



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC.* by Cheryl Lynn Greenberg  
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for creating a divisive climate, the Right goes unscathed. Missing from this collection is how the Right has appropriated civil rights discourse and strategically utilized it to argue that the colorblind society is already upon us. This too is a "social wrong" worth challenging.

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*A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC.* Ed. by Cheryl Lynn Greenberg. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998. xx, 274 pp. Cloth, \$50.00, ISBN 0-8135-2476-8. Paper, \$20.00, ISBN 0-8135-2477-6.)

In April 1988, Connecticut's Trinity College hosted a three-day symposium and reunion of former members of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Now, ten years later, a heavily edited transcript of those sessions has been published in book form. Scholars eager to know everything that they can about SNCC will find *A Circle of Trust* to be a useful resource, but the discussion transcripts actually add surprisingly little to our knowledge or understanding of the people who made SNCC the most interesting and important of the regionwide civil rights organizations that toiled in the Deep South during the 1960s.

No historian who already is well familiar with Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle* (1981) or Charles Payne's subsequent *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1995) will learn much if anything that is notable or surprising from *A Circle of Trust*. Many of SNCC's best-known activists—Diane Nash, James Forman, Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael), and Cleveland Sellers, though not Robert Moses, John Lewis, or Marion Barry—attended the Trinity conference, but the Trinity sessions evoked relatively little of the rich personal storytelling that top-notch oral history interviewing of former activists often can elicit.

Robert Zellner provided a wonderfully memorable account of arriving at SNCC's Atlanta office in 1961 only to discover that it was just a one-person shop, and both Robert Mants and Victoria Gray Adams gave significant descriptions of how they became impor-

tant movement activists. Most of *A Circle of Trust*, however, fails to rise to those levels, and anyone who is not a dedicated SNCC aficionado will find the transcribed remarks to be very sluggish reading indeed.

Some conference participants were eager to attack scholars who have argued that internal sexism within SNCC was an important stimulus for early women's liberation efforts. Some speakers' assertions, however, such as Prathia Hall's expression of "outrage at the notion that any of us could have been oppressed because of gender in SNCC," have appropriately led the editor, Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, to warn in her introduction about the risks of "a certain romanticization of the past."

At least one participant, Casey Hayden, who in 1964 co-authored an important paper on women that was distributed at a SNCC meeting in Mississippi, frankly acknowledged how her memory was far from perfect: "I don't remember doing this Waveland paper. I mean, I did it, but to tell you the truth, I don't remember it." Hayden's co-author, Mary King, however, vehemently decried how SNCC's history, "just like most of the history of mankind on this planet, has been totally distorted by a group of so-called scholars."

Comments such as that led one of the few academic historians who took part, Allen Matusow, to conclude that "the veterans of this movement have clearly identified two enemies: sheriffs and historians." Matusow erred only in failing to add that most of the SNCC participants remained even more harsh in their disparaging view of 1960s liberals and liberalism.

Many of the movement veterans agreed that the 1964 Democratic National Convention's rejection of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party (MFDP) delegates represented SNCC's fundamental turning point, but Matusow correctly asked SNCC members to at least consider "whether they hadn't given up on liberalism too soon" during 1965 and 1966. The SNCC participants devoted only a strikingly small proportion of their conference recollections to events that postdated 1965, but Matusow properly suggested that a history that is critical, rather than merely celebratory, is really the *most* respectful of its subjects' contributions and decisions. SNCC's organizers

risked their lives on countless occasions while helping transform the rural South, and, in Matusow's words, "that's why they're the authentic heroes of the 1960s and why they deserve a full and complete history, not a history that's going to romanticize."

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*Black Leadership.* By Manning Marable. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. xx, 238 pp. Cloth, \$27.95, ISBN 0-231-10746-3.)

Manning Marable reminds us that the Million Man March of October 16, 1995, took place one hundred years after Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Address and explains that little has changed in black leadership style. These two important public events, for him, signify "the essential problematic of black leadership in white America." Both Louis Farrakhan and Booker T. Washington displayed the charismatic or dominating political style of black leadership. Their messianic style of leadership grew out of black church culture with rigid, autocratic, patriarchal hierarchies. Although Marable mentions the idea of "group-centered leaders" rather than "leader-centered groups" urged by Ella Baker, former NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) field secretary and SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) director, he does not develop it, nor does he include an essay on Baker.

This book is primarily a "profile (of) the ideas and leadership of four significant figures in the social and political history of black America: Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Harold Washington, and Louis Farrakhan." Marable acknowledges his limited objective but argues that the four leaders symbolically represent different efforts for "black empowerment in a predominantly white society." The issue of black empowerment has been a major part of Marable's scholarship. He has been primarily concerned with the burden of race, class, and gender borne by African Americans. His works have critiqued American political economy with the goal of social and economic transformation into a nonracist,

nonsexist, socialist democracy. For Marable, the purpose of scholarship is to change the world, not just to explain it. His writing has therefore been passionate, polemical, and provocative. Although a bit more measured, *Black Leadership* is no exception.

Animating most of Marable's work is a reverence for the ideas and activities of W. E. B. Du Bois, who he claims was "the central architect for the modern social protest movement for freedom in the United States." Not surprisingly, one-third of the essays in this book deal with Du Bois. Marable examines Du Bois's cultural, religious, and Pan-Africanist ideas. Du Bois represented a different leadership model from traditional black leaders as a leader of ideas rather than organizations. Although Du Bois himself recognized that he was not a natural leader, Marable accords him a status near the top of black leadership with a "commitment to a democracy defined by the realization of racial equality and social justice for all social groups and classes within the society." Marable's aggrandizement of Du Bois causes him to devalue many of Washington's ideas, although he does acknowledge Washington's complexity and considerable accomplishments in improving literacy, promoting health, increasing black land ownership, and fostering economic development. But Washington's political strategy, according to Marable, "helped to establish a rigid system of racial inequality and segregation . . . across the U.S. South." This strong indictment of Washington does not consider the extent to which he sought to make the best of a bad situation.

In *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (1983), Marable concluded that "Black American history's central axis is the tension between accommodation and struggle." Because of his own desire for a democratic and egalitarian society, he is impatient with any ideas or movements that do not contribute directly to that goal. Louis Farrakhan and the Million Man March therefore become reactionary and akin to Washington's "program of black petty entrepreneurship and political cooperation with white conservatives." More damning to Farrakhan is the connection that Marable draws between the Nation of Islam and Lyndon LaRouche, the Ku Klux Klan, and the American Nazi Party, a story that is