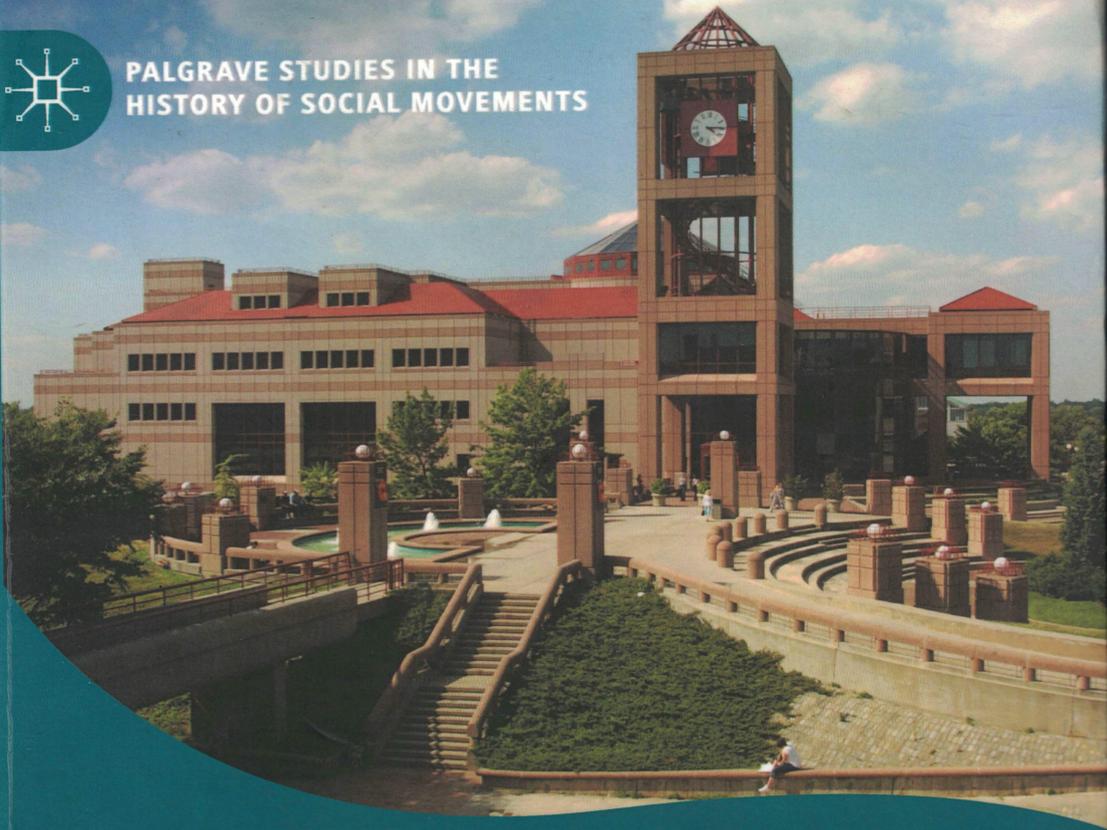




PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE  
HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



# Student Activism in 1960s America

Stories from Queens College

Magnus O. Bassey

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discipline-based and are often somewhat narrow in focus.<sup>15</sup> Since student movements of the 1960s cannot be attributed to a single explanation, it is therefore my position that to understand student movements of the 1960s, one must focus on individual historical contexts because in the critical study of social movements, motives cover a wide array of theoretical positions. The material in this study contributes to new research on student activism by shedding new light on the untold stories of individual QC student activists. The study presents first-person narratives from the actual participants, and tells their stories in their own voices, from their own records, and from the documents they left behind. It identifies the QC student activists of the 1960s; how and why they became activists, their activities, their achievement as activists, and what motivated them to think that they could make history themselves by confronting racism. It provides an intimate look at the students' lives and their social justice journey, beginning at Queens College and as they moved into their careers. The study also examines the organizing models of the student activists at QC in the 1960s.

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It has been documented that participation in activism is often a product of ideological identification with the values of the movement together with a history of previous activism.<sup>16</sup> In this context, even before the 1964 activism heated up on campus, QC students were already at the forefront of social justice work. For instance, during the summer of 1963, about forty students from QC traveled to Mexico as part of the Queens College Mexico Volunteers, sponsored by the college's Newman House to assist impoverished Mexicans to build a laundry facility in the town of Taxco. On their second trip, the volunteers built a school that is still thriving in Mexico today.<sup>17</sup> Political consciousness of students on campus was further stirred up when the Student Association hired buses for a large delegation of QC students to attend the March on Washington, D.C., where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in August 1963. These students came back to campus having taken Dr. King's message to heart and were fired up. In addition, QC students were also involved in numerous protests in New York City during the early 1960s.

