

Telling and Teaching the SNCC Story from the Inside Out and the Bottom-Up

SNCC 60th Anniversary Conference

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Speakers include:

Deborah Menkart - Executive Director at Teaching for Change

Judy Richardson - SNCC Veteran, SNCC Legacy Project Board Member

Jessica Rucker - Electives Teacher & Department Chair, Euphemia Lofton Haynes High School

This discussion centers around providing various strategies on how a teacher or community leader can properly teach the history of SNCC. Also, SNCC veteran Judy Richardson provides actual accounts of the important role women and music played within the organization of SNCC.

Deborah Menkart: Okay. There are thousands of stories like the one of Harriet Moore.¹

Freedom schools are one example of educational forum that introduced a curriculum of liberation. You can also learn more about the freedom schools at the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] Digital Gateway and the civil rights movement archives. More recently, more than a hundred thousand teachers have registered at the Zen Education Project to download lessons, to teach outside the textbook. Of course, in response to truth-telling over the generations, there has always been a tax. Currently, GOP [Republican Party] bills in about 27 states are trying to ban teaching about institutionalized racism, and teachers are responding by saying that they are committed to truth-telling by those bills.

Therefore, what we're going to talk about today requires not only learning and teaching the history that's not in the textbook. It also requires applying those lessons to defend the right to teach that history. There are many themes about the civil rights movement that are missing or misrepresented in textbooks. We'll share this list that I've got here on the screen in the chat box, which includes those titles or those themes and many more.

But for our session today, Judy Richardson and Jessica Rucker will focus on three from that list: the roles of women, young people, and music in the movement. Judy will talk about her personal connection to this history, and Jessica will share teaching stories. If you have questions, please place them in the chat in all caps; we'll try to get to them. We will begin with Judy talking about how the role of women in the civil rights movement, history, and, in particular, the role of women in SNCC, including herself. It looks like we might need to start over.

I'm gonna wait for instructions here as taught and represented in textbooks. We'll share the long list in the chat box for our session today. Judy Richardson and Jessica Rucker will focus on three from that list: the roles of women, young people, and music in the movement. Judy will talk

¹ Freedom Schools- An education program that was developed by SNCC(Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) to help educate and inform Black american in regions where they organized to ensure that

about her personal connection to this history. And Jessica will share teaching stories. If you have questions, please place them in the chat in all caps. We will begin with Judy Richardson talking about how the role of women is portrayed in the civil rights movement, history, and in particular, the role of women in SNCC, including herself.

Judy Richardson: Oh, thank you, Deborah; you know, being here with you and Jessica makes me feel like I'm in one of your wonderful teaching for change in education teacher sessions. In fact, I think it was just last week. I enjoyed learning from Kate Messer's session with Jessica as moderator. But the themes that you've gone through represent the characterizations most often misrepresented and sometimes very deliberately about the 1960s movement that SNCC[Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] played such an integral role in helping to organize.

But I wanna start with how I first understood how this movement was being framed, it was 1979, and I was the first and, for a while, the only production staffer at Blackside Productions in Boston for what became eyes on the prize, you know, that seminal 14-hour series on the civil rights movement. So, in 1979, I'm sitting in the Blackside production office, reading *Stride Toward Freedom*, Dr. King's account of the ²Montgomery bus boycott. And I see the name of ³Joanne Robinson, and I think she's gonna come up on screen.

Video Gallery Begins

And I see the name of Joanne Robinson, and I think, whoa, you know, I'm finally saying the name of a woman besides Mrs. Parks. Most importantly, Joanne is described as a leader of the ⁴women's political council in Montgomery. So I do some digging, and I finally found her because we wanna do an interview with her. She's a teacher in LA in Los Angeles, and I call her. She proceeds to tell me on the phone about the night that ⁵Rosa Parks was arrested and how she goes undercover at night to her college, the HBCU[Historically Black College and University] the black college, Alabama State College in Montgomery, to run off 35,000. Are you talking about a mimeograph machine, right? 35,000 leaflets.

About how her organization, the Women's Political Council[WPC], used their network. So these people had a network of black teachers and black business women in Montgomery to spread the word of Mrs. Parks' arrest throughout the black community the next morning. Now, this made

² Montgomery bus boycott- A protest against the bus system in Montgomery Alabama that was organized by civil right leaders and supporters, the protest lasted for 381 days from 1955 to 1956. During this protest Black Americans refused to ride the buses in Montgomery Alabama and instead walked and took rides their destinations. As a result of this protest.

³ Joanne Robinson- A civil rights leader who was a leader of the Women Political Council in 1955, under her leadership the organization was able to help ignite the Montgomery bus boycott.

⁴ Women's political council(WPC)- An organization of professional Black American women in Montgomery Alabama, in 1955 the organization what was then led by Joana Robinson at the time, was responsible for initiating the Montgomery bus Boycott.

⁵ Rosa Parks- A civil rights activist who played a crucial role in igniting the Montgomery Bus Boycott, by refusing to give up her seat to a white bus passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

sense to me because it was women, together with the men of SNCC, who led our organization. You guys all probably know that SNCC was the only organization led by young people in the Southern movement. And we were also primarily black-led. You probably also know that the leadership of SNCC came out of the sit-ins that in 1960 sprang from the black colleges throughout the south, you know; that leadership included people like [Diane Nash](#), [Julian Bond](#), [Marion Barry](#), and [John Lewis](#). So now, in 1963, I decided I was going to leave school after my first year at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

I decided I'm just gonna take off one semester to work with SNCC in Cambridge, Maryland, on the Eastern shore of Maryland, where I've been getting arrested in demonstrations and missing classes, you know, on Mondays at Swarthmore. So I think about this, well maybe I should take off, you know, the next semester, because [Penny](#) Patch is a returning sophomore now to Swarthmore. She had been working in SNCC, the Southwest Georgia project, and she returns to Swarthmore and suggests that. I just take off, you know, a semester, the first semester of my sophomore year, but she says if you want to get on staff while working there, and she says this, you got to go by [Ruby Doris](#). This is if I wanted to get paid as staff people. So these are some of the, okay, there's Ruby, Doris. The one that we just flipped by was this wonderful prey hall.

