

SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference: Baker Award: The Algebra Project, Jamil Al-Amin

The first Ms. Ella Baker award is presented to the Algebra Project. The award is presented by Joanne Grant to Bob Moses. Ed Brown presents the situation of his brother, Jamil Al-Amin (aka H. Rap Brown) to the audience.

Date: April 2000

Location: Raleigh, NC - Shaw University

Host

[Martha Prescod Norman](#) - SNCC organizer; member of Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee

Moderator

Jacqueline Brockington - Ella Baker's niece

Presenter

Joanne Grant - Journalist and filmmaker; documented the Civil Rights Movement through reporting and film; author of *"Black Protest"* and director of *"Fundí: The Story of Ella Baker."*

Speakers

[Bob Moses](#) - Field Secretary, SNCC; Director of SNCC's Mississippi Project; key architect of Freedom Summer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party; founder of the Algebra Project.

[Diane Nash](#) - Founding member of SNCC; leader in the Nashville Student Movement and Freedom Rides; central strategist in nonviolent direct action and voting rights campaigns.

[Ed Brown](#) - SNCC field organizer in Alabama and Mississippi; active in voter registration, grassroots education, and direct action in hostile Southern environments.

[Willie Peacock](#) - SNCC organizer from Mississippi; worked extensively on voter registration and community empowerment in Greenwood and the Delta; key figure in building local Black political leadership.

[Elizabeth \(Betita Martinez\) Sutherland](#) - SNCC communications staff; later a leading Chicana activist, author, and founder of *El Grito del Norte* newspaper; central voice in multiracial organizing and intersectional liberation work.

****NOTE:** Video begins with remarks already in progress. **

Jacqueline Brockington:...so at this time, Joanne will make the official presentation.

Joanne Grant: I am very pleased to present this award to Bob Moses, my friends and comrade and the [Algebra Project](#).¹ And I'd like everybody who's connected with the Algebra Project to stand up and accept a round of applause.

Thank you. This award is the Ella J. Baker Award for Service to the Community. It's presented by my publisher, John Wiley & Sons, who published *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*, my biography of Ella Baker. The chairman of the board of John Wiley was very eager to present this award because he once met [Ella Baker](#) at a meeting in New York many years ago. He was so impressed by her that when the book came out, he was really glad to be able to present this award.

Bob and his wife, [Janet \[Jemmott\]](#), founded the Algebra Project in 1982. I just wanted to read you a very short statement from the *Harvard Educational Review* about the project. The project relies on the Mississippi organizing tradition and on Ella Baker's techniques. As a matter of fact, this article is entitled "Organizing in the Spirit of Ella."

"The Algebra Project emphasizes the centrality of families to the work of organizing, the empowerment of grassroots people and their recruitment for leadership, and the principle of casting down your bucket where you are and organizing in the context in which one lives and works."

So I'm very pleased to present this check to Bob Moses and the Algebra Project.

Bob Moses: Well, I wanted to try and talk without the mic, 'cause I'm not gonna talk a lot. When Joanne and Jackie organized an event for Ella while she was still alive, they asked me if I would introduce her. So when we got up on the podium, Ella turned to me and said, "Well, they got us up here where they put all the others."

So I've been thinking of how to do this, what we could do to respect what we are doing here and Ella. This morning when I was introduced, Jackie said she wanted to introduce one of Ella's children. And so what I thought we could do now is—[Mrs. Gray](#) did something wonderful for us this morning when she asked us to call out the names of people that had gone before us who helped prepare the way for us.

¹ The Algebra Project is a national nonprofit founded by Bob Moses in the 1980s that uses mathematics—particularly algebra—as a tool to empower marginalized students, especially Black and low-income youth, by fostering mathematical literacy as a key to full citizenship and participation in the 21st-century economy and democracy.

Ella's legacy is her children. I was wondering if we couldn't, one by one—anyone here who recognizes him or herself as one of Ella's children—just stand up and say your name for us and give flesh and blood and spirit to Ella's legacy.

My name is Bob Moses.

Joanne Grant: My name is Joanne Grant.

[various members of the audience]:

Curtis Muhammad.

Lauren Guyot.

Joyce Ladner.

Eric Jones.

Reggie Robinson.

Avon Rollins.

Marshall Jones.

Marion Barry.

Bob Zellner.

Euvester Simpson.

Victoria Jackson Gray Adams.