According to Michael J. Sandel, "Times of trouble prompt us to recall the ideals by which we live."<sup>18</sup> At QC, social justice became the students'

guiding principle for activism and remains to this day the abiding counsel for moral and civic community work. For example, more than a matter of public debate or moral suasion, Lucy Komisar left QC between 1962 and 1963 to edit the *Mississippi Free Press* in Jackson, Mississippi despite the high levels of brutality meted out to civil rights workers in Mississippi. Lucy's example must have been instructive in the recruitment of QC volunteers for Prince Edward County during the summer of 1963 and for Freedom Summer in 1964. At about the same time, a former QC student, Dorothy M. Zellner was a full-time SNCC staff working in the South. As a student at QC, Dorothy was a writer and editor for a major student newspaper, *Crown*, influencing students on major social issues in her work against racism and discrimination. Under a different circumstance but related to activism, sixteen students from QC and one of their professors, Dr. Rachel Weddington, went to Farmville, Virginia, in the summer of 1963 to prepare Black students for classes for "free schools" that would be open to all students in the fall of 1963 because schools had been closed in Prince Edward County, Virginia, for four years by the state due to Virginia's "Massive Resistance" to integration.<sup>19</sup>

We see another example of QC activism after three civil rights workers were declared missing in Mississippi, the efforts by the leadership of the Student Help Project in highlighting and emphasizing profound shortcomings in Virginia and Mississippi generated intense catalytic resonance on campus.<sup>20</sup> This led to the establishment of "fast for freedom," during which seven QC students went on a five-day hunger strike to draw the attention of the press, television networks, and the public to what was happening in Mississippi. Another goal of the fast was to protest segregation and to put pressure on the federal government to protect civil rights workers. Some of the students involved in the fast included Gary Ackerman, a student newspaper editor (and, later, a member of the New York Senate from 1979 to 1983 and a member of the US House of Representatives from 1983 to 2013); Michael R. Wenger, chairman of the Student Help Project at QC 1964–1965 (who later served as the Deputy Director for Outreach and Program Development for President Clinton's Initiative on Race); and Ronald (Ron) F. Pollack, the Student Association President (who later was the Founding Executive Director of Families USA and the Founding Executive Director of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)). Many of the QC student activists from the 1960s have brought their social values and political commitments into successful and meaningful careers in public service, activism, and social

everyday activities.”<sup>27</sup> In short, Dr. Simon was telling these students that it was not enough for them to shout their beliefs from the rooftops or to act on their beliefs whimsically but to get out of their comfort zones regularly to back up their words with action.<sup>28</sup> Stan Shaw and Michael Wenger maintained in a book chapter that the CORE faculty advisers, three members of the education department accelerated their understanding that social justice was part of a healthy society and instigated the activist process by challenging them to do more than just protest.<sup>29</sup> Michael Wenger credits Helen Hendricks, Sidney (Sid) Simon, and Rachel Weddington with turning them from young impetuous, immature, and somewhat disrespectful young people into more mature, more respectful, more responsible, and thoughtful adults.<sup>30</sup> Lucy Komisar in her personal narrative in 2009 told her audience at QC how Michael Harrington held weekly public meetings with them at Deb’s Hall during which time they debated and shared their concerns about ideology, social movements, social justice issues, and inequality in American society.<sup>31</sup>

A reviewer had asked, just as many others have asked me, what made QC such a rich site for student activism in the 1960s although other CUNY college campuses had influential student programs like the Student Help Project, CORE, student newspapers, and others, but activism was not as intense as in QC? My answer is that unlike other CUNY campuses, members of the QC Student Help Project went to the South in 1963 as a group and saw the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) officials organize protests, boycotts, pickets, sit-ins, and resistance in Prince Edward County. As we will see elsewhere in this book, while in Virginia, members of the QC Student Help Project were equipped with the courage, information, and organizational tools to confront power, and they shared these skills with others when they returned to campus in 1963. They showed their colleagues at QC how they could confront systemic racism and become agents of change. These volunteers were able to connect protests to QC students’ profound thoughts of activism as democratic action on campus. The students who went South realized that they could channel their energies and power to bring about change. This is how Michael R. Wenger and Stan F. Shaw, two leaders of the Student Help Project who went to Prince Edward County, Virginia in 1963 made this point:

Through our Prince Edward County experience, we not only learned that we could be change agents, but we learned how to be change agents. We developed skills in communication, goal setting, team building, planning, fund-raising, political organization, community organization, teaching, and advocacy.<sup>32</sup>

Back on campus after the Virginia project, Wenger states, “We intensified our activities as we sought to generate wider and stronger support for the civil rights movement among students, and to raise their awareness of the persistent double standard with which our society viewed the value of a human life.”<sup>33</sup> Stefan M. Bradley in his book, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* documented similar findings at Columbia University some years later in 1968. This is what he said:

Many of these young people had been exposed to the Civil Rights movement in the South. Students, white and black, had traveled throughout the South, participating in freedom rides, registering voters, and even teaching in inadequate schools. After witnessing firsthand, the ugliness of racial discrimination and oppression, many of the student protesters believed that it was their obligation to change society...These black and white students, taking their cue from the Civil Rights movement, formed coalitions to fight racism in the early 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to point out here that the student activists at QC in the 1960s were by no means representatives of the campus community or even somewhere in-between, rather they were outliers who were often labeled “troublemakers”<sup>35</sup> by the college administration and many of the other students on campus because QC campus in the 1960s was conservative to the core.<sup>36</sup> Despite overwhelming odds, these activists did not succumb to the machination of their adversaries. Joan Nestle, one of the student activists at QC in the 1960s confirmed in a correspondence with me that they were called the scum of the earth at QC, but even then, they kept on going.<sup>37</sup> A lot of the students at QC at this time cared very little or not at all about social justice issues because they were inherently conservative. They were more preoccupied with their schoolwork and a few extracurricular activities. However, as Mark Levy recollected, it was only a very small group of artsy, poetry-reading, guitar-playing bohemians and beatniks that brought activism and activist backgrounds with them to

greatest surprise, one of the respondents was a person whose information I needed the most because I had almost nothing relating to his Freedom Summer service in the QC archives. On the other hand, there were abundant archival materials including biographies, printed materials, clippings, correspondence, photographs, curriculum, lesson plans, preparatory and training materials, Freedom Summer documents, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) documents, memorandums, newspaper clippings, personal letters, memorabilia, souvenirs, Freedom Summer anniversaries, and reunions among other documents in the QC archives for about 30 participants. We have this trove of information in the QC Civil Rights archives not by accident but because Mark Levy (himself a Freedom Summer volunteer) who was one of the coordinators of the Civil Rights archives at Queens College, had created a QC Roll Call of activist alumni and faculty who served in the southern Civil Rights Movement and persuaded the QC activists of the 1960s to donate their personal CRM-related documents and materials to the QC archives, which most of them did so very graciously.<sup>47</sup> Some of these documents were arranged and indexed, others were not. To conduct this research, then, I waded through piles of boxes intermittently and sorted out what I needed over a period of four years. Yes, you heard it right, four years, for it is often said that archival research is not only a difficult art but it is perhaps the most demanding task of the historian.

An in-depth examination of the lives of the student activists, a thorough review of extensive material from the archives, and interviews conducted uncover a previously untold story of the 1960s student activism at QC. Reviewing archival records, documents, interviews (oral and print), and relevant secondary sources over the course of four years has allowed me to write this book. This study is based on sources derived from records of 31 QC subjects who through their written records, archival materials, and personal interviews have told their own stories. In conformity with modern academic historiography, the research for this book is based on primary sources from archival materials collected from the Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library at QC, whose Department of Special Collections and Archives contains an impressive collection. Also important, were the archival records I examined from the University of Southern Mississippi—McCain Library and Archives. Among those records reviewed are copies of the *Mississippi Free Press* edited by Lucy Komisar, a QC student who took a year off from her studies to write and edit for the paper from 1962 to 1963. This research has also benefitted

from the *Student Movements of the 1960s Project: The Reminiscences of Mario Savio*. The Savio interview was undertaken under the auspices of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. *KZSU Project South Interviews* (SCOPE Chapter 33, Mickey Shur) from the Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California, proved helpful as well. The *KZSU* interviews were conducted by eight students from Stanford University during the summer of 1965 and were sponsored by *KZSU*, Stanford's student radio station. Other records reviewed include the *Tully-Crenshaw Feminist Oral History Project* Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, and Interview with Lucy Komisar conducted by Julie Altman. Some documents from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi were also reviewed. Other documents that have enriched the narrative in this book include the history of the Freedom Summer Project, private papers, diaries, correspondence, letters, memos, editorials, articles, letters to editors, mementos, letters to and from friends and family members of participants, memorabilia, flyers, curricular materials, and teaching aids that shed light on the contributions of QC students to the 1960s activism. Most of these materials were donated by the student activists themselves to the QC library. Some of the participants were interviewed to record their stories in their own voices. Where permitted, the attempt was made to tape the interviews for oral history and for posterity. The stories of the participants are told in their own voices and in the voices of the local people they encountered. I have identified and elaborated on the strategic moments that connect the archival materials at QC to events in the 1960s. The important questions this research is trying to answer are: Who are the QC student activists of 1960s? What catalyzed them to become activists? What did they achieve during their mission? What prompted them to think that they could make history themselves by confronting racism?