Yeah. Oops. So there's [Prathia Hall](#), okay. She was a charge, in fact, of the Southwest Georgia movement, along with [Charles Sherrod](#). Okay. So Penny[Patch] says to me, if you wanna get on staff while you're working there, you got to go by her. She says, just that you got to go by Ruby Doris. Now I had to get paid because my money, my mother had no money. My father died on the assembly line when I was seven. So I needed a little bit of money. Now, Ruby Doris was a fierce administrator, the fierce administrator of the SNCC national office in Atlanta. And it was she who would decide whether I'd get that weekly pay while working in Cambridge, Maryland. And that big-time pay was gonna be \$10 a week or \$9.65 cents after taxes. Okay. Ruby, Doris, she's smiling here, but honey, she was fierce.

She was a Spellman student who had come out of the Atlanta student movement. In 1961, at the age of 18 years old, she did 30 days in jail, no bail, refusing bail after demonstrations to desegregate supposedly public facilities in Rock Hill, South Carolina. And then, in the photo that you're seeing here later that year, she was on the Freedom Rides and sent to the dreaded Parchman prison in Mississippi. There, she does 45 days in Parchman prison. In 1966, for the new slide, she replaced [Jim Foreman](#) as executive secretary. She's the one in the middle who she's elected on the slate.

That includes [Stokley Carmichael](#), who's elected chairman, replacing John Lewis. And you'll see Foreman to the left, Cleve Sellers and Ruby Doris, and Stokley[Carmichael]. So Ruby Darris is one of the many women, young folks, and older folks like Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, Mrs. [Unita Blackwell](#), [Mama Dolly Raines](#) in Southwest Georgia who guarded movement folks who guided movement folks, who stayed with, oh, I should mention, I'm sorry. I was mentioning Mama Dolly Raines in Southwest Georgia cause Mama Dolly Raines would guard movement folks who stayed with her by staying out, sitting outside her house with a shotgun. And these were the

women who guided and guarded us. These were the local people. And what's amazing is that you can find out about all of, well, so many of these women and men on our SNCC digital website, which Jessica will now share with her students how she brings this history. So, over to you, Jessica.

Jessica Ruckers: Yes, indeed. First, thank you so much; I would like to extend very, very deep gratitude to the SNCC legacy project for extending this invitation. But more than that, I'm really grateful that this SNCC 60th conference exists. 60 years is a short, long time. But it's the right amount of time to be here together and celebrate this history. So I wanna just say thank you for that. Also, being in conversation with Deborah Menkart and Judy Richardson is absolutely inspiring. As I was listening to Judy talking about Miss Ruby Doris Smith and how you had to go by Miss Ruby Doris Smith, I have to go by SNCC vets. If I wanna teach this history, I gotta learn this history directly from the folks who made this history. And so I'm grateful to be here.

As we were talking about Miss Ruby Doris Smith, it made me think about Ms. Doris Perry Rucker, who is my late grandmother. In 2019, she transitioned and became an ancestor. I believe she's here with me right now. I had the opportunity, just a few weeks before she passed, to take her on a VIP[Very Important Person] tour of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. When we got into the history galleries, the sections that really look at US history from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, she asked me to pause.

I was wheeling her in a wheelchair, and one of the things she said was, you know, Jessica, for you, this is history, but for me, this is my story. And that stuck with me because just the summer before that, the summer of 2018, for three weeks, I had the opportunity to spend some time at Duke[University] and really be in conversation with teachers who were learning from SNCC veterans, scholars, and other movement leaders about this history. So I'm elated that now I get to be a steward and a custodian. So one of the things that I like to do is really get the heads and hearts of the historical figures that we study.

So, one of the greatest gifts of the Duke NEH[National Endowment for the Humanities] Institute, in addition to being in conversation with Judy Richardson, [Jennifer Lawson](#), and [Courtland Cox](#), I even had the opportunity to have breakfast one-on-one with [Charles Cobb](#), was this repository called SNCC Digital Gateway. It absolutely blew my mind, as I saw prior to having access to the SNCC digital gateway. I had to pull from a variety of sources, websites, university college archives, and just a variety of places, because I am fortunate to teach at a school that believes that we should already teach beyond textbooks. Still, it was hard to curate lesson plans from credible and reliable sources. So when I was introduced to this repository, I was like, wow.

So, one of the first assignments I created for students using SNCC digital because students commented on the feel of it, like Ms. Ruckers, this kind of looks like we're engaging the social media. I was like, right, right. It's very approachable. There are lots of primary source documents like photographs, audio, and a variety of different resources that students found very attractive.

So I said, all right, great. So, you are going to take on the role of a historical figure from the 1960s, and each student will be assigned a bio. The first thing they had to do was create a social media profile page based on that particular historical figure. So, I introduced them to the website from the landing page.

You'll notice, based on the image, there's a tab that says people. So, I help students navigate to the people tab. So, students looked at their bio card and read a brief excerpt. We engaged in something called a mixer, stepping into Selma. So we watched the film Selma, and students then reflected on what they learned from their small bio. Then, students did a deep dive, and they immediately noticed that on the left-hand side of the screen, there were lists of different states where SNCC was doing its work. And then, on the right-hand side of the screen, there was a full list of different SNCC veterans and movement leaders. Particularly who are Freedom Summer volunteers. And immediately, students' eyes went to [Marion Barry](#). They were like, wait, is that our Marion Barry? And I was like, yes, DC[Washington DC]'s mayor for life.

