The Time Has Come (1964-1966)

MAN: What Dr. King gave us, what Stokely Carmichael gave us, what Malcolm X gave us, everybody gave us, whether you agreed with them or not, the energy of that time and the goals that we were all aspiring to, I think, is what it was all about at its best. At its worst, it was when we did nothing.

MAN: Black people are dissatisfied. They're dissatisfied not only with the white man, but they're dissatisfied with these Negroes who have been sitting around here posing as leaders and spokesmen for black people and actually making the problem worse instead of making the problem better.

MAN: I'm tired of marching, tired of marching for something that should have been mine at birth.

WOMAN: Many days I would come home and I would think about all the liberals that got on the buses and went south when -- For sit-ins and boycotts in the South. And I really would come home and wonder, you know, where were they now?

NARRATOR: By the mid-1960s, the civil rights movements had changed the laws that divided us by race. But the struggle from unity was far from done.

WOMAN: Just because I'm white doesn't mean that the 14th Amendment doesn't apply to me either. I am white and I want my rights.

MAN: We look at Miss America, we see white. We look at Miss World, we see white. We look at Miss Universe, we see white. Even tigers from the kingdom and jungle in black Africa are white.

MAN: The Black Panthers preach every day hate, kill whitey, kill the police, kill the pigs. Hate, hate, hate, that's all you hear from them.

MAN: We don't hate nobody because of their color, we hate oppression. We hate murder of black people in our communities. We hate the growing unemployment in our communities. We hate black man being ... (inaudible) into the military service.

MAN: Sergeant, you've just recently returned from Vietnam. Can you tell us how it feels to have to come from one zone of combat in a foreign land to one in your own land?

MAN: It's not a good feeling, not one I'm kind of proud of.

MAN: We stand on the eve of a black revolution, brothers. Masses of our people in the streets. The rebellions that we see are merely dress rehearsals for the revolution that's to come.

WOMAN: Are you going to live outside of the American culture, or are you going to live within it? As long as you stay in America, you've got to conform. What else can you do?

NARRATOR: This television series chronicles a period of history when our nation stood at a racial crossroads, a time when Americans struggled to define what was truly meant by liberty and justice for all. It was a time for anger and fear, a time when a gain for blacks was sometimes seen as a loss for whites.

MAN: Are the people of Cleveland willing to vote for a candidate for mayor who has the best qualifications, but whose skin does happen to be black?

WOMAN: We pick our lipsticks by color, sometimes our dresses, but we don't vote that way. We study the candidates.

MAN: I believe that.

NARRATOR: It was also a time for triumph, a time when victory blurred the color line. A time when once again America struggled to be America for all of its citizens.

MAN: When we come together, what time is it? When we respect each other, what time is it? When we get ourselves confident, what time is it?

MAN: It's nation time, it's nation time, it's nation time. You can hear reverberating all those cries ... (inaudible) from the '40s and the '30s and the '50s and the '60s. I mean, came to be fulfilled in that moment of crying that it's nation time now.

JAMES HAUGHTON: Less than 2 percent of the Negro people in Harlem have taken an active part in the civil rights struggle. We observe that there have been other groups out on the streets. The Nationalists have been out on the streets, the Muslims have been out on the streets, but the NAACP up to this point has not been out there where the people are at.

LOUIS MICHAUX: All over America, there's not one black citizen in the United States. I defy Dr. Martin Luther King to tell me that they're citizens of this no-good country because integration will never happen. You'll never, as long as you live, integrate into the white man's system.

NARRATOR: In the early 1960s, on inner city street corners in the north, many groups competed for the hearts and minds of black America.

MALCOLM X: All praise is due to Allah. Everybody in Harlem is a Muslim.

NARRATOR: One of the groups attracting the largest crowds was the Nation of Islam.

MALCOLM X: We too have been taught by the Honorable Elijah Mohammed that we were stripped of everything we had and then cast into the fiery furnace. A land where they've been making it hot as hell for us for 400 years.

NARRATOR: The Nation of Islam was a religious organization. Its approach to teaching black pride and self reliance often provoked controversy. In major cities across the country, the nation built temples for prayer, established businesses to encourage economic independence in black communities, and created schools to educate its children. Members of the Nation of Islam were sometimes referred to as Black Muslims. Their God was Allah, and his messenger was Elijah Mohammed.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: The so-called American Negro have to be completely reeducated. He have to be completely made over again. And the condition that he is now in is not fit for self. And Islam gives him that qualification, that he can feel proud and does not feel ashamed to be called a black man.