Obviously, a study of this nature required that I speak with some of the people involved. Fortunately, I was able to interview eleven subjects and one professor, Dr. Sidney B. Simon, for this book. Those interviewed were primarily people who had returned their questionnaires to me and agreed to do personal interviews with me or those who responded to some of the many questions I asked the activists on my list in the process of the research. I interviewed the eleven activists and one professor through e-mail correspondence, phone conversations, and/or face-to-face discussions. The phone and face-to-face interviews generally lasted

## Queens College: A History

*My education at Queens (College) was a political and moral education, moving from the civil rights movement to the women's movement to what I do now. It wasn't in the course catalog, but that education has been the basis for everything I've done in my life. The issue for students and others here is whether you make political and moral values part of yours.*

—Lucy Komisar

*Because the students went out into the larger community each day, as residents, family members, and jobholders, they were always part of the real world, and responded to it immediately and fully.*

—Lee Cogan

The pursuit of knowledge and the desire to serve and support others are ingrained in the history of Queens College (QC). Located on a beautiful piece of land on a hill in Flushing, Queens, QC was established with “the goal of offering a first-rate education to all people regardless of background or financial means,”<sup>1</sup> specifically within the growing population in the borough of Queens. Parents in Queens who could not afford to send their children away for college felt a pressing need to still see their children receive a college education. Although the population of the borough of Queens had grown to 1,250,000 by 1935, Queens had no public college or university of its own.<sup>2</sup> After a series of meetings held over the span

## The Pioneers

*I wanted to make more of a contribution than participating in occasional demonstrations.*

—Lucy Komisar

In this chapter, I will examine how Lucy Komisar's activism, and the advocacy of members of the Students Help Project set the tone for vigorous student activism and protests at QC in the 1960s. I consider these activists pioneers because they were the first group of students to leave QC campus to the South for activist and social justice work aimed at confronting power. The chapter will examine how Lucy Komisar's activism, and the advocacy of members of the Student Help Project set the tone for vigorous student activism and protests at QC in the 1960s. In the narrative, I will first highlight Lucy's involvement on campus, as well as how her work in Mississippi propelled her into a life of social justice activism and change before turning to the Students Help Project, both of which, I argue, paved the way for profound student activism at QC campus during the Freedom Summer of 1964. Indeed, there is a clear nexus between Lucy's activism, the advocacy of members of the Student Help Project, and the intensification of student protests at QC campus in the 1960s, although this nexus has never been clearly attributed until

this research. Historical validation of the nexus between Lucy Komisar and activism on QC campus, for instance, can be found in her work as the editor of the *Mississippi Free Press* and how she dedicated herself with zeal to the cause of social justice after she had returned to campus in 1963. Lucy founded the Dissent Forum as a venue to invite speakers to Queens College. She participated in the campus free speech protest against attempt by the QC administration to censor the *Phoenix* newspaper for running a poem about abortion. She remembered carrying a petition against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and asking her fellow students to sign. Some refused to sign because they were afraid that it would prevent them from ever getting a government job. This, Lucy said, was part of her political consciousness that made her decide, "now for the rest of my life ...I will do what I believe in and not be silenced by fear of not getting a job."<sup>1</sup>

Lucy Komisar was born in New York in 1942. Her father, David, was a salesman, and her mother, Frances, was at first a secretary and later a housewife.<sup>2</sup> Her grandparents emigrated from Russia and Eastern Europe to New York City in the early 1900s. She attended public schools both in the Bronx and on Long Island. She was a bright student who obtained exceptionally good grades in school. After graduating from high school, she entered Queens College in 1959, eventually obtaining her B.A. degree in 1964. However, in the spring of 1960 she attended a Yale University "Challenge Colloquium" wherein college students gathered to discuss current events. Though she initially wanted to become a Spanish or French teacher, she found herself also involved in activist causes while in college. During the Yale conference, she met members of the Young People's Socialist League, also known as YPSL.<sup>3</sup> The Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) was the youth group of the Socialist Party, a democratic socialist organization led by Norman Thomas.<sup>4</sup> A few months later, Lucy drove in her old Plymouth car with Michael Harrington, a member of the Socialist Party, Paul DuBrul, a YPSL, and Jack Newfeld (who was not a YPSL but had worked with fellow student Paul DuBrul on the Hunter College newspaper<sup>5</sup>), to Raleigh, North Carolina where Southern student leaders would found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Later, Lucy, with other YPSLs, served as a volunteer staff for Bayard Rustin's Committee to Defend Martin Luther King.<sup>6</sup> Back at Queens College, Lucy got involved in student politics and was chosen to represent the student government at the National Student Association Congress which was held every summer.<sup>7</sup>