Marion Barry was an SNCC leader. And they were like, what? And so immediately, they felt more connected to history. So history wasn't; his story history became our story. So, one student got an opportunity to click on the people tab. Their next assignment was to look at the timeline. So now you have your historical figure. The next piece of the website was to navigate to the timeline to put your historical figure in a particular context. And what they saw was that SNCC folks weren't taking action in isolation. There were many concurrent tactics and strategies that were intentionally being planned to bring about this broader sense of freedom rights, as we like to call them. Once students get a sense of their person, they put them into this specific timeframe.

Then, students got to see how action was taking place over time. So then we navigated over to the map. So, for students, seeing the map was a visual representation of just how vast the SNCC freedom movement diaspora was, so to speak. And students found that very inspiring. One of the lessons that students also really enjoyed because we have a teacher from Mississippi, and we often go back and forth. I'm from DC, educated in DC, and learned about who I am as a person in DC. And then, I have an African American colleague who learned who he was as a resident of this country from the perspective of growing up in Mississippi.

So students were like, these points of yours are a little bit different, but, but, but anyways, um, so as we were talking about Mississippi, there's an episode of *Eyes on the Prize*, and it's called *Is this America*. That question really pulls students in because they're struck by Merlie Evers telling the story of stepping out of her front door and seeing her husband murdered in cold blood. He posed to Childish Gambino, who at the time had a song called *This is America*, where Childish Gambino uses not only very powerful lyrics but the music video with significant visual imagery, particularly the way he uses the color red to talk about right? The prevalence of racism and white supremacy.

So our resistance doesn't come outta nowhere. Even our resistance was being resisted by people in positions of power. And so, the color red is tied to the blood that Merlie Evers so vividly kind

of described back to the major conservative US political party. So students got to see how music in concert with movements, pun intended, really thrust the movement forward. So then I said, I got more for you. Guess what, you know, freedom songs were a big part of the movement; you know, every movement needs a soundtrack, so to speak. So many of my students were fascinated by the role of young people, the role of women, and also the role of music. So, Judy, I'd like to tag you back here and tell us a little bit more about some of the personal histories about the role of music in the movie. There you are, Judy.

Judy Richardson: Yes, indeed. I'm the one in the middle, staring vacantly into space, and all these other SNCC folk around me. You know, I loved what you just did with that because, you know, a lot of us worked a long time, including SNCC veterans and some really wonderful local movement scholars. It took us, you know, 3 or 4 years, and with some wonderful project managers outta Duke University, and that, you know, people actually are using it and liking it. And that mainly that students, you know, are finding these primary sources. So, that was a great description. So, you can go down a rabbit hole, as you well know, you know, you start with one thing and then, oh, let me go here. Let me go here. So it's all story told. I mean, that's the other thing, and with activists from today's movement and in conversation with SNCC vets, it's wonderful.

Anyway, I'm gonna talk a little bit about young people first, and then about the role of music in the movement. When I got into SNCC, I was surrounded by young people my age, and we're talking 19, 20, well, 17, 18, 19 years old, who are absolutely passionate about organizing. Now, it doesn't mean that we're doing it by ourselves, though. We are organizing a lot along with older black folks.

So those are some young people, and then these are some older folks. You'll see [Bob Moses](#) to the left: Julian Bond, [Curtis Hayes](#), and then [Hollis Watkins](#), Who's still in Mississippi and [Amzie Moore](#) and John Stepto and Amzie Moore was key. Ms. Baker gives and sends us to Amzie Moore and older activists, and he helps to guide us through, you know, organizing in Mississippi, along with a number of other folks. What we find when we get there is certainly Amzie Moore, but it's also Mrs. Divine, John Hulett. And of course, Miss [Ella Baker](#) was our guarding light whom you see there at the Atlantic City in Mississippi freedom Democrat, um, the Mississippi freedom democratic party[MDFP] in 1964.

She's the one who called the sit-in leaders together from all these black campuses in 1960. SNCC was born after that meeting. Now, Ms. Baker grounded our organizing with both her incredible grassroots organizing philosophy and her long experience. By sharing her network of grassroots leaders throughout the south, that's how we got to Amzie Moore, and because of Miss Baker's vigilance, we were able to develop on our own. There she is, again at, I think it's probably [Highlander](#). Yeah, it is Highlander, which was a major labor organizing, civil rights movement organizing, site in Tennessee. It still exists.

It is now run co-directed by the wonderful Ashley Woodard.....Ashley, that's right. Woodard, not Henderson, Ashley Henderson. Oh, anyway, Ashley, she's on another panel this afternoon for us, as a matter of fact, but in any event, Ashley now heads this same Highlander. This is where Rosa Parks was in a six week session before she decided not to get off up off her seat. So Highlander is also with SNCC. People gather when we're about to split in, but we don't, but we have a meeting there. Highlander was really key. I'm not going off on Highlander, but that is important, because of Miss Baker's vigilance, we were able to develop on our own with the very careful guidance of Ms. Baker.

Without the controls that some of the older adult organizations might have imposed on us. Like all of us, Ms. Baker also understood the importance of music in unifying and fortifying us. Music was the main one, the main pieces of glue globs or whatever, you know, that held us together. And you see her again; this isn't on the boardwalk in Atlantic City when we are trying to stop the all-white Mississippi delegation from Mississippi at the Democratic Convention in 1964 from taking their seats at the Democratic convention. I was there as well, but I'm not in this picture cause these are the main people here. So music, Ms. Baker understood it. We understood it. And folks often see footage, you know, of sit-ins or other demonstrations. It looks like, you know, white racists are beating us over the head.