Martha Prescod Norman: Next, we would like to recognize Diane Nash. Here she is. We'd just like to recognize Diane as a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The woman who set the standard for all the women who followed her in terms of courage, thoughtfulness, militance, and kindness. Now Diane, we got rid of all this concrete reward when we thought you weren't coming. So we have a song for you from Miss Bettie Fikes.

Bettie Fikes: [singing]

*I've been in the storm, so long
I've been in the storm, so long
I've been in the storm, so long
But I'm trying to make heaven my home...*

Diane Nash: That was just beautiful. Thank you so much for that, Bettie. And the beauty of the music and the spirit and the love with which the award was presented is worth much more than money.

Martha Norman Prescod: Next, is Ed Brown here? While he's coming, I also want to mention that the statement that you read in support of Jamile was initially written by Mike Thelwell. [indistinct] Clairborne, and Bill Strickland and I sort of formed a committee where we got it together and sent it off. And so we're asking Ed Brown, his brother, to say a few words.

Ed Brown: Good afternoon. Let me say how wonderful it is to be here with all you young people. There are some of you young, the others—well, I lie. Let me begin by extending to you the heartfelt gratitude and salaams of my brother, Jamil Al-Amin. Most of you may know him as [H. Rap Brown](#).

In his own words, he would like for me to greet you in the way in which Muslims greet each other and say to you: as-salamu alaykum. Jamil, at this point in time, has been incarcerated in the Montgomery County Jail. He is awaiting an extradition hearing that will take place on the 21st of April, at which point in time, he will probably be transferred back to Georgia.

Let me just tell you that Jamil does not want you or me or anyone to feel down or depressed about his situation. Jamil is a fighter, and he will continue to fight in relationship to these charges that have been placed against him. He is in good health. He was not wounded, as was reported by the press. And there are many other kinds of things that have been reported by the press which you should certainly suspend belief in, because they have no foundation in fact.

There has been a deliberate attempt in terms of demonizing him and reducing his humanity. For those of you who know him, you will know that many of the allegations that have been leveled at him are not part of his character. He said to me—because I have not had a chance to talk to him in a manner which is conducive for us to have privacy—he said to me, “Don’t worry. The truth will come out. Truth crushed to earth will rise again.”

So I want you to understand that you are not looking at someone who is by any means defeated. They have touched the rock and they do not know what kind of fight they have on their hands in this situation.

I feel that, and he feels that, the struggle continues. It will continue around his case. It will continue in terms of requests that people have made of me about things that they can do. The first thing is that you can offer him your prayers, and he does not take that lightly as being a religious person.

The second thing that we have to do is begin to educate people about who is Jamil Al-Amin, who is H. Rap Brown? We have to repair and restore his humanity. We have to see him as the

multidimensional person he is and basically debunk the kinds of charges that have been made against him—that he is simply, quote, “a Black Panther,” or that he is, quote, “a cop killer.”

Jamil, as you know him—and those of you who worked with him in the movement—was courageous and untiring in his efforts in relationship to the cause in which he believed. He simply brings that also to what he sees as his mission now, which is the building of an Islamic community in the United States.

The second thing that we can do is build support committees for Jamil, and that becomes important to ensure that we try and create a balanced kind of atmosphere and eradicate some of the poison that has been placed in the atmosphere by the unfair, overwhelmingly negative coverage that has been given to him.

The third thing that we can do, obviously, is that those of us who are inclined and would like to basically be supporters of his in terms of financial contributions—there is a defense fund. There is a leaflet that will be available to you which talks about where you can mail whatever contribution you so choose to make.

I won’t take up any more of your time with regard to that other than to say, we are involved and continue to be involved in a struggle. It is not an ending struggle. We sometimes forget about the fact, or we pause and believe that somehow that struggle has come to an end. It doesn’t come to an end until we die.

As long as there’s one person who’s oppressed, we’re involved in a struggle. As long as there’s one person who is needy, we’re involved in a struggle. As long as justice is denied to anyone, justice is denied to us all—and we are involved in a struggle.

The only thing that I can tell you in terms of Jamil Al-Amin is: that struggle continues. Thank you.

Allow me one moment, because I am remiss here. I have to do one thing. I really do appreciate the statement that was drawn by you and read earlier, and I will take it to him and share it with him. I’d like to especially single out [Michael Thelwell](#), because as I understand it, he labored long and hard in putting together the struggle. I understand that it was 600 pages. Yes. So therefore, I think that not only should we thank Michael Thelwell, I thank the editors as well.

Martha Prescod Norman: Now, if those of you who haven’t received the statement—it’s here at the head table, as is a pad for anybody to sign who wants to do that. I’m going to do a couple of housekeeping things while the people from the Walking Wounded Project come forward to make their short presentation.