Lucy was one among many protesters who picketed the ABC Paramount Corporation's offices in Manhattan at 7 West 66 Street in 1961 because the Paramount Theaters in Austin were segregated. During this protest, Lucy was one of four young protesters who held a sit-in in the company's executive offices. Although fifteen protesters were arrested during this event, Lucy was not one of them. Along with a group of peace activists, Lucy took part in a sit-in at the Russian Embassy in New York to protest the Soviet detonation of a fifty-megaton bomb.<sup>8</sup> In another protest, Lucy was arrested on a charge of criminal trespass in Elkton, Maryland, for eating with Walter Lively (an African American) in a segregated restaurant during the US Route 40 freedom rides organized by CORE. Lucy and Walter Lively spent three days in jail.<sup>9</sup> In 1962, Lucy participated in a sit-in with other members of the YPSL at Beth-el Hospital in Brooklyn in support of workers at the hospital who were not allowed to form unions, a right given to others by New York State law. Lucy and thirty-three others were arrested during this event including Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), who later became a leader in the SNCC. Lucy also took part in a protest in New York against segregated Woolworth's stores in the South. Although Lucy credits Allard Lowenstein with changing her worldview toward activism,<sup>10</sup> it was at the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) meetings that she took her first steps toward political activism. During the annual Midwest meeting of the National Student Association Congress in 1962, Lucy met William L. Higgs, a lawyer from Mississippi, who had helped found a small alternative newspaper, the *Mississippi Free Press*. Higgs needed reporters for the paper, and Lucy, who had worked on newspapers in high school and college, offered to go to Mississippi to help. She took a year's leave of absence from QC to go to Jackson, Mississippi to work on the *Mississippi Free Press* as its editor with Charlie Butts as the publisher. From 1962 to 1963, she wrote and edited a good deal of the newspaper almost completely by herself until she returned to college in 1963. Central to Lucy's editorial duties was her avid advocacy for the minority's right to vote in Mississippi. In one of her editorials in the *Mississippi Free Press* of Saturday, June 29, 1963, captioned, "IF YOU DON'T VOTE...YOU DON'T COUNT," she stated:

Last week, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested a man in connection with the murder of Medgar Evers. It is the first time that we recall seeing an arrest resulting from the many investigations the FBI has made in

regard to the abuses of the rights of people in Mississippi. There have been many other shootings in the state that can be clearly and directly connected with the attempts of [Blacks] to seek their right to vote. In most instances, the FBI has made some investigations, but we do not recall any previous arrests. ... The only sure way to have any government agency work for you is to be registered. Then when you squawk about something, that agency is going to do something (for fear you will use your voting power to see that someone takes their jobs).<sup>11</sup>

In another editorial of June 15, 1963, she wrote,

The selfish and corrupt government of the state is clearly to blame for the death of Medgar Evers. He died because he stood in defiance of the interests that wish to see Mississippi remain in its past...No one could know Medgar Evers and not hear him prod, urge, cajole, and encourage all people to register and vote so that they could end injustice and suffering in Mississippi.<sup>12</sup>

And in the editorial of June 1, 1963, captioned "*After the Storm*," Lucy stated, "Of course, we hope that something permanent and fine will come out and be left after the storm. And we have no doubt, there will be several changes—several improvements. But the only way to really assure that any improvements remain and the only way to really be able to get at the root of the trouble, is with the ballot."<sup>13</sup>

In a eulogy to Medgar Evers, Lucy extolled the virtues of the deceased as one of the finest "polling rights" advocates, and said,

Medgar Evers gave his life to building the kind of unity that would show up at the polls with greater and greater strength at each election. He knew that the only way to bring about the kind of state he envisioned was to get the deprived people of Jackson and Mississippi unified at the ballot box so that they could put into office reasonable and humane men on both the state and local level.<sup>14</sup>