And we are just saying we shall overcome. Many of us were just tactically nonviolent. We knew that we didn't have enough guns to win against all those from the federal government to the local county sheriff, who opposed us and didn't want us to vote or to gain equal power, but music kept us going. It helped keep us unified when lots of folks just wanted us dead. The power of music operated both externally outside SNCC on demonstrations and then inside internally within SNCC. So I'm gonna tell two short stories. One is the first one is external, and it's something that's a story that I heard from Dr. Bernie Johnson. Reagan, who came out of the South as a leader in the ⁶Southwest Georgia movement, is an SNCC freedom singer. And then, of course, many of you know her as the founder of *Sweet Honey in the Rock*.

So she tells this story, and she said it was the early 1960s in Southwest Georgia out in the rural area. It's a mass meeting. It's being held in a small rural church in Southwest Georgia, darkness; there are no streetlights around; it's rural Southwest Georgia. In this small rural church, a small amount of people, all black folks, of course. And they're talking about getting registered to vote. Who's been able to run the gauntlet to get registered? What movement churches have been burned or bombed, who's been fired from their jobs for trying to register to vote all that stuff? Of course, they're singing, they're singing, gospel songs and freedom songs. And in the middle of this small gathering, a sheriff walks in. You know, he strides in and opens the doors.

He strides in, and suddenly, there is a hush in this mass meeting. He comes to the front of the church looks at every one of them, and says, you know, Flora, does Mrs. Johnson know you're

⁶ Southwest Georgia Movement- A SNCC project that

here telling Flora that he knows that this black woman who works for Mrs. Johnson is about to get in real deep trouble for being in this mass meeting. He says, Clyde, you know, but does Mr. Thompson know you're here again, sending the Warner warning? You are in danger for being in here talking about voting rights. So all this happens. Total hush people, have stopped singing, but suddenly, somebody starts singing. Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around. And it's one voice at first, right? Then another voice picks it up. And suddenly, this small group of black people is singing not with singing at the sheriff and singing.

Ain't going to let nobody turn me around. Now, what Bernice said was when you looked at the faces of the people in that gathering, the black faces, you could see that they were, and he could see the sheriff could see, these are not the same folks that I came in on. They have been changed by the power and the unifying force of this music. Right. So that's how it worked outside and inside; it also served to help us. So you'll see a lot of us; I'm the one, you know, in the coat, because a lot of times we didn't have any heat in the national office and it kind of got cold. So we were wearing, okay, so this is an executive committee meeting, and right in the middle with his head down is the famous, legendary James Foreman, who was our executive secretary.

You will see to his right Marion Barry. You'll see other people around here, you'll see to my right above my head, you'll see John Lewis. You would also see Julian bond, and he's sitting smoking as he usually did at that time. But I remember toward the end of 1965, when I wondered where we were going as an organization, and I was sitting in the middle of this big staff meeting, I'm talking about maybe a hundred, hundred 50 SNCC folk who would come in from throughout the projects, Mississippi, Alabama, Southwest Georgia, Arkansas, and staff folk are arguing about SNCC direction.

Now, not me because I never said anything, but others are arguing and they're arguing really hard about substantive issues, but harder and more fire-filled than I had seen before. It got really intense. I worried that we might disintegrate and not be able to come back from the brink and that somebody would say something that would just light the fire, and suddenly Jim Foreman, our executive secretary, begins to sing. I gotta say, he didn't sing all that great didn't matter. But he starts singing *with the circle unbroken*. I swear, I did not think anybody would join in. I thought we, as an organization in SNC,C had gone beyond the time when we would sing.

He's singing by himself. And at first, he was singing alone, and then somebody started picking it up. And then a few more people, it's like in that church, and soon everybody was singing strongly, *Will The Circle Be Unbroken?* And for what Foreman did with the song, which is what songs always did, was he reminded us what we meant to each other one to other and how much we needed and had always needed each other. That song reminded us all that we really were still a band of brothers and sisters in a circle of trust, and that trumped everything. So let me stop there. But music was really important.

Jessica Ruckers: Yeah. Thank you so much. So, we're supposed to jump in Q & A, but just so much richness came up. Deborah, can I take a quick moment? So, for us, I started off by talking about how students use SNCC digital to create these social media pages, and I'm old school y'all, so I still have hard copies of the document, right? So that's a written example once students could really get in the heads and the hearts of SNCC veterans, like, I love what you said. Like he didn't sing all that great, but it was okay because, yes, what students started, to understand through their research is that we're talking about real people fighting for real changes because of real racist laws and real challenging circumstances. So, I had students write poems to be in conversation with freedom songs.

So students were like, Miss Rucker, look, I'm not a poet, but I'll give it a try, you know? It means honoring and keeping the legacy alive of the people who came before us to make it possible for me to be here today. I'll try. I was like, thank you. That's all I want because when you said earlier that you were guided and guarded right, students over time because we weren't limited to a secondary source, a textbook because students were actually hearing and learning about SNCC folks from the perspective of SNCC, they felt guided and guarded. So, we used a book called *Rhythm and Resistance Teaching for Social Justice*. And we used a particular framework called the write that I poem. We mentioned Diane Nash. I'm gonna bring Diane Nash into this space.

We also talked about James Foreman. So just for context, I teach primary students of color, so Black and students of the ⁷African diaspora, Asian American students, digital students, and then also ⁸Latinx students who also identify as ⁹Afro Latinx, but across the diaspora as well. This particular student is Asian American, and she wanted to write about Diane Nash. She was very moved by what she learned, right? I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and attended Howard university in DC. I transferred to Fisk[University] and Nashville and witnessed severe racial segregation between whites and blacks; tell them that I helped found SNCC after witnessing this incident, tell them, that I joined SCLC[Southern Christian Leadership Conference] to fight for this injustice and better my community, right. That I risk my life from my community at different times for different reasons.

Tell them that I joined a sit-in at Rock Hill on January 12th, 1960. I chose this with SNCC to provide more exposure for this movement to be arrested for 30 days. Write that I taught nonviolent tactics to youth in Jackson, Mississippi, to be sent to jail for two years, and tell them that I encourage others to fight to desegregate buses in Mississippi. When I went to court for attempting to desegregate buses, I was asked to move to the back of the room and refused to move to the back, to be charged with contempt of court. When you write my story, tell them about my advocating for women's rights and for failed housing. When you write my story, tell them that I am still here advocating for others. All right. One last piece, and this is an African American young woman who wrote from the perspective of James Foreman.