NARRATOR: Elijah Mohammed successfully rehabilitated many convicts and drug addicts, teaching discipline and self respect.

UNIDENTIFIED MUSLIM: After taking drugs in 1958, after I heard the program of the Honorable Elijah Mohammed, this is the only thing that ever gave me the inspiration or the strength not to use narcotics. And he opened the door for me to show me that some of the good things of this Earth could be mine with just a little effort and following him.

MALCOLM X: The Honorable Elijah Mohammed doesn't condemn the victim, he goes to work on the victim. He doesn't say that all the --

NARRATOR: One of the converts was Malcolm X, who would soon transform the Nation of Islam. He was born Malcolm Little. His father was an organizer for black nationalist Marcus Garvey. After the father's violent death, which many believe to be a lynching, and the subsequent breakup of his family, the young Malcolm drifted into a life of drugs and crime. In 1946, he was convicted of burglary and sentenced to 10 years in prison, where he was introduced to the teachings of Elijah Mohammed. After his release, he became a Muslim minister, and through street corner rallies, brought many new members into the Nation of Islam.

MALCOLM X: The Honorable Elijah Mohammed teaches us that it is time for you and me to stand up for ourselves. It is time for you and me to see for ourselves. It is time for you and me to hear for ourselves, and it is time for you and me to fight for ourselves. We don't need anybody today speaking for us, seeing for us, or fighting for us. We'll fight our own battles with the help of our God.

OSSIE DAVIS: So the first time I actually saw him was in the mosque in Harlem one Sunday afternoon as he preached one of his sermons. And he described how we as black folks smelled. He described how we looked, he described how we felt. And then he described what caused us to feel that way, and of the chains of slavery are still in your minds and in your heads and you look at a white man and you love him, that's what you do. You hate the fact that he let you go from slavery, you want to go back there. But no, the Honorable Elijah Mohammed is here now and we're going to change all that. You know, the righteous black man is on the scene and we're not going to be satisfied with you and your shuckin' and jivin'. The time has come.

NARRATOR: In 1959, the media discovered the Nation of Islam.

MIKE WALLACE: While city officials, state agencies, white liberals and sober minded Negroes stand idly by, a group of Negro dissenters is taking the street corner stepladders, church pulpits, sports arenas and ballroom platforms across the United States to preach a gospel of hate that would set off a federal investigation if it were preached by southern whites.

Louis Lomax, a reporter I'd never heard of, came to my office, told me about something called the black Muslims. I'd never heard of them. Would we be interested in doing a broadcast, a documentary about them? I suggested that yeah, we might. Let's learn more about them. One of the conditions about doing the broadcast, he said, was they will not talk to a white reporter.

LOUIS LOMAX: This is the first time I think my color's ever been in my favor rather than against me. But on the whole, I would say that this assignment was a little rough.

NARRATOR: Assigned a white camera crew, Lomax filmed this rally in Washington, DC. The program included a performance of a play by Louis X called "The Trial" in which whites are tried for their offenses against blacks.

SPEAKER: I charge the white man, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, with being the greatest murderer on Earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest liar on Earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest troublemaker on Earth. So therefore, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I ask you bring back a verdict of guilty as charged.

MIKE WALLACE: When Louis Lomax came back with a film of the rally, the Black Muslim rally, I was simply stunned. I mean, here was this auditorium overflowing, thousands of people, about an organization I knew nothing about. I found it difficult to credit when I saw it.

LOUIS LOMAX: Have you ever been accused, sir, of preaching hate?

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: Yes.

LOUIS LOMAX: Do you think you are preaching hate?

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: No.