The *Asbury Park Press* reported that for about a year, Lucy and Charlie Butts "drew weekly salaries of \$20 each," to which Lucy responded, "It wasn't much money, but there aren't many ways to spend money in Jackson anyway."<sup>15</sup> Writing and covering the news for the *Mississippi Free Press* was not without its risks. Indeed, when Lucy spoke with John Doar, the deputy attorney general for civil rights, after she had been

out covering the Civil Rights march in Jackson, Mississippi, Doar told Lucy, "Look, you'd better watch out, because our people who were in the street are telling us that they heard white men there talking about you. They know who you are. So, watch out."<sup>16</sup> She also experienced some harassment from the police in Mississippi.<sup>17</sup> Lucy left Mississippi in August 1963. On her way home, she stopped over in Washington, DC for the March on Washington and heard Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., give his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Back on campus during her senior year, Lucy participated in several activist causes. Apart from founding the Dissent Forum, she participated in many activist events such as carrying petitions and stopping students on the QC quad to sign. To Lucy's bewilderment, many students refused to sign because they were too afraid of the government.<sup>18</sup> Lucy was particularly disturbed by this kind of behavior on campus because she knew that the bridge to political power and change can only be built through the cooperation of students, faculty, and the people.<sup>19</sup>

After graduating from Queens College in 1964, she worked for the *New York Post* as a copy girl and later for *Village Voice* as a freelance writer. She also worked for the hat workers' union. She was a writer for the United Hat, Cap, and Millinery Workers. During her search for work, she came face-to-face with unacceptable levels of employment discrimination against women,<sup>20</sup> which led her to become involved with the National Organization for Women (NOW) to push for tougher antidiscrimination laws in the workplace. She soon became the public relations person for NOW, and in 1970 she was elected NOW public relations vice president. During her tenure, she devoted most of her energies to writing and speaking about feminism, advising those who wanted to start new chapters of NOW and other activist organizations, speaking at colleges and clubs because she believed that using her talents in this way was more rewarding and fruitful. Lucy's accomplishments included getting the US government to change its contract compliance rules in the early 1970s to include women.<sup>21</sup> Working with others, she was also able to get the Federal Communications Commission to require affirmative action for women's employment in radio and TV stations.

Lucy worked as NOW public relations vice president for about eighteen months and decided to direct her efforts to other pressing issues. Going forward, she devoted a great deal of her attention to journalism, mostly freelance writing. She also took interest in journalism concerned with foreign politics because through working in developing countries she

“became aware of the use of the tax haven system to help dictators loot those countries of assets, and corporations cheat on taxes.”<sup>22</sup> According to one biographer:

In the 1980s and 1990s, she (Lucy) wrote about international affairs, with a focus on movements for democracy in the developing world. In that context she reported from Central America, the Philippines, Zaire and elsewhere in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. She also wrote about European politics and foreign policy and covered dissident movements in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. She was banned from East Germany and harassed by security police in Zaire.<sup>23</sup>

Lucy is an investigative journalist and activist whose work covers a wide array of topics from financial corruption to corporate fraud to offshore banking, international corruption, international crimes, looting of countries, etc.<sup>24</sup>

As a journalist, Lucy has written for numerous papers.<sup>25</sup> She was a member of PEN (Organization of Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors, and Novelists), and was a member of the organization's board of directors until 1996. Her PEN membership included her serving on the Freedom to Write Committee and visiting Uruguay under dictatorship to report on repression of the press. The Freedom to Write Committee offers support to writers, journalists, and editors who have been jailed, persecuted, or censored for their writing.<sup>26</sup> Lucy was also a member of the American Civil Liberties Union, among others.<sup>27</sup> During her prolific career, Lucy has won several distinguished journalism awards.<sup>28</sup> Lucy's other distinctions include working as the campaign manager for James McNamara for New York City Council in 1965. She also worked as special assistant to the deputy administrator, Human Resources Administration, New York City, 1967–1968. She was the press secretary for Allard Lowenstein's Congressional primary campaign for the 5th District of Long Island, New York, in 1968. She served as the press secretary in the City Council President campaign of Elinor Guggenheimer in 1969. Lucy has worked as a writer, reporter, and producer of several documentaries. Currently, she is a freelance writer and has written several books and belongs to several professional organizations. She was one of three women who broke down the “no women allowed” barrier at McSorley's, a men's only bar in Manhattan in the 1970s to test the new public accommodations law in New York City.<sup>29</sup> She is the author of the report, *Citigroup: A*