⁷ African Diaspora- Regions of the world that inhabit people of African descent.

⁸ Latinx- Refers to people of latin american descent.

⁹ Afro Latinx- this term refers to people who identify as African and latin descent.

So right that I never gave up and never stopped fighting for what I thought was right. Never stopped, right? That I, with many other people, help SNCC help keep kids organized, help voice their minds through nonviolence, help raise money, working with people from Kings[Martin Luther King] to Shuttlesworth[Fred], tell them that I also believed in self-defense, along with Robert Williams, fought against the white terrorists. Even though I supported King, his tactics were slow. I grew a right that I organized Freedom Summer in Mississippi, helping youth to vote, campaigning for freedom schools, influencing African Americans to register and then vote, Tell them that I was a black man from Chicago, Illinois, born October 4th in 1928, tell them that I was a war veteran that I was arrested and brutally beaten for mistaken identity. Proving that even though I risked my life for this country, the color of my skin was the only thing that stood out. Write

That I was a man, a man that witnessed tremendous injustices while covering the little walk crisis and chose to fight for what was right; when you write my story, say that my most memorable quote is, " *We are not foreign; revolutionary revolutionaries are forged through constant struggle in the study of revolutionary ideas and experiences.*" This, for me, is what happens when we teach beyond the textbook, when we teach the actual texts. Right? So that was the students equivalent version of freedom songs. I will tell you, this student retain more about this particular historical era from the 40S to the 80S that we studied than any other time in my teaching career. No hyperbole. To this day, students can go back to these poems and say, oh yeah, I remember studying James Foreman. I remember studying Diane Nash. I remember [Annie Pearl Avery](#), you know, I remember Marion Barry and Judy Richardson and [Victoria Gray](#), names that students weren't quite familiar with.

So, the way I was guided and guarded in 2018 really shaped the class that I attended in 2019. So, I just wanted to share that. The last thing I wanna say is as a gift for participating in the Institute, I also had the opportunity to be given this volume. So my Latinx students were also really moved by the work of women like Maria Verela; pardon me, thank you. Who used art and photography to help carry the message of the movement. Students were like, wow. So we were here too. I was like, we all were here. Yep. So, thank you for that opportunity to bring them in.

Judy Richardson: Thank you. And I just got to say two things. One is on Jim Foreman's thing always was, and my friend [Dotty Zellner](#) always says this: you know what Foreman always said was, write it down, write it down. This is history. This now, at 19 years old, you're not thinking that you were making history. Right. But he understood we need to write down our stuff because otherwise, other people will frame it for us. So Emily Crosby, who's another good friend and colleague of Dr. Emily Crosby. She said, you know, SNCC is probably the most documented of the civil rights over groups because one of the things Ruby Dorris said was if I don't get your weekly report from the field, Mississippi, Alabama, whatever, you're not getting your little \$9.64 cents. So all of those reports, and then we had the Watts line reports, because we're calling the projects twice a day, all the projects throughout the rural south.

And we wrote everything down, and then Julian Bond would send it out in communications on the newsletter and stuff. So we documented a lot of things, and they are really important. It's what is now the SNCC legacy project because [Courtland Cox](#) is really very involved in talking to the young people who are anxious to do it about making sure that they document and archive their material. So people they, if they want to interpret this current movement, they have to misinterpret it because otherwise, if they wanna interpret it correctly, they will have material to go by.

Deborah Menkart: It's material that can help young people learn beyond the traditional narrative that we shared at the beginning, all those points that normally limit young people to thinking that the whole movement was Dr. King saying four words and Rosa Parks all by herself, desegregating the buses. So, both of their lives are much fuller richer, and more complicated than those narratives say. Then, the story of SNCC is the one that young people need now to learn about how to take on all these efforts to suppress the brutal efforts to suppress voting rights today.

So I wanna ask a few questions that have come from our audience. One is speaking about not only the attempt to suppress voting rights but the attempt to suppress teaching about this history because people know the power of teaching about it. When young people like *ju* Jessica's students learn history, they then apply it to their lives today. So Judy, one person asked how Ella Baker or other organizers from that time, what might they have done in the face of these attempts to suppress the right to teach about this history that we're seeing across the country today.

Judy Richardson: Well, you know, one of the wonderful things about Ms. Baker[Ella] was that she always posed questions. I mean, she really was very Socratic in terms of the way she taught. So when you were sitting in an SNCC meeting with her, she would usually be in the back. She would have a mask over, which is very familiar to folks now, but she would have it because she had asthma and there were a lot of folks, young people and they were smoking. So she would be with us till 3, 4 o'clock in the morning, these meetings would go on and on. Because we were you within our meetings, you always had to come to a consensus because, as folks often said, you know, since you're putting your lives on the line and you're risking your lives and the lives of the local community, where you're helping to organize, people need to agree to whatever your direction you're suggesting we go in.

So sometimes to get to that direction, it took a long time, but throughout it, Ms. Baker, unless you were really going off the rails, Ms. Baker would often say, well, okay, if you do this now, what will happen 5 weeks from now, what will happen 6 months from now, which is a different way of thinking for young people who are generally just in the now. So, part of it is her thinking about teaching through questions. So, nothing was not allowed. No, I mean, that's the thing. I know that she was a teacher, she came out of teaching and always, and even when she goes into Harlem, she's teaching with young people, you know, she's working with young people in the

NAACP[National Association of the Advancement of Colored People] all of that is about how do you teach in a way that makes people think differently so that they are thinking not about what is, but what can be and what I can do with other people to make it what can be.

