

(upbeat/pickup words in parentheses)

2. *That which touches me most is that I had a chance to work with people
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me*
3. *(To me) young people come first, they have the courage where we failed
(And if) I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale*
4. *(The older I get, the better I know that the secret of my going on
(Is when the) reins are in the hands of the young who dare to run
against the storm*
5. *(Not need)ing to clutch for power, not needing the light just to
shine on me
(I need to) be one in the number as we stand against tyranny*
6. *Struggling myself don't mean a whole lot, I've come to realize
(That) teaching others to stand and fight is the only way
our struggle survives*
7. *(I'm a) woman who speaks in a voice and I must be heard
(Some)times I can be quite difficult, I'll bow to no man's word*

ELLA'S SONG

Words and Music by Bernice Johnson Reagon

To Ella Baker

The words in this song are Ella Baker's. Her legacy of organizing against exploitation, racism, and injustice stretches over fifty years. As an advisor to SNCC and my political mother, she tried to teach us that the most important work an organizer can do is to train new organizers, so that in the struggle you acknowledge that your continuance rests with the children.

The first verse is from a statement Baker made about the murder of three Civil Rights Movement workers, Mickey Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney, during the Mississippi Campaign in the summer of 1964. A search was mounted after their disappearance that involved dragging the rivers of Mississippi. As they searched the muddy waters they turned up bodies of Black men who had never been looked for because they were Black. We all knew that the racism of this country was such that we were now looking for James Chaney, a Black Mississippian, because his fellow Civil Rights Workers were white. Ella Baker said, "Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons, is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest, until this happens."

ELLA BAKER
(1903-1986)
Civil Rights Activist

A key figure in the development of such civil rights organizations as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Ella Baker was an exemplar of "group-centered" leadership, which stressed consensus over hierarchy and development of both the leadership and "followership" potentials of every individual.

Baker developed her organizing skills in New York City during the Depression, where she cofounded and ran the Young Negroes' Cooperative League. She went on to work for the NAACP in a variety of capacities before being tapped to set up and manage the SCLC in the late 1950s. A group of student activists convened by Baker in 1960 grew into SNCC; members such as Julian Bond and Eleanor Holmes Norton would later describe the velvet hand of Ella Baker in guiding the organization—and especially in developing the talents of its young members as they wrote their own chapter of the movement.