*History and Culture of Tax Evasion* (2006). Her investigative reporting has indicted major American banks and corporations in assisting third world dictators to loot their countries of assets and cheat on their taxes.<sup>30</sup> On this aspect of her work, she once said:

Through my work in developing countries, I became aware of the use of the tax haven system to help dictators loot those countries of assets and corporations cheat on taxes. And I turned my attention a dozen years ago to investigating the offshore bank and corporate secrecy system. I found that it was run by the big international banks to help tax evasion by corporations and the mega rich, to hide and launder the money of drug and arms traffickers and other criminals, to help dictators of mineral-rich countries steal revenues, to enable international corporations bribe corrupt officials to get contract, to help divorcing men hide their incomes.<sup>31</sup>

Lucy is presently a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has published many revelations about governmental fraud in America and abroad.<sup>32</sup>

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Though events such as those mentioned above galvanized students at Queens College into activism, it appears to me that other national events added impetus to the sweeping student activist movement at QC in the 1960s. Of great significance here was the contribution of the Student Help Project volunteers in connecting protests to students' profound thoughts of activism as democratic action on campus. Because members of the Student Help Project had been exposed to Civil Rights activism when they went to the South, they were able to provide students on QC campus when they returned with informational and organizational tools to understand how they might confront systemic racism and become agents of change.<sup>33</sup>

The Student Help Project was a program in which QC students volunteered to tutor minority and low-income students in Jamaica, Queens, with Professors Rachel T. Weddington, Sidney B. Simon, and Mickey Brody of the education department acting as their advisers.<sup>34</sup> These faculty members also mentored QC students who went to Virginia, where schools were shut down by orders from the state for the purpose of stopping school integration. Following the unanimous decision of the US Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), that “separate but

been no specific outreach to Jews, but there was a great [spirit of] volunteerism in Jewish America, people who thought, 'This is important, I need to be involved in this.' Rather than us specifically appealing to Jews, this was something that appealed to Jews. It was an observable phenomenon, out of all proportion to the percentage of Jews in the general population."<sup>12</sup> The motivation and inspiration for participation by each of the student activists are interwoven in their personal stories throughout this book, though I will go into a little detail here, specifically for the White and Jewish students. Although Lucy Komisar credits Allard Lowenstein, Michael Harrington and the political and moral education she received at Queens College for changing her worldview toward activism, it was at the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) meetings that Lucy took her first steps toward political activism.<sup>13</sup> Elliot Linzer came to student activism through his membership in CORE and the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). Arthur Gatti was an active member of CORE and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), two of the most prominent organizations that worked for social, racial, and economic justice. He was also affiliated with the anti-Vietnam War movement, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the Youth International Party, and the War Resisters League. Joan Nestle was a strong member of CORE and Andrew Berman was both a CORE member and a member of the SDS. Other CORE members were Michael Wenger and Stan Shaw. Many of the activists from QC had a prior history of activism or were involved in some form of movement participation. For example, many of those who volunteered for Freedom Summer from QC had protested at the New York World's Fair and marched against discrimination at New York City's Woolworth's on Thirty-fourth Street or attended the March on Washington.<sup>14</sup> Andrew Goodman was in the picket lines at the New York World's Fair and marched in demonstrations for equal rights at New York City's Woolworth's on Thirty-fourth Street. This was also true of Mark Levy, who began his activism during his days in student politics and took his first steps toward social justice activism in the student union. According to Mark Levy, his sense of being able to work with others to bring about change determined for him the type of activism he was willing to invest his time and resources in.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Mario Savio (who was not Jewish) went to Albany with a group of students to protest a proposed fee raise at CUNY colleges. He joined the picket line for civil rights demonstration and antidiscrimination at the New York Woolworth's and served as a picket captain during the student strike of November 16, 1961, at

Queens College. This strike was organized by the Student Association president, Kenneth (Kenny) Warner. One of the QC activists I interviewed told me that he joined the movement because social change was in the air in the 1960s. According to him, the Civil Rights movement was growing and winning victories: the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins at lunch counters, freedom rides, desegregation of schools, and the March on Washington. The injunction to Americans by the young and charismatic President John F Kennedy to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," was very inspirational and electrifying to many students. Some students believed that possibilities that did not exist before now seemed within reach, making it the most exciting thing youths could engage in.