So, her thing was always about history, and she understood the importance of people's history. I mean, when [Howard Zinn](#) was doing a people's history, she and he worked together; they were advisors for SNCC. It's interesting that this idea of education and open education, I mean, we do freedom schools now. We're not talking about making them think a certain way. We're just saying, wow, look at the Mississippi state constitution. There are ways that you can read that with just regular, middle school, and high school students.

What is there in this that actually works for you or even works for poor white people in Mississippi, that you, they examine those in the freedom schools in Mississippi, back then in 63, 64, 65. They're looking through it, but then you make the other leap. Okay, if you are writing a state constitution, what would you put in it? You know, what is gonna make it a more just Mississippi, not just for black people, not just for Asian American people, not just for poor white people. What is for everybody in this state, what's gonna make it more, just so that you're always thinking about somebody outside your group.

It certainly your primary thing is how do you get black people registered to vote without getting them killed? But the other part of that is how does this relate to the broader folks of allies and stuff? And you see that with Montgomery, just one quick thing, when we're doing *Eyes On The Prize* and we're showing the Montgomery bus boycott, what always struck me was that

¹⁰Reverend Abernathy, when he goes up and they've won and he said, this isn't just a fight for 15, 20,000 black people in Montgomery. It's not even just a fight for X number of people in Alabama together. This is a fight for all freedom-loving people all over the world. There was always this sense that we were connected to the wider world, but no, I think she would absolutely be on it.

Deborah Menkart: Right, and I think, as Reverend Abernathy said, it was a fight for everyone, which is, I think what the GOP sees as a threat. They don't want white people to see that really their lives would also, our lives would be improved by this freedom struggle and to be allies. That expresses solidarity, the media says it's all about, or the GOP says it's all about white people feeling guilty, but that's not their concern. Their concern is white people feeling solidarity and recognizing those divide-and-conquer politics for what they were, particularly young people.

¹⁰ Reverend Ralph Abernathy- Civil rights activist who played a pivotal role in organizing the Montogmery bus boycott and co-founded SCLC(Southern Christian Leadership Conference).

Yes. Right. Because they saw what happened in June of 2020, the whole summer of 2020. Those are young people across the board questioning America, saying, is this America? Yes, this is the America. We have a few more questions coming in. So I wanna ask Jessica to talk a little bit about what you've talked about your class and the writing students did, but you've also run and taken that idea of freedom schools and brought that into your school. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that because that's something other teachers might wanna do, as well as community groups.

Jessica Rucker: Yeah. Thank you so much for that reminder. So, on one of the last days of the Institute back at Duke, I got the opportunity to have breakfast one-on-one with Charlie Cobb, and that in and of itself was incredible. So, one of the things that I got the chance to read, I guess the prospectus might have been called. I can't remember the language of the document, but in 1963, when he was field secretary, he proposed this notion of a freedom school. The language was to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippi. And that particular language really resonated with me because of the specific context that I teach in. So, at my school at the time, we've kind of paused this right now.

We would have these periods called intercession. So, intercession was a time dedicated specifically to academic remediation, but some teachers leveraged that as an opportunity to just redo what had already been done, even though students had demonstrated that the way that content was delivered didn't meet their learning needs. But it was like, let's just give you a little extra time. So, for me, I was like, what if we leverage this opportunity to kind of creatively combat some of the academic and social regression that can sometimes occur for students during these school breaks, that also helps to embed or reinforce ideals of participatory democracy. So, what I proposed was facilitating a week-long series of academic enrichment courses and social enrichment workshops to really help students build and maintain strong quantitative as well as qualitative, numeracy, and literacy reasoning skills.

So I put it in the context of movement leaders of the 1960s, right, that in order to challenge the dominant culture and what already exists and to borrow language from the perspective of active community members and responsible citizens. Students need to be able to effectively read, write, do math, acquire, and present information orally, but it also needs to be relevant and rich. I was taught, right? The only reason why I know how to learn to read and write is so I can teach somebody else to read and write and be free. So, in short, I partnered with several local community-based organizations, everybody from Empower DC, which led a great workshop on the role of organizing around mass displacement and forced relocation to M- love that looked at the intersection of youth organizing and organizing around home language access.

Then, one of the culminating activities was Teaching For Change, which actually helped us get in contact with Mr. Tim Jenkins, who had the opportunity to share his experiences as a movement leader. So essentially, we had this week-long freedom school with four half-day four

or five half-day workshops, where in the morning, students were really imbued in movement organizing youth organizing direct action tactics, and then towards mid-morning, they had opportunities to see how, what they were learning in terms of reading, writing, and math connects to like the movement, like, how do we finance movements? You know, how do we write letters for movements or petitions for movements? So, students got to see that the reading, writing, and numeracy skills that we are asking them to learn for eight hours a day don't just exist in the halls of the classroom but that the movement needs our minds, like our minds and our bodies and our spirits. And so that was a really great opportunity for me, for students, and to also partner with local community organizations.

Deborah Menkart: That's great, and if people who are listening wanna learn more about freedom schools, you can go visit the SNCC digital gateway website, even more about Mr. Tim Jenkins, that page that Jessica showed you about people. He's one of the people on that list. Also, if you are thinking I would love to bring a veteran to speak to my students, go to the Civil Rights Movement archive website. And there's a list of veterans who are willing to speak either in person or now that we have Zoom.

I know Judy Richardson and Courtland Cox spoke with a group of students in California last year. I think it was upper elementary school students. Who'd done a lesson, an SNCC digital lesson, or a lesson based on the SNCC digital website and then had them as guest speakers? So, definitely check out those resources. And again, we'll share those afterward. There's another question. So, we got a number of questions coming in. One question is about Judy, going back to you, stepping into history. And when you heard about the violence in Selma at the bridge, the Edmund Pettus bridge, what was your reaction when you heard about John Lewis, the folks from the Dallas County Voters League, folks from SNCC who were beaten at the bridge that day?

