HES Presidential Address

Teachers in the Movement: Pedagogy, Activism, and Freedom

Derrick P. Alridge

In this year's Presidential Address, historian Derrick P. Alridge discusses his current research project, Teachers in the Movement: Pedagogy, Activism, and Freedom. The project builds on recent literature about teachers as activists between 1950 and 1980 and explores how and what secondary and postsecondary teachers taught. Focusing on teachers in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, the project investigates teachers' roles as agents of social change through teaching the ideals of freedom during the most significant social movement in the United States in the twentieth century. Drawing on oral history and archival research, the project plans to produce five hundred videotaped interviews that will

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Derrick P. Alridge is Professor of History of Education in the Curry School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia. This article is adapted from his Presidential Address at the History of Education Society meeting in 2019 and is preliminary research toward a manuscript on teachers' involvement in the civil rights movement. The research is being funded by the Spencer Foundation.

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generate extensive firsthand knowledge and fresh perspectives about teachers in the civil rights movement. By examining teachers' pedagogical activism during this period of rapid social change, Alridge hopes to inspire and inform educators teaching in the midst of today's freedom and social justice movements.

Keywords: teachers as activists, ideals of freedom, oral history, civil rights movement, pedagogical activism, social movements, freedom and justice

Tete ka asom ene Kakyere.[1]

Growing up in Rock Hill, South Carolina, in the 1970s, I attended Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Catawba, South Carolina, where I often heard stories of local teachers' involvement in the civil rights movement. I knew many of these teachers personally through our interactions in the community. I was especially inspired by the story of an event that occurred in January 1961, when students at the local Friendship Junior College held a sit-in at McCrory's Five & Dime to protest Rock Hill's segregated lunch counters and other businesses. After being refused service, the students were arrested, and instead of posting bail, they chose to serve thirty days in the York County jail.[2]

The "jail, no bail campaign," as it was called, was legendary in my youth and marked an important moment in the civil rights movement. One of the students who served time in jail was William "Dub" Massey, a legendary teacher and community leader in Rock Hill. Massey later became a sixth-grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary School and a school counselor in York, South Carolina. His work as an educator and community activist, along with the work of many other educators in my hometown, inspired me to become a middle and high school social studies

[1] A proverb of the Akan people (from parts of Ghana and the Ivory Coast). According to historian Jan Vansina, this proverb translates as "ancient things remain in the ear," as cited in Kwame Y. Daaku, "History in the Oral Traditions of the Akan," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, no. 2/3 (Aug.-Dec. 1971), 117. Explaining the proverb's meaning, Jan Vansina states, "The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation." This idea serves as a guiding concept for my work. Many of those who taught during the civil rights movement have vivid memories of their pedagogy. These memories are "documents" that tell us something about the past that is often unavailable in written form. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), xi.

[2] Fred Sheheen, "Lunch Counters: Police Arrest 10 at Rock Hill Sit-In," *Charlotte (NC) Observer*, Feb. 1, 1961, C1; "100 Protest S.C. Sit-In Jailings," *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 18, 1961, 9; and John H. McCray, "Students Don't Fear Chaingang in Rights Fight," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Feb. 18, 1961, Sec. 2, 2.

and history teacher, a professor in a school of education, and a historian of education.[3]

For decades, my interest in these teachers led me to contemplate the following questions: What is activism? Did teachers engage in activism through their teaching during the civil rights and post–civil rights eras? If so, how and why did they practice activism? If not, why not?

These questions have been foundational over the past four years in my work as the principal investigator of a large oral history project *Teachers in the Movement*. The project's goal is to collect five hundred videotaped interviews of teachers who taught between 1950 and 1980. I am also collecting teaching materials, memorabilia, and other documents and resources these teachers used during their careers.[4] At the intersection of oral and intellectual history, the project illuminates how many K-12 educators and college and university professors engaged in forms of activism through pedagogical approaches that vigorously promoted ideas and ideals of freedom, democracy, and liberation. Collecting oral histories from these teachers has given me a glimpse into their classrooms to discern exactly how they were teaching and promoting activism.

