

Session Title

SNCC Digital Gateway: Learn from the Past, Organize for the Future, Make Democracy Work

Session Link [here](#)

Session Participants

Chair: Todd Moye, University of North Texas

Panelists: Emilye Crosby, State University of New York at Geneseo

Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Ohio State University

Charles Cobb, Duke University

Judy Richardson, SNCC Digital Gateway/Duke University

Laura Boughton, Oxford High School

Overview of the Session

In this session, the panel introduced the [SNCC Digital Gateway](#), a collaboration including the SNCC Legacy Project, Duke University, and Civil Rights Movement scholars. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, was founded in 1960 when legendary organizer Ella Baker brought together sit-in leaders from across the South. The only national civil rights organization led by young people, SNCC activists became full-time organizers, working with community leaders to build grassroots organizations in the Deep South. SNCC focused on voter registration and on mounting a systemic challenge to the white supremacy entrenched in the country's political, economic, and social structures.

While scholars have written a number of important books exploring and illustrating the significance of SNCC, the general public tends to know very little about the movement beyond Dr. King and a few high profile demonstrations. Even the attention that has accompanied the series of 50th anniversaries of movement milestones has tended to reinforce a top-down and "Big Events" focus. As the movement's victories are facing serious challenges and as young people across the country have renewed interest in direct action, organizing, and challenging ingrained power, it is essential that a fuller, richer accounting of SNCC's history reach the wider public, especially students, activists, and today's version of the "ordinary people" who were at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement.

The SNCC Digital Gateway, which had a soft-launch on December 13, 2016, is designed to meet this need. Using documentary footage, audio recordings, photographs, and documents, the site portrays how SNCC organizers, alongside thousands of local Black residents, worked so that Black people could take control of their lives. It unveils the inner workings of SNCC as an organization, examining how it coordinated sit-ins and freedom schools, voter registration and economic cooperatives, anti-draft protests and international solidarity struggles. The website includes a wide range of historic materials (hosted in digital collections at repositories around the country); over 150 individual profiles; more than 100 events pages; Inside SNCC pages that explore how the organization worked; an Our Voices section, which presents aspects of SNCC's history from the eyes of the activists themselves; and a Map, which connects users to the people who worked—and the events

that happened—in specific places. The project team is currently identifying and developing materials that are especially germane today and exploring relevant and accessible formats for sharing it.

The panel included four people from the editorial board—SNCC veterans Judy Richardson and Charles Cobb, Jr., and scholars Hasan Kwame Jeffries and Emilye Crosby—reflecting on the project and resulting website. Laura Boughton, a high school teacher and fifth panelist, spoke about lesson plans she developed and how she has used the site as a teacher.

NCHE Habits of Mind

- Grasp the significance of the past in shaping the present.
One of the key points of focus in this session is the importance of helping young people today see themselves as people who can make a difference. By focusing on the significance of the past, the panel members drew connections to social movements in existence today.

- Interrogate texts and artifacts, posing questions about the past that foster informed discussion, reasoned debate, and evidence-based interpretation.
One purpose of the SNCC Digital Gateway is to enable students and the public at large to engage in posing questions and using evidence to bring meaning to the past.

Key Points in Session

Throughout the session, participants emphasize their preference for discussions that are from the “inside out” rather than top-down. A key concern of members of the panel is what will be left behind concerning the work SNCC did, and how will these records be useful?

Potential Resources for Classroom Use

1. [Teaching Tolerance’s Teaching the Movement Framework](#) provides data on the extent to which the Civil Rights Movement has been addressed in state standards. Based on these findings, the website provides teaching principles and curriculum “rehabilitation tools” for educators who wish to engage their students in considering the Movement beyond the traditional “King and Parks” narrative.
2. The [Library of Congress’s Civil Rights History Project](#) consists of video recordings of individuals’ recollections about a variety of topics pertaining to the Civil Rights Movement.
3. [Facing History and Ourselves](#) offers several units that help teachers engage students in considering Race and U.S. History and in thinking about Democracy and Engagement.
4. The [Stanford History Education Group \(SHEG\)](#) offers lesson plans and assessments that pertain to teaching the Civil Rights Movement.

Inquiry/Discussion Questions

1. How might various perspectives have influenced the actions taken by different members of SNCC? How might various perspectives have influenced the ways SNCC's actions were perceived by different individuals and groups during the time?
2. To what extent were the events and developments that SNCC played a key role in shaped by unique circumstances of time and place? In what way were they part of broader historical contexts?
3. How do the materials presented in portions of the SNCC Digital Gateway website complicate the central argument put forth by textbooks telling the story of the Civil Rights Movement?
4. Ask students to write historical questions based on their examination of specific portions of the SNCC Digital Gateway. Remember, good historical questions:
 - consider causes or effects.
 - are argumentative (offer different possible interpretations based on the evidence.
 - are open-ended.
 - have appropriate specificity (focus on who, where, when).