Judy Richardson: Well, it's interesting. I was actually, we were all called to, um, the national office. I was in Atlanta working in the national office, and the morning of Bloody Sunday, Foreman[Jim] called us in and said, John Lewis is about to step off. You know, there were about 700 people. Bob Mants from SNCC is next to him. Jose Williams is standing next to him from SCLC Dr. King's organization. Foreman says, you know, John says that, you know, Dr. King was supposed to be there, but they don't seem to know where he is.

So John is calling Foreman[Jim] to say, do you think we should just start and see what happens? So this is before Bloody Sunday; it's that morning, but you know the assault hasn't happened yet. So they step off, you know, and they start marching. Of course, bloody Sunday happens. Now, just to know, in terms of where we were as an organization, in terms of SNCC, we had decided we didn't wanna do any more big demonstrations, that it took away from the local grassroots organizing that we wanted to focus on.

So that was our position as an organization, but John Lewis said, you know, he wanted to go. So we said, okay, you go not as a representative SNCC, but you go on your own because that's

important that you be able to do that. You have to be able to, you know, do what the spirits say do. So he goes, so now Bloody Sunday has happened at that point. SNCC has no alternative. You do not let violence stop the movement. You never let violence stop the movement.

So, at that point, it is okay; all stuff on, whatever you call it, is on deck. I mean, everybody then has to organize. We actually found a helicopter. We got a couple of SNCC people in. Yeah, cuz you know, we're gonna get a flight right away. So we got that in. People started getting the SNCC cars; Ruby Doris ran what was called the [Sojourner fleet](#) of the Chryslers that we had bought cuz it was a black caucus within the United Auto Workers local that had gotten us through. We had gotten some cheaper cars at cheaper prices. We had gotten this fleet of Chrysler cars. So we started moving them in. I go in, but this is afterward, but the main thing was that because it was John, it was all of these folks who had been beaten bloody.

[Mrs. Boynton](#), you know, when you see her in footage and *Eyes On The Prize*, she has pulled along young people. All of these folks are beaten horribly on the ground after their tear gas. Then, I just recently worked with my old production company on something for the National Park Service site in Selma[Alabama]. The orientation film is focused on young people who started the movement in Selma, including Mrs. Boynton, and how they talk and relate to her. But in that you, you hear from these young people about how, you know, it wasn't that the white cops on the troopers on the horses stopped at the bridge, they ran into the black community. They're going you see them going up onto the steps of the ¹¹Brown Chapel, which was a movement church.

They start to try to go into the churches. They are going up these steps; they are going into the black community. They're going into the projects. So they follow the marchers back into the black community. So part of it was just, okay, I wasn't necessarily in support of a big demonstration at this point, nor were many of the folks in SNCC at that point, but once they do the violence, no, no, that will not stand. So we go in, and it's off of that because again, we're not thinking just demonstration that we had already been thinking about ¹²black belt projects and where our black people gathered, you know, in big percentages. So, Stokley Carmichael, you know, is part of that group, as is his [Ivan Donaldson](#) and a number of other people.

And [Mr. Hulett](#)[John] had already started in Lowndes County, the Lowndes County Christian organization. So he had wanted SCLC[Southern Christian Leadership Conference] to come but that hadn't happened. So he contacts Stokley[Carmichael], and Stokley says, yeah, we'll come on in. So I went in with Stokley, [Ruth Howard](#), and a lot of folks into Lowndes County, and we

¹¹ Brown Chapel A.M.E Church- A Black american church in Selma Alabama, this church played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement, being the starting point for the march from Selma to Montgomery and as served as a regular meeting place for members of various civil rights organizations.

¹² Black Belt Counties- Areas in the southern United states from the Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, identified for is rich black soil, good for harvesting crows, it is also areas that are heavily populated with Black americans and descendent of American chattel slavery.

started what became the [Lowndes County Freedom Organization](#). Jennifer Lawson is part of that. Courtland Cox becomes part of that, and we start and, well I won't go into all that.

But in any event that we get as the logo local people say, well, get us you know, a logo, the logo of the regular democratic party in Lowndes county is. It was their official logo, the democratic party of Alabama, a logo that said had a white rooster in the middle and it said, white supremacy for the right. White supremacy for the right, official Alabama Democratic party logo. So we got a black Panther and Johnny Johnson who is from Lowndes county, he was a teenager. Then he said, shoot, and, you know, Panther can beat up or rooster any day of the week. You know? So, there was, there was an organized effort beyond the demonstration of, you know, of that March.

Deborah Menkart: Woo. Thank you. And I think for people who this, if you're hearing this for the first time, again, go to SNCC, digital gateway, look up Lowndes county, L O W N D E S, to learn a lot of that story. Also the book by Dr. Hassan Jeffries. And I think Judy also just surfaced more of the themes that we didn't focus on at the beginning, but the theme of the level of violence, young people, if they learn about the civil rights movement, it's the horror of segregation, but very little about the daily reality of violence. Then the other theme that we have on that list is the incredible strategies used to resist the fact that SNCC had to figure out, okay, how do you get a fleet of cars, a helicopter. So I think there's a lot to learn how to make all the primary documents that you see in the popular education materials.

Judy Richardson: I said a helicopter was actually a private plane. We had to book a part of a plane.

Deborah Menkart: Yeah, whatever it was. It flew. That was before the age of cell phones, before a lot of the resources that we have now to coordinate all that. I'm gonna try to squeeze in one more question. This is, Dan Berger asked about, and I apologize, we haven't named other folks but asked about resources to teach about the conflicts within SNCC. And if you go to the Zinn education project, there's a lesson by Adam Sanchez that he wrote in consultation with Judy Richardson and Betty Garman Robinson, who sadly passed before this conference. The two of them provided a year's worth of conversations with Adam; as Jessica said, nothing can be done without consultation the knowledge of the SNCC folks. Jessica, you could just say a minute moment about using that lesson, and then I think we wanna go into closing comments. Actually I realize we do have a few more minutes if you wanna comment on what she said and the lesson. Yeah.

