de Jong Abstract and Bio

Abstract:

Despite hopes that civil rights legislation passed in the mid-1960s would ensure justice and equality for African Americans, poverty and economic dependence hindered black southerners’ efforts to exercise their rights in the post-civil rights South. This paper analyzes the efforts of social justice activists who continued the freedom struggle beyond the 1960s by harnessing new resources made available by the federal government’s War on Poverty. Through innovative self-help initiatives, they pioneered effective approaches to solving social problems that offered possibilities for improving the lives of poor white and black people. These initiatives threatened the dominance of regional elites, who successfully undermined the War on Poverty by discouraging white participation and portraying it as an attack on free enterprise that wasted taxpayers’ money on programs that only served black people.

Bio:

Greta de Jong is a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research focuses on the connections between race and class and the ways that African Americans fought for economic as well as political rights in the twentieth century. She is the author of *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900–1970* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002); *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle after 1965* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); and *You Can’t Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), which received awards from the Southern Historical Association, the Agricultural History Society, and the Southern Association for Women Historians.