LOUIS LOMAX: What are you preaching, sir?
ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: The truth.
MALCOLM X: They call Mr. Muhammed a hate teacher because he makes you hate dope and alcohol. They call Mr. Muhammed a black supremacist because he teaches you and me not only that we're as good as the white man, but better than the white man. Yeah, better than the white man. You are better than the white man. And that's not saying anything. That's not saying -- You ... nowhere just to be equal with him. Who is he to be equal with? You look at your skin. You can't compare your skin with his skin. Why, your skin looks like gold beside his skin. You find that old pale thing laying out in the sun trying to get to look like you, that pale thing.
NARRATOR: In 1963, Malcolm X became national spokesman for the Nation of Islam.
MALCOLM X: You find him using Man Tan trying to look like me. That old pale thing.
SONIA SANCHEZ: I was standing on the island there, looking at him, and my friend said, "I'm going back to the office, we're going back." And I said, "I'm going to stay because I like the rain." There was this kind of quiet drizzle that was happening there.
MALCOLM X: I hope you're not getting too wet.
SONIA SANCHEZ: And I looked up and looked around determined not to look at him, determined not to listen. But he started to talk and I found myself more and more listening to him. And I began to nod my head and say, "Yeah, that's right, that makes sense."
MALCOLM X: The government accepts its responsible for the poverty that makes you and me turn to alcohol, to dope, and to crime. The government is responsible for the housing conditions that exist here in Harlem. The government is responsible for the rats that bite our little children and the cockroaches that eat better than we do. Don't look for the ... (inaudible) in Harlem, go downtown and look for them in city hall. And brothers and sisters, if you don't find them in city hall, look for them in Albany in the state house, or look for him in Washington in the White House.
MALCOLM X: You don't have any boats or airplanes bringing drugs into this country. The white man brings it in. The white man brings it to Harlem. The white man makes you a drug addict. The white man then puts you in jail when he catches you using drugs. We're trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, of ignorance, of apathy, of disease, and of death. And they have these ol' Uncle Toms, Negro leaders, coming to Harlem, telling you and me that the times are getting better. The times will never get better until you make 'em better.
SONIA SANCHEZ: When he came off the stage, I jumped off the island, walked up to him and of course when I got to him, the bodyguards moved in front and he just pushed them away and I went in front of him and extended my hand and said, "I like some of what you said. I didn't agree with all that you said, but I liked some of what you said." And he looked at me, held my hand in a very gentle fashion and said, "One day you will, sister."
NARRATOR: As his reputation grew, Malcolm X began to write a book with Alex Haley.
ALEX HALEY: When I began to interview Malcolm for the book that would later be called "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," he would talk about the greater glories of Mr. Elijah Mohammed, his leader, and about the Nation of Islam and there was nothing else he would talk about. And finally, I began very delicately as I could to say to him, "Mr. Malcolm, this book is to be about you, so I know about them, you've told me. I've written with you about them, but we need now to go into your life." And he would always get first testy about it, and then he got distinctly annoyed about it, and finally he would get angry.
I said, "Mr. Malcolm, could you tell me something about your mother?" And I will never, ever forget how he stopped almost as if he was suspended like a marionette. And he said, "I remember the kind of dresses she used to wear. They were old and faded and gray." And then he walked some more. And he said, "I remember how she was always bent over the stove, trying to stretch what little we had." And that was the beginning, that night, of his walk. And he walked that floor until just about daybreak.
NARRATOR: Largely ignoring Elijah Mohammed, the media focused on Malcolm X, contrasting him with Martin Luther King, Jr.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: And it is a message which says that I am convinced that the most potent weapon available to oppressed people as they struggle for freedom and justice, is the weapon of nonviolence.
MALCOLM X: We're nonviolent with people who are nonviolent with us. Because we are not nonviolent with anyone who is violent with us.
JOHN LEWIS: Malcolm X represented a different brand of leadership. Many of us that grew up in the South had been deeply influenced by the church, by the preaching of black ministers, but also by the message, the philosophy, the teaching of Martin Luther King, Jr., the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. We saw Malcolm as someone, in a sense, from the outside, coming from the North to tell us there was a different way, a different approach. And I think many of us in the South had some reservations about it.
OSSIE DAVIS: Martin and the regular civil rights leaders were presenting to America our best face, our nonviolent face, our desire to be included into American society and we wanted to show the world that we had no evil intentions against anybody, we just

wanted to be included. But they also understood that America, in spite of our reassurances, would be frightened and hesitant to open the door to black folks.

So Malcolm as the outsider, as the man they thought represented the possibilities of violence was the counter that they could use. They would say to the powers that be, "Look, here's Martin Luther King and all these guys, we are nonviolent. Now, outside the door, if you don't deal with us, is the other brother, and he ain't like us."

