

The Mother of the Nonviolent Right To Vote Movement

Diane Nash May 15, 1938 - Present

Diane Nash was born in Chicago, IL. While a student at Fisk University she began attending nonviolent civil disobedience workshops led by the Rev. James Lawson. At age 22, she became the unofficial leader of the Nashville sit-ins that desegregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee, inspired by sit-ins in February in Greensboro, North Carolina. In April 1960 Nash helped to found SNCC, and quit school to lead its direct action wing. In 1961, under her leadership the Nashville Student Movement took over the responsibility for the Freedom Rides from Birmingham, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi. The rides had been conceived by the Congress of Racial Equality, but after severe attacks, CORE's leader James L. Farmer Jr. decided to cancel them. Nash argued that, "We can't let them stop us with violence. If we do, the movement is dead."



She was a co-author with her former husband Rev. James Bevel, of the Selma 1965 Right-To-Vote Proposal which became the 1965 Selma Movement, and greatly aided in the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

President John F. Kennedy appointed her to a national committee that led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She worked for the SCLC under Martin Luther King, Jr. from 1961 to 1965, and served as an organizer, strategist, field staff person, race-relations staff person and workshop instructor.

Nash later questioned SCLC because of its dominance by males, especially clergymen. After 1965, she broke ties with SNCC when it departed from its original nonviolent principles.

She is the mother of two children, Sherrilyn and Douglas Bevel.

“Freedom is people realizing they are their own leader.”

“Something is wrong when people follow a single leader. That has never resulted in freedom for black people.”

“Anytime you have a lot of people thinking they need one leader to tell them what to do, it’s a social illness.”