The panels this afternoon, which we hope to start shortly after 3:30—you might want to take out your pens and pencils because we've been scrambling for rooms to accommodate the size of this gathering.

Hollis Watkins: People are beginning to get up and move. Could we ask people to just have a minute of silent prayer for Brother Al-Amin?

Martha Prescod Norman: There's been a request for a moment of prayer for Amin. So if we could have one moment, and then we'll go on with the rest. All right.

Thank you. All right. I'm going to read very quickly where the panels are located this afternoon.

“Black and White Together”—with [Anne Braden](#), [Jim Forman](#), and [Zoharah Simmons](#)—in the Estey Hall Auditorium.

A discussion of *Ain't Scared of Your Jails* with Diane Nash, [Reggie Robinson](#), and [Bob Zellner](#) will be in C2 in the convention center, with Bob Zellner as the moderator. [Tim Jenkins](#) is the moderator on the first one.

“The Media Sixties” panel will be in the convention center D2 with [Julian Bond](#), [Doris Derby](#), and [Dotty Zellner](#).

“Organizing Student Movements Today”—D3—[MacArthur Cotton](#), [Dave Dennis](#), [Hollis Watkins](#), Sekout Franklin, Deidra Edwards, and Susan Glisson.

“Teaching the Movement in the Primary Grades” will be conducted by Maggie Donovan in the Inness Room of Estey Hall.

“Contemporary Organizing: Combining Labor with Communities”—with [Curtis Hayes Mohamed](#), Pat Bryant, and Charles Ensley—will be in the Estey Conference Room.

“The Sit-in Movement”—these are heck panels here—Dion Diamond, [Charles Jones](#), Avon Rollins, [Frank Smith](#), and Virginia Thornton will be at the convention center in E2.

“Organizing in Alabama”—with Eric Jones, [Janet Moses](#), and [Cleve\[land\] Sellers](#)—will be in E3.

“How Do We Get to the Just Society”—with [Casey Hayden](#), [James Lawson](#), and Bob Moses—in C1 in the convention center.

“Gender and Democratic Movements”—[Victoria Gray](#) and [Gloria Richardson](#) —

Audience Question: Where would that be?

Martha Prescod Norman: Oh, I'm sorry. In E1 in the convention center.

The film *Freedom Song* will be shown in Room B in the convention center, with discussion by [Dorie Ladner](#), [June Johnson](#), [Chuck McDew](#), and [Brenda Travis](#)—all people who are featured in this film directly or indirectly.

"Teaching in the Spirit of Ms. Baker, the Algebra Project, and the Freedom Rides" will be in the convention center in E4.

"Freedom Schools Then and Now" with [Charlie Cobb](#) and [Mary Lane](#) in E5 in the convention center.

"Teaching the Movement: What Do Our Students Get From It?" will be in the snack bar out here—we ran out of room—with John Dittmer, Timothy Tyson, and myself.

The book signing is in the William Gary Student Center from five to six. And then there's a freedom walk that begins at the Sheraton Hotel at seven. Is it—oh, I'm sorry. It's canceled. Then at eight o'clock, the cultural evening with a wonderful concert by the SNCC [Freedom Singers](#) will be at St. Peter's AME Church—St. Paul's. Some say Peter and some say Paul.

Can we have your attention for one more presentation please? Could you hold down one minute, please? We're not finished.

Willie Peacock: My name is Waziah Peacock. Some know me as Willie Peacock—whichever you can think of will do. This is not going to be a long talk. I'm really making this presentation to some key people here and not really leaving anybody out, but Tim Jenkins made a referral to what we are trying to really deal with.

And that is many of us who were part of that legacy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SCLC [[Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#)], and CORE [[Congress of Racial Equality](#)], NAACP [[National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)] who worked out in the field and really became real close comrades in arms and did many things and experienced together.

You hear of such things as you walk through the halls, since you've been here. People: "Oh, I haven't seen you in 35 years." "I haven't even heard from you, man. I'm really glad to hear you." "Oh, your brother passed?" "Man, that was three years ago." Many people don't even know that my brother was a part of the Freedom Singers.

What I'm trying to say is that we, on the West Coast, we've identified about 60 people that live out there that we could identify as walking wounded—folks who have many needs,

psychologically and physically—ills and spiritual depression, you know.² And we decided we would come together and form a committee made up of such people as [Jean Wiley](#) and myself, and Betita—some of you know her as Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez—and Mary Loveless O’Neil, and Mike Miller, and so on.