MALCOLM X: One white man named Lincoln supposedly fought the Civil War to solve the race problem and the problem is still here. And then another white man named Kennedy came along running for president and told Negroes what all he was going to do for them if they voted for him, and they voted for him, 80 percent, and he's been in office now for three years and the problem is still here. When police dogs were biting black women and black children and black babies in Birmingham, Alabama, that Kennedy talked about what he couldn't do because no federal law had been violated. And as soon as the Negroes exploded and began to protect themselves and got the best of the crackers in Birmingham, then Kennedy sent for the troops and there as no -- He didn't have any new law when he sent for the troops when the Negroes erupted than he had at the time when whites were erupting.

NARRATOR: In November, 1963, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. In the midst of national mourning, Elijah Mohammed suspended Malcolm X for his comments on the president's death.

PETER BAILEY: This came about as a result of statements in the press indicating or trying to imply that he had rejoiced over the assassination of President John Kennedy, a statement that Brother Malcolm had said at the time that it was a case of the chickens coming home to roost. He ha been saying all along that the violence, the whole violent atmosphere that had been created as a result of the movement, and by the government not doing anything about this. In this case, Kennedy was the president at the time, that it created a whole atmosphere of violence, and finally this violence had reached the White House.

NARRATOR: The relationship between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam rapidly deteriorated.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: He felt that he was now a big man before the public and this seemed to have been his desire. He wanted to be seen or heard or he wanted to exalt himself above his teacher.

MALCOLM X: The Nation of Islam, as it is guided spiritually by the Honorable Elijah Mohammed doesn't involve itself in politics in any form. Because of its failure to become actively involved in the struggle of the Negroes over all, many persons in the past have drifted away from it, and are now becoming involved with us in an axis effort to work with other groups towards solving the political, social and economic evils that afflict our people.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X now advanced his own program for black Americans. He formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity dedicated to the philosophy of black nationalism.

MALCOLM X: Which means the black man should control the politics of his own community and control the politicians who are in his own community. My personal economic philosophy is also black nationalism, which means that the black man should have a hand in controlling the economy of the so-called Negro community. He should be developing the type of knowledge that would enable him to own and operate the businesses and thereby be able to create employment for his own people, for his own kind.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X made two trips to Africa, including a pilgrimage to Mecca to become an orthodox Muslim. His meetings with African leaders to seek their support attracted the attention of the U.S. Justice and State Departments.

MALCOLM X: Well, my purpose here is to remind the African heads of state that there are 22 million of us in America who are also of African descent. And to remind them also that we are the victims of America's colonialism or American imperialism and that our problem is not an American problem, it's a human problem. It's not a Negro problem, it's a problem of humanity. It's not a problem of civil rights, but a problem of human rights.

PETER BAILEY: What he ultimately was aiming for in a foreign policy level was to have the government, the U.S. government, have to defend its inaction in terms of the racist attacks that were going on at that time, to defend his actions before the U.S. Commission on Human Rights and take it before the World Court.

REPORTER: Malcolm, are you prepared to go into the United Nations at this point and ask that charges be brought against the United States for its treatment of American Negroes?

MALCOLM X: Oh, yes. The audience will have to be quiet. Yes, as I pointed out when I was -- During my traveling, that nations look, and African nations and Asian nations and Latin American nations look very hypocritical when they stand up in the United Nations condemning the racist practices of South Africa and that which is practiced by Portugal and Angola and saying nothing in the U.N. about the racist practices that are manifest every day against Negroes in this society.

REPORTER: You're prepared to work with some of the leaders of the other civil rights organizations?

MALCOLM X: Certainly, certainly. We will work with any groups, organizations or leaders in any way as long as it's genuinely designed to get results.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X received many threats, but an attempted poisoning in Africa made him believe the danger went beyond the Nation of Islam. On December 3rd, 1964, he took part in this debate in Oxford, England.