Jessica Rucker: Let me just say this hearing the story about the rooster and the Panther again was really powerful because Jennifer Lawson was also somebody that I got a chance to be in conversation with, and just hearing about like her visual art skills, like again, right. The movement uses everything. There's not one skill that is not applicable and relevant to the movement. Being able to take story directly from Jennifer Lawson's mouth back to my students

to say, we need our art, we need our math, we need our minds. You know, we get the Baltimore algebra project, right?

Every resource is used for the movement. So it's just really inspiring to hear that story again. So, yeah, so this incredible lesson, right curated by Adam Sanchez became a culminating lesson. So essentially, it starts with this, this member overview where students are reminded that they're members of the student non-violent coordinating committee, um, and to, to challenge racial segregation in the south, then Adam does this really great job at giving that timeline that we, we get to also see on SNCC digital. And then after students kind of walk through the timeline from ¹³Brown vs Board of Education to Montgomery bus boycott to the ¹⁴Little Rock Nine we get to April, and then it becomes clear that students from across the south need to be organized.

This is the language that students in my context really understand because they see themselves as students at our high school but as members of a bigger community, right? So, they get this notion, that students across a geographic space need to come together to talk about how to strengthen a student movement. So students are really brought in by this. So what the lesson does is it first kind of situates, the freedom riders and students are encouraged to write a letter from the point of view of a freedom rider. Then it goes into these situations or like problem solving scenarios, and these became like debates. So, we call these the SNCC debates. So when we focus on Mississippi ,students again, they're taking on the role of their historical figure. Were in Cleveland, Mississippi ,earlier; Judy was talking about Amzie Moore. So Amzie comes to ton to encourage one cohort of students to join this voter registration effort in Mississippi. But this group of students also knows that President John Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, also have contacted SNCC, to focus on voter registration.

So, there's this dynamic. A long story short the debate focuses on this question. So, should SNCC focus on voter registration or direct action? We're being invited by somebody from Mississippi, Mr. Amzie Moore. We get our start, however by direct action. What should we do? So we also complimented this particular lesson by watching freedom song, which gave students kind of a dramatized reenactment of what the debates look like. Students were like, wait. So it was daytime when they started the debate, it goes into nighttime, and then it's daytime again when they finished. I'm like, yeah, like these were real conversations because it's, again, real people.

So the Mississippi situation, as it's called in the lesson, provided students an opportunity to kind of argue one side or the other from the perspective of their historical figure. So that was one of their, their kind of culminating summative, Socratic seminars, or I might have called it philosophical chairs. They had gone back and forth from the perspective of either somebody who advocated for voter registration or somebody who advocated for direct action. Then they had to have historical evidence for why they were advocating that particular point of view.

¹³ Brown vs Board of Education- A critical US supreme court case in 1954 that ruled racial segregation in public school was unconstitutional due to the 14th amendment.

¹⁴ Little Rock Nine-9 Black american student enrolled in a high school, Little Rock Central High School, following the Brown vs Board of Education decision that outlaw segregation in public schools.

Then we talked about right, like how Ms. Baker had to intervene and, and how that impacted, like, like the potential future of SNCC and spoiler alert, students know SNCC still exists, but it was really awesome to see students take like a real issue, like a real matter and argue from the perspective of a historical figure. So I hope that answered the question, but it's an awesome lesson.

Judy Richardson: And I know we got two more minutes, so yes, absolutely. No, no, that was perfect.

Deborah Menkart: Yeah. Thank you. We had another question, which I'm just gonna give a quick response to, that Dr. Davis asked about how do we make sure that there's a civic well in this country for a more inclusive curriculum. Dr. Davis remembers their school trip in Mississippi was a field trip to Parchman prison. So I just wanna say that there are actually tens of thousands of teachers across the country who are dedicated to teaching this history.

So, everyone who is a teacher, check out the resources that we've just been talking about. If you're not a teacher, we need you to go to school and board meetings and speak up in defense of this kind of teaching. We often focus on the presidential election, and meanwhile, the right wing is taking over school boards and trying to ban exactly the work we're talking about here. You can play a major role in local elections, particularly in midterm elections, where not a lot of folks turn out. So we need you to step up and defend the teachers like Jessica Rucker and the 130,000 other teachers who are signed up at Zinn. I'm gonna ask for a quick closing comment from Judy, and then we're going to move to our closing slide, closing reflections from Judy.

Judy Richardson: Okay. Real quick thing. Two things. One is you can't do everything, but if you do nothing, nothing changes. That's number 1. And number 2, understand that it's people just like you and surround yourself, even if it's just three or four people, with folks who really do think you can change things. Cause if you're around people mainly who say, can nothing be done? I'm not gonna do nothing. Nothing will ever change. That's my thing.

Deborah Menkart: Woo. And Jessica, any closing words for our audience here,

Jessica Rucker: Teach beyond the textbook, you know, teach using sources like *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, SNCC digital, so that you can teach primary sources that carry the primary message in the movement.

Deborah Menkart: Yes. Great. And we're gonna actually ask for the slide to come up that shares some of those resources to do that. So if you can see there, the, uh, again, the resources that people have talked about here today, SNCC digital gateway, Zinn educationproject, civil

rightsmovement archive, and the book that Jessica held up, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*. If you start with those there'll be a radical transformation.

Judy Richardson: just to say, that *Hands on the Freedom Plow* is 52 SNCC women in their own words, their testimonies. It took us 15 years ,six of us editors who were SNCC women, but it's 52 stories. And they're wonderful.

Deborah Menkart: Thank you, to everybody who joined the session today for your comments, your reflections, and for carrying on this work.