Over time, my study has evolved to incorporate the following questions: 1) Who were the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary teachers in the movement in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia?[5] 2) What, how, and why did these

[3] William "Dub" Massey, interview by author, Rock Hill, SC, Sept. 17, 2017. Teachers in the Movement Collection, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia (hereafter cited as TIM Collection).

This presidential address includes examples of the rich oral history materials being collected as part of the Teachers in the Movement project. Supported, in part, by a Lyle Spencer Research Grant, the project aims to create the largest repository of teacher activism during the civil rights movement. As part of an ongoing project, all collected materials have not yet been made available to the public. If you are interested in specific interviews, please see https://teachersinthemovement.com/ as interviews are being added all the time. Interviews not yet made public are privately held in the collection of Derrick Alridge at the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. You can contact him at dpa8w@virginia.edu.

[4] For the purposes of this article, I feature the voices of teachers themselves in providing their pedagogies and narratives of activism. Research conducted in archives throughout the South will provide a more full-scale history of the teachers.

[5] To make the scope of the study manageable, I limited its geographical focus to the southern states closest to Virginia, where I reside. However, there is also a historiographical rationale for this choice. Many popular images of the civil rights movement are associated with Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi: the fiery Bull Connor and the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama; the desegregation of Little Rock High School in Little Rock, Arkansas; the desegregation of the University of Mississippi and the murder of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia,

teachers teach? 3) How did notions of freedom manifest themselves in these teachers' pedagogies? 4) Who and what influenced the teachers' pedagogies and participation in the movement? 5) How can recovering these teachers' stories inform and impact education today?

In the context of this study, I define *activism* as expressed support for the civil rights movement and the deliberate championing of freedom and equality in teaching and/or community work. I argue that the notion of freedom or liberation lay at the center of many of the teachers' pedagogies. For African Americans, education has historically been viewed as a means of obtaining freedom. Historian Earl Thorpe states that "the central theme of Negro thought has been the quest for freedom and equality."[6] Teachers during the civil rights era and larger black freedom struggle, I contend, were essential disseminators of the idea of freedom through both their work in the community and their pedagogy in the classroom. In this article, I share teachers' voices and views about their roles and pedagogy, inviting readers into their classrooms to discover how ideas of freedom permeated their teaching during the most consequential social movement in the United States in the twentieth century.[7]

Toward a Historiography of Teacher Activism

Some civil rights scholars and activists, and even organizations such as the NAACP, have characterized teachers, particularly black teachers, as unsupportive of the civil rights movement and opposed to school desegregation. They argue that teachers were more interested in maintaining their positions in segregated schools and their status in the community than in advancing civil rights. Historian Adam Fairclough has attempted to problematize the role of black teachers during the Jim Crow period. While acknowledging the contributions of some black teachers, Fairclough asserts that African American teachers generally were unable to advocate for equal rights, instead

Mississippi. As a result, the Deep South—and particularly these three states—is often viewed as the location of the civil rights movement. By focusing on other southern states, we seek to broaden the historiography of the civil rights movement and expand public knowledge of other places where the movement occurred. My geographical focus thereby furthers my goal of offering a wider view of teachers' involvement in the movement as well as of the movement itself.

[6]Earl E. Thorpe, *The Mind of the Negro: An Intellectual History of Afro-Americans* (Baton Rouge, LA: Ortlieb Press, 1961), xi.

[7]For an invaluable discussion of the idea of "freedom" in the civil rights movement, see Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

compromising their principles to preserve their positions and gain favor with white community and educational leaders.[8]

Characterizing black teachers as accommodationists in the early years of Jim Crow, Fairclough concludes, "Conforming to the humiliating etiquette of white supremacy, black educators resorted to flattery and guile in dealing with whites who possessed money and power."[9] In the 1960s, Fairclough speculates, the civil rights movement would have welcomed greater activism by black educators. However, he argues, although black teachers on the whole supported civil rights, many did not support full-blown civil rights activism that might result in integration that would jeopardize their jobs.