MALCOLM X: And I live in a society whose social system is based upon the castration of the black man, whose political system is based on castration of the black man, and whose economy is based upon the castration of the black man. They came up with what they call a Civil Rights Bill in 1964 supposedly to solve our problem, and after the bill was signed, three civil rights workers were murdered in cold blood. Civil Rights Bill down the drain. No matter how many bills pass, black people in that country where I'm from still our lives are not worth two cents. Well, any time you live in a society supposedly based upon law and it doesn't enforce its own law because of the color of a man's skin happens to be wrong, then I say those people are justified to resort to any means necessary to bring about justice where the government can't give them justice.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X's influence was strong among young people, especially for some members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: So many people in SNCC who didn't even know who Malcolm was began to sit up and take notice. So here in SNCC, it became first of all, right, Malcolm X is having an effect where you don't even think he's having an effect, so people began to look closer. Of course, the closer they look to Malcolm X, the quicker they got hooked on Malcolm X.

NARRATOR: Early in 1964, SNCC and Dr. Martin Luther King joined forces for a voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. When SNCC invited Malcolm X to speak in Selma, he reaffirmed his willingness to support other civil rights leaders.

MALCOLM X: And I think that the people in this part of the world would do well to listen to Dr. Martin Luther King and give him what he's asking for and give it to him fast before some other factions come along and try to do it another way. What he's asking for is rights and that's the ballot. And if he can't get it the way he's trying to get it, then it's going to be gotten one way or the other.

NARRATOR: On February 14, 1965, Malcolm X's home was bombed as he and his family slept inside.

REPORTER: Had you had any threats of anything like this?

BETTY SHABAZZ: Have I had any threats? The only thing I get is threats. I get not less than six or seven threatening phone calls every day.

ALEX HALEY: And the phone rang and I picked it up, it was a morning, a Saturday morning as I recall, and this voice came on and started talking. And I'm wondering, who is it? I didn't recognize the voice. And finally, something he said made me realize with a great shock, my shock, that was Malcolm X. And for the first time in our whole acquaintance of years, I really didn't perceive who he was. The thing was, he was under such pressure that it was as if it had constricted his vocal cords. He just felt, I guess, as near desperate as I ever saw him because, again, here's the image of the fearsome, indomitable Malcolm X, but bottom line was he was a father and he was a husband and his wife and daughters were imperiled and what could he do about it?

MALCOLM X: My house was bombed, it was bombed by the Black Muslim Movement upon the orders of Elijah Mohammed.

NARRATOR: But within the week, Malcolm X expressed doubt that the Muslims were responsible. He planned to speak again the following Sunday at the Audubon Ballroom.

SONIA SANCHEZ: I was going to the Audubon that day, had been out the night before reading, had gotten lazy and had said simply, "Ah, I'll go next week," and so proceeded to go into the kitchen, put some coffee on, turn on the radio. And my little apartment there, I had a little black and white kitchen table with these little black chairs. And I had this little black radio on that table, and I clicked the radio on. As I stood there thinking about what had happened the night before, turned towards the stove to pick up the coffee. And the flash came through on this station and said Malcolm had been assassinated.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X was killed by 16 gun shots fired at close range. He was 39 years old.

BETTY SHABAZZ: And my children were crying, "What's going on, what's going on, are they going to shoot us?" And I just knew they had shot him.

OSSIE DAVIS: And that night we went into the Harlem community to walk and mingle with the people. There was a kind of sense of loss, and as we passed people, some who were even strangers, we would stop and greet each other and say what this man had meant to us.

PETER BAILEY: He was a master teacher and there is no greater loss to a community than the loss of a master teacher.

NARRATOR: During the next three days, 20,000 people endured subfreezing temperatures to say goodbye to Malcolm X.

OSSIE DAVIS: When the funeral was over and Malcolm was stripped of his western clothes and then the Muslims came and dressed him for proper Muslim burial, they had a service.

We went out to Ardsley, the cemetery. And when we got there, you know, the professional gravediggers was standing there with their shovels, but some of the black brothers said, "No, huh-uh, we can't let you do that. We dig this grave. You know, we cover this brother with dirt." And it was a moving moment, and I was proud at that moment to be black and proud that my community and

people, no matter what had been said by the outside world, said to the brother, "We loved and respected and admired you." So we buried him and there it is.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X had a far reaching effect on the civil rights movement. In the South, there had been a long tradition of self reliance. Malcolm X's ideas now touched that tradition. In 1965, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee launched new strategies to challenge white control of southern politics.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: Our direction was clear, a heavy emphasis on nationalism, strong, as strong as Malcolm had it, as strong as we could get it.