It has also been said that integration into supportive networks acts as the structural draw that encourages some students to participate in activism. Yes, a few of the student activists I interviewed for this book told me that they joined the movement because some people they knew and respected reached out to them and invited them to join.<sup>16</sup> As Doug McAdam discovered in a series of his studies, student activism was quite often consistent with the core values the students learned at home.<sup>17</sup> Progressive politics animated Michael Wenger because his parents were progressives who hosted a fundraising event for Aaron Henry, head of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in Michael's former high school. Henry even spent the night in Wenger parents' home.<sup>18</sup> Another student in this category was Andrew Berman whose early life was much influenced by his parents' leftist politics. While in college, Berman took interest in peace, social justice, and civil rights causes and joined organizations that emphasized the exchange of ideas concerning social change. Also, according to one writer, Andrew Goodman was born into a leftist Jewish family "steeped in intellectual and socially progressive activism and were devoted to social justice."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as noted by Jerusha O. Conner, some of the student activists of the 1960s came "from middle and upper class affluent homes run by liberal, well-educated parents who encouraged criticism and intellectual discussion and practiced permissive child rearing."<sup>20</sup> Jon N. Hale argued that many of the 1960s movement volunteers had parents who were active in the civil rights movement themselves or were advocates of social justice.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, Michael Wenger and Stan Shaw explained that the Queens College volunteers, some of whom were Jewish, had parents who were Holocaust survivors or had,

raining down on men, women, and children. This as he saw it, was so very unreal against what he had been raised to believe about American democracy.<sup>50</sup> And as he later said, “identifying your efforts with people who very obviously were oppressed... just appeals to human beings.”<sup>51</sup> He saw Freedom Summer as a unique opportunity to change America. In answer to a question why she got involved while other students were standing by? Lucy Komisar said, “It was a sense of morality, and it’s very hard to figure out where that comes from. I think my parents always, being liberal, had some of that sense about social justice; I guess they passed it on to me.”<sup>52</sup> Peter Geffen participated in SCOPE because “Andrew Goodman’s memory had to be honored by continuing his work and not ignoring what he was doing.”<sup>53</sup> There were those who joined the Movement because social change was in the air and they wanted to be part of it.

This chapter examines the motivational factors in movement participation by QC student activists of the 1960s through their own voices and the records they left behind. I conclude that there is considerable individual variation in what accounts for movement participation. And according to McAdam, “As social phenomena, social movements are large and diverse enough to provide a broad umbrella under which a wide variety of participants can huddle.”<sup>54</sup>

## NOTES

1. Lee Cogan, In Stephen Stepanchev ed. *The People’s College on the Hill: Fifty Years at Queens College, 1937–1987*. New York, Queens College, 1988, p. 9.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Mark Levy, “About Freedom Summer ’64 and QC,” p. 4.
5. “Student Movements of the 1960s Project: The Reminiscences of Mario Savio.” Box 2, folder 7, Arthur Gatti Collection, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York, p. 29.
6. Michael Wenger, *My Black Family, My White Privilege: A White Man’s Journey through the Nation’s Racial Minefield* Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc. 2012, p. 42.

7. Jerusha O. Conner, *The New Student Activists: The Rise of Neoactivism on College Campuses*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.
8. Eric L. Hirsch, “Sacrifice for the Cause: Group Processes, Recruitment, and Commitment in a Student Social Movement.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April, 1990, pp. 243–254.
9. Doug McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer.” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 1986, pp. 64.
10. Jonathan Mark writing for New York Jewish Week of July 16, 2014, estimates that about 50% of the 1000 students who participated in Freedom Summer were Jewish. See Jonathan Mark, “Freedom Summer Memories: Black-Jewish Alliance Was Brief, Beautiful.” *New York Jewish Week*, July 16, 2014.
11. James Farmer, “Foreword.” In Jack Salzman, Adina Back and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, eds. *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*. George Braziller in association with The Jewish Museum, New York, NY: 1992, p. 13.
12. Mark, “Freedom Summer Memories,” *New York Jewish Week*, July 16, 2014.
13. Lucy Komisar: A Personal History of Civil Rights and Feminism, Talk at Panel on “Women, Queens College, and the Civil Rights Movement,” March 16, 2009, Queens College. See Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 49.
14. In Doug McAdam’s study of Freedom Summer 1964, about 76% of the participants had taken part in earlier protests. Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988. See also, Doug McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer.” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 1986, p. 82.
15. Similarly, Mario Savio (who was not Jewish) went to Albany with a group of students to protest a proposed fee raise at CUNY colleges. He joined the picket line for a civil rights demonstration and antidiscrimination at the New York Woolworth’s and served as a picket captain during the student strike of November 16, 1961, at Queens College, organized by the Student Association president, Kenneth Warner. (See Cagin and Dray, *We are not Afraid*, p. 103.