assistance and feedback throughout the project and Lori Bedell for reviewing the essay.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1890 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 150.

² All passages from Baker's January 21, 1964 address are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the printed text that accompanies this essay on the VOD website.

³ Baker's 1969 speech, "The Black Woman in the Civil Rights Struggle," given at the Institute for the Black World in Atlanta, Georgia is transcribed in: Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1998) 228-231.

⁴ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 1-12.

⁵ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 139.

⁶ Quoted in Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 93.

⁷ Quoted in Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 93.

⁸ "Cornel West's Thoughts on Ella Baker." YouTube, 0:29, posted by *Time*, October 9, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omyQ6P2SCzo>.

⁹ "Cornel West's Thoughts on Ella Baker," 1:24.

¹⁰ Baker transcribed in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 228.

¹¹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 1-7.

¹² Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 14-18.

¹³ Ella Baker was born in Norfolk, Virginia. Her family moved to Littleton when she was seven years old and was primarily raised there in North Carolina.

¹⁴ Her grandfather Mitchell Ross, as well as four other family members, purchased 250 acres which were divided among family members, "thus creating the extended family enclave in which Ella grew up." Grant, *Ella Baker*, 12.

¹⁵ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 83.

¹⁶ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 94.

¹⁷ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 52.

¹⁸ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 47.

¹⁹ Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 685.

²⁰ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 1-12.

²¹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 146.

²² Quoted in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 82-83.

²³ Quoted in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 82-83.

²⁴ Quoted in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 82-83.

²⁵ Mittie K. Carey, "The Parallel Rhetorics of Ella Baker," *Southern Communication Journal* 79 (2014):31.

²⁶ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 101.

²⁷ Houck and Dixon, *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 685-686.

²⁸ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 174.

²⁹ Olson, *Freedom's Daughter*, 146.

³⁰ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 144

³¹ Carey, "The Parallel Rhetorics of Ella Baker," 32.

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- ³² Quoted in Ellen Cantarow, Susan Gushee O'Malley, Sharon Hartman Strom, Florence Luscomb, Ella Baker, Jessie Lopez De La Cruz, *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change* (New York, Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1980), 84.
- ³³ Quoted in Cantarow et al. *Moving the Mountain*, 84.
- ³⁴ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 144.
- ³⁵ Carey, "The Parallel Rhetorics of Ella Baker," 28-31
- ³⁶ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 4.
- ³⁷ Baker transcribed in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 231.
- ³⁸ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 117.
- ³⁹ Ella Baker, as quoted in: Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 99.
- ⁴⁰ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 271.
- ⁴¹ Additionally, the documentary *FUNDI: The Ella Baker Story* was made in 1981 and directed by Joanne Grant.
FUNDI: The Ella Baker Story, directed by Joanne Grant (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 1981), DVD.
- ⁴² Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 350.
- ⁴³ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 319.
- ⁴⁴ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 233-34.
- ⁴⁵ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 4.
- ⁴⁶ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 4.
- ⁴⁷ Ransby, Barbara, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 369.
- ⁴⁸ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 363.
- ⁴⁹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 7.
- ⁵⁰ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 70-72.
- ⁵¹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 317-320.
- ⁵² Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 105.
- ⁵³ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 317-320.
- ⁵⁴ Ella Baker, "Bigger Than A Hamburger," *The Southern Patriot*, May 1960, <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/sncc2.htm>.
- ⁵⁵ Baker, "Bigger Than A Hamburger."
- ⁵⁶ Baker, "Bigger Than A Hamburger."
- ⁵⁷ Baker transcribed in Grant, *Ella Baker*, 229.
- ⁵⁸ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 320.
- ⁵⁹ "History & Timeline," Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, accessed May 5, 2015. <http://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis64.htm#1964hburg>.
- ⁶⁰ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 321-322.
- ⁶¹ Ella Baker. Quoted in Mary King, *Freedom Song* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 319.
- ⁶² Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 325.
- ⁶³ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 326-328.
- ⁶⁴ Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 63.

⁶⁵ Susan O'Malley, "Ella Baker." In *American National Biography Online*. American Council of Learned Societies, and Oxford University Press. 2000. <http://www.anb.org/articles/>.

⁶⁶ Baker's extant works are accessible through archival collections housed at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison. "More Than a Hamburger" is her most-frequently anthologized work, appearing in several major collections of work relating to either African-American history or the civil rights movement in particular. Anthologies which include the article include: Marable, Manning, and Leith Mullings. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal: An African American Anthology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009). and Lawson, Steven F., and Charles M. Payne *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

⁶⁷ Cornel West and Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 90.

⁶⁸ West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 90.

⁶⁹ "Cornel West's Thoughts on Ella Baker," 0:54.

⁷⁰ "About Us," The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, accessed December 6, 2014, Ellabakercenter.org.

⁷¹ "Who Was Ella Baker," The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://ellabakercenter.org/about/who-was-ella-baker>.

⁷² "Ella's Voice," The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://ellabakercenter.org/blog>. 2014.

⁷³ "Ella Baker Intern Program," Center for Constitutional Rights: The Bertha Justice Institute accessed June 8, 2014, <http://ccrjustice.org/hom/BerthaJusticeInstitute/bji-ella-baker-summer-internship-program>.

⁷⁴ Grant, *Ella Baker*, 4.

Ella Baker was a behind-the-scene strategist in many of the American progressive movements of the 20. th. century.Â Baker joined the staff of the New York Public Library Adult Education Program at the 135. th. Street Branch in 1934.Â This coalition aimed to rally financial support around the struggle for desegregation of Southern schools, to support victims of "segregationist vigilantes," the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott and voter rights in the South. In Friendship held fund raising events in Madison Square Garden in 1956 to help pay for the Mississippi Improvement Association's legal fees and to purchase new vehicles for the car pool during the Montgomery Bus boycott. The evening ended with the Selma Freedom Chorus, including some small children, some teenagers, and a boy at the piano"the most beautiful singing I had heard since the mass meetings in Albany. (That is something impossible to convey in words"the singing, the ever-present singing"in churches, at staff meetings, everywhere, raising the emotional level, giving people courage, almost always ending with everyone, knowing one another or not, holding hands.) By 11 a.m. there were two hundred and fifty people in the line, which extended the full length of the block, around the corner, and halfway down...Â On the first floor of that building was the office of the FBI, its windows looking out at the country courthouse. Ella baker, "Address at the hattiesburg freedom day rally" (21 january 1964). [1] This is rather unusual. Aaron Henry said that I had had my fling with all the civil rights organizations. Well, my greatest fling has still to be flung, because as far as I'm concerned I was never working for an organization, I have always tried to work for a cause, and the cause to me is bigger than any organization. Bigger than any group of people, and it is the cause of humanity. The cause is the cause that brings us together, the drive of the human spirit for freedom. [2] You know, I always like to think that