NARRATOR: Carmichael and other SNCC members began a voter drive in Lowndes County, Alabama, known as Bloody Lowndes for its violence against blacks. Although 80 percent of the population was black, there were no black elected officials. Economically dependent on white plantation owners, many were afraid to join civil rights efforts. And none had been allowed to register to vote until early 1965.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: Now, in this country it says majority rules. We are 80 percent of the majority in this -- We are 80 percent in this county and we have the right to rule this county. We have the right to rule this county and we're going to rule it. I don't care how poor we are and how black we are, we are going to govern this county.

JOHN HULETT: Stokely Carmichael and Colton Cox and others who got together and told us according to the Alabama law, if we didn't like what the Democratic Party was doing in our county, or the Republican Party, we could form our own political organization and it could become a political party.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: George Wallace was the head of the Alabama Democratic Party. The Alabama Democratic Party was racist. Its symbol at that time had a white rooster and it had the words of white supremacy. That was the official emblem of the Democratic Party in Alabama. So here it would be easy for us to tell our people, "Hey look, this party's not for us. We need our own party."

NARRATOR: The new political party was named the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. But it became better known by the symbol it chose, a black panther.

JOHN HULETT: And then when we chose that symbol, the black panther, the minute the people in that county started saying we were violent during that time. You know, now you got a violent group in Lowndes County who is turning out -- Who are going to start killing white folks. But it wasn't that, it was a political -- Just a symbol to our own race that we was here to stay and we were going to do whatever needed to be done to survive.

JOHN JACKSON: Everybody was excited because they said, "Well, they have the rooster, which represents the Democratic Party, the elephant which represents the Republican Party, why can't we have a black cat to represent us? Everybody knows how a cat look," and we were excited because we knew that if a person couldn't read or write, they sure knew the difference between a cat, an elephant and a rooster.

NARRATOR: SNCC went door to door and farm to farm explaining to first time voters the rules for taking part in the Lowndes County primary.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: Now, the law says you can't vote in ours and also vote in the Democratic primary, which has to be held on the same day according to the law. So what we'll have to do is vote on one and not the other. So if you want to vote for our candidates for sheriff, for tax assessor, tax collector, coroner and the school board, then you have to vote for us.

NARRATOR: On May 3rd, 1966, Lowndes County blacks voted for the first time since the end of Reconstruction. Some voted as Democrats in the Hayville courthouse. Several blocks away, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization held its primary on the grounds of the First Baptist Church. Voters for the independent party were introduced to candidates for seven offices, including sheriff, before casting their ballots. Even with the ever-present threat of violence, 900 black voters showed up that day to vote for the panther.

JOHN HULETT: This was the first time that the black people in this county came together to make choices of their own candidates for public office. It was important also because the numbers of people that turned out for the election that day and voted for their candidates and felt that they had done something for themselves, to start making some of the kinds of changes they wanted to see happen in the system.

NARRATOR: Eleven days later, Stokely Carmichael, representing the new militancy within SNCC, defeated John Lewis as national chairman.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: If you took a clear look at John Lewis, he looked more like a young Martin Luther King, Jr., than anything else.

JOHN LEWIS: It was almost like a coup. People were saying we need someone who would stand up to Lyndon Johnson, we need someone who would stand up to Martin Luther King, Jr.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: It was clear that he'd been alienated from the SNCC staff. So the vote against him represented that. But more importantly, it represented the clear insight of the SNCC organizers that understood that the question of morality upon which King's organization depended to bring about changes in the community were not possible. The SNCC people had seen raw talent and they understood properly this raw talent had nothing to do with morality, but had to do clearly with power.
NARRATOR: It had been almost a year since Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, but white resistance remained strong. In Mississippi alone, more than 300,000 blacks were not registered to vote. James Meredith, the first black person to enroll at the University of Mississippi, was determined to change all that. On June 5th, 1966, Meredith left Memphis, Tennessee, prepared to walk 220 miles to Jackson, Mississippi. He called it a March Against Fear.
JAMES MEREDITH: To point out and challenge, if necessary, this all pervasive and overriding fear that's so much a part of the day to day life of the Negro in this country, and especially in Mississippi.
NARRATOR: On the second day of his march, James Meredith was shot from ambush.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: We, as you know, have been greatly concerned about the shooting of James Meredith, we have expressed that.
NARRATOR: Leaders of major civil rights organizations rushed to Memphis, Tennessee, where James Meredith was hospitalized. They vowed to continue the march for him.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: And something needs to be done to make it clear that we are not going to be stopped, we're not going to be intimidated.
NARRATOR: From the start, there was conflict.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: If we're going to be free, we will have to suffer for that freedom, we will have to sacrifice for it.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: But I'm not going to beg the white man for anything that I deserve, I'm going to take it. We need power, we need power, that's what we need. We need power ... (inaudible).
FLOYD McKISSICK: And I think it was more of a youth movement in all of the organizations asserting themselves far more than it was competition among leaders themselves. It was a clash of ideas, no question about a clash of ideas.
NARRATOR: The leaders began marching at the point where Meredith had been shot. Mississippi state troopers forcefully prevented them from marching on the road surface. Carmichael, angered by this rough handling, stepped forward to retaliate, but Dr. King restrained him.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: We've got to realize the white folk in the state of Mississippi ain't nothing but a bunch of racists. And the only people who can stop them are the black folk in Mississippi. Now, we've got to make this march our march. This has got to be the march for the black people in Mississippi. And the only way we can make that our march is that we've got to go into every little place and get every black man and black woman, black boy and black girl out, who's not afraid and let's march and let's make this our Mississippi. It's got to be our Mississippi.
NARRATOR: In sweltering heat, the marchers walked along Highway 51, stopping in towns along the way to register new voters.
REPORTER: How long have you waited to register, how many years?
EL FONDREN: Oh, long time. Long time.
REPORTER: How many years? How old are you?
EL FONDREN: I'm 106 years old, 9 months. Never fool with this ... (inaudible).
REPORTER: How do you feel, sir?
EL FONDREN: Me? I feel good.
NARRATOR: Twenty Mississippi state troopers provided some protection, but half way through the march, that number was reduced to four. Governor Paul Johnson announced he wasn't, "going to wet nurse a bunch of showmen." As James Meredith recovered from his wounds, the threat of another attack against the marchers was an ever-present concern.
DAVID DAWLEY: There was a new sense of anxiety that we were becoming involved in something that might have consequences, something real. It wasn't an academic exercise.
NARRATOR: As the marchers camped each night, they were protected by an organization known as the Deacons for Defense and Justice.
REPORTER: Are any of them armed?
ERNEST THOMAS: Well, I would think so.
REPORTER: What are they carrying?

ERNEST THOMAS: Well, it depends, .38s .45s, M-2s.
REPORTER: Are they prepared or trained to use them?
ERNEST THOMAS: Yes, they are.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: I'm tired of violence. I've seen too much of it. I've seen hate on the face of too many sheriffs in this house. And I'm not going to let my oppressor dictate to me what method I must use.
NARRATOR: SNCC planned to issue a dramatic call as the march approached Greenwood, Mississippi.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: Willie Ricks was sent out as head as the advanced scout, and sometimes he could have as many as 20 to 40, as we grew bigger, even 20 or 40 people under his direction to spread out. And his task was to take them, spread them out to plantations, speak to the sharecroppers, tell them the march was coming through, but to throw out black power and to give little black power speeches to get their reaction. I think about three nights before Greenwood, because SNCC was deciding where's the best place for us to launch it? About three nights before Greenwood, I remember about 2:00 in the morning, Ricks came back and he was giving a report and Cleve Sellers was sitting next to me, I remember. And Ricks was saying, "We ought to drop it now. The people are ready for it. I said it the other day, and they dropped their hoes," you know. And I said, to Cleve, I said, "You know, you sent the wrong man out because we need a clear analysis here and this man is given to exaggerations."
Ricks had everybody primed. He said, "Just get to your speech, we're going against freedom now, we're going for black power. Don't hit too much on freedom now, but hit the need for power." So we built up on the need for power. And just when I got there, before I got there, Rick was there saying, "Hit them now, hit them now." I kept saying, "Give me time, give me time." When we finally got in, we dropped the black power, of course they had been primed and they responded immediately. But I myself, to be honest, I didn't expect that enthusiastic response.
DAVID DAWLEY: Until finally everyone together was thundering, "Black power, black power." And that was chilling, that was frightening.
FLOYD McKISSICK: It scared people because they did not understand, they could not subtract violence from power. They could only see power as a violent instrument accompanying it.
JOHN LEWIS: It was empty rhetoric, it was not a message. And the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had a rich history of being involved in programmatic efforts and not just the use of slogan. It was at that point during that march that I made a decision to leave the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: The cause of black equality will be decided by black people because --
NARRATOR: The media saw the call for black power as a major shift in the civil rights movement.
ARLIE SCHARDT: There was a tendency, I thought, to overplay it. There were a lot of new reporters, reporters that were new to this beat who were coming in from a lot of papers around the country as the march began to pick up momentum and as this black power theme began to get some publicity. The second reason was that the theme was never really clearly articulated, or at least what it meant was never clearly defined. And so it was open to very broad interpretation, and there were some whites for their own reasons who wanted to take this as a signal of real black hostility and enmity.
DAVID DAWLEY: And the strategy coming out of black power from SNCC was that blacks should organize with blacks, and whites should organization with whites.
CLEVELAND SELLERS: SNCC took the position that if there was going to be a march in Mississippi, it should be a march that's indigenous. Meaning that Mississippians should be involved and we should not call out the liberal armies from the North to come in and assist with that march.
DAVID DAWLEY: So we moved on to work with whites on issues that we felt we should work with. In the next year, that was not civil rights, that was Vietnam.
NARRATOR: As the march neared Canton, Mississippi, reporters played up the differences between Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Let me say first that this march is nonviolent, it is a nonviolent expression of our determination to be free. This is the principle of the march and certainly we intend to keep this march nonviolent.
FRANK McGEE: Mr. Carmichael, are you as committed to the nonviolent approach as Dr. King is?
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: No, I'm not.
FRANK McGEE: Why aren't you?
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: Well, I just don't see it as a way of life, I never have. But I also realize that no one in this country is asking the white community in the South to be nonviolent. And that in a sense is giving them a free license to go ahead and shoot us at will.