I’ve passed out some of the proposal that we’ve drafted, which will become the basis of the application we’re going to make to the Tides Foundation to receive tax-exempt funds—not just to bring together money, but to form a staff of people, of us, to go around and bring together some type of identifying of those people that worked with us so closely and are in dire need of help.

Some folks don’t have the willingness or the energy to access these resources that already exist. So we can be friends and start communication with each other to begin to heal ourselves. This is what the walking wounded program is all about. Many people that were on the committee when we were forming it—they don’t like that name. And so we got two things here: the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, and Walking Wounded of the Civil Rights Movement.

But anyway, nobody’s going to volunteer and come together and heal us. We’re going to have to heal ourselves. We’re going to have to write our own history the way we want it written. And we’re going to have to exhibit the archival stuff in places and ways where we want them. Many of us are still alive and so disjointed in terms of being in contact with each other—it’s very bad.

I don’t know—we think we got forever to live here. That one of these days, after a while, we’re going to be in touch with each other. When we get the resources, when we get rich or something. But we could write each other. We could form—where in the states where we have at least three to five people—we could form ourselves a committee to make sure we are in touch with the rest of us in other states and out of the country, wherever we are. So that we can form a tight unit and maybe start that as a project to try to restore and make healthier again the Beloved Community and expand that internationally as we set out to do.

So you’ll see me walking around here. I don’t intend to leave anybody out, but I want to make sure those of us who have this work to do of bringing ourselves back together get this proposal that we’ve formulated to begin our work of doing that. Some of you I’ve already given this to. And at this time, we’re developing a website. And I’m going to let Betita [Elizabeth Sutherland] talk about that.

Elizabeth Sutherland: Yeah, just two minutes. Okay. As my brother here was explaining, you know, veterans of the Civil Rights Movement—we don’t have a Veterans Administration to take care of folks. There’s all kinds of groups—the veterans of the Spanish Civil War, the Lincoln

² "Walking wounded" refers to individuals who have endured significant trauma—psychological, physical, or spiritual—but continue to function outwardly in daily life. In the context of the passage, it describes movement veterans or community members on the West Coast who carry unseen or unaddressed wounds from years of struggle, oppression, or burnout.

Brigade—they've got an organization. World War II veterans have an organization. People in other struggles have had organizations.

There is none for the veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. So that's the idea here. We are calling it the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement Project—or, if you like to say it, walking wounded, because some people definitely are.

The website is a major tool of this project. And I'm just going to talk two minutes about what is on that website, which is up now. Anybody wants to write it down—it's www.crmvet.org. All right?

C-R-M—Civil Rights Movement veterans—dot org. Okay. And there'll be some interest in it, I think, also for young folks, not just for the older wounded, but I'll get to the reason for that in a minute.

Audience Question: Does "vet" have an "s" on it?

Elizabeth Sutherland: No, just "vet." Okay. Yeah—www.crmvet.org. Okay, so that's the website. It is up and running. It's just started, and it has three sections—four sections.

One is a section that I think will be of interest to everybody, which is what we're calling the "Veteran Section." It's where we're asking people to post information about themselves—what you were before in the Civil Rights Movement, what you're doing now, how you are. Put a picture of yourself in there—hey, you can put photos on the website—so everybody can see how gorgeous you still are or whatever. You can look up people there who you haven't been able to find, which is another asset we think, to this project. You can post information about anything you want to, just as long as it is not 99 pages long.

Secondly, there will be information on this website about resources that we hope to find that might help people—like ways to get health insurance, maybe cheap or free—whatever the needs are, for the different needs that were mentioned. Also, putting people in touch to form local committees, like you said, because a few folks in the Bay Area can't do it alone, nor should we. That would be a sort of communication network and identification of resources.

Third, there will be a memorial section where—sometimes you find out two years later, "Well, so-and-so died last week"—we can keep more up to date on those things, and people can pass the word about those who have passed as they wish.

And finally, there will be a list of resources and links to getting more information about them. So we hope that you all will consider adding your names and your histories and photos, if possible, to the website.

Sort of the motto, I think—at least for me—behind this website is: *Let the circles go unbroken.* All the circles. Thank you.

Martha Prescod Norman: One final thing is that we want to recognize Joanne Grant who formed the fundamental idea for this conference, and for Charles Payne and Dr. Moses for taking it up.

Julian Bond: And let us thank Martha Norman for organizing it.

Martha Prescod Norman: And I'm asking Brenda Travis and [Muriel Tillinghast](#) to go to the gender panel. Thank you.