NARRATOR: The marchers began to set up their tents for the night on the grounds of an all black school in Canton, Mississippi. Permission to use the school grounds had been granted by the black school board but was later revoked by white city officials.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: We don't want anybody to move. The time for running has come to an end. You tell them white folk in Mississippi that all the scared niggers are dead. You tell them they shot on the rabbits, they going to deal with some men.
NARRATOR: Mississippi state troopers who had once been assigned to protect the marchers now took another stance.
MARTIN LUTHRE KING, JR: I want to get this over because this is important. We're going to stick together, if necessary we are willing to fill up all of the jails in the state of Mississippi. And I don't believe they have enough jails for all of us people if they arrest us.
ARLIE SCHARDT: It was like a scene of hell with the smoke rising and people vomiting and crawling around and choking and crying. And then there was a kind of an eerie silence and the one thing you could hear over and over again was this thug, thug, thug sound. And what it was was Mississippi troopers kicking people on the ground or hitting them with their rifle butts.
JOHN HART: How were you hurt?
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: They hit me in the chest with a canister.
JHN HART: With a canister?
WILLIE RICKS: White power, that's what it is, white power.
NARRATOR: Despite the tear gas and beatings, the marchers remained nonviolent, but voices in the night told of the rage that many were feeling.
WOMAN: We will overcome.
MAN: Whitey got to go. Whitey got to go. Whitey got to go.
NARRATOR: On June 26th, the march entered Jackson, Mississippi. Along the route, 4,000 new voters were added to Mississippi voting rolls since Meredith first began his March Against Fear 22 days earlier in Memphis.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: And I have watched my dreams turn into a nightmare, I still have a dream. I still have a dream that one day right here in the state of Mississippi, justice will become a reality for all of God's children. I still have a dream.
STOKELY CARMICHAEL: We have to march to a position where we can see a strength and unity amongst each other from ... (inaudible) where we won't ever be afraid. And the last thing we have to do is to build a power base so strong in this country that we'll bring them to their knees every time they mess with us.
NARRATOR: This was the last great march of the southern civil rights movement. The call for power would now be raised in communities across the nation, challenging Americans to look at the realities of their democracy. Black Americans were changing, and there was no turning back.
FLOYD McKISSICK: And let 1966 be the year that we decided that we would develop our whole culture, that we would be proud of being black people, that we would no longer accept the use of the word Negro, but we would become mature and we would regard ourselves as black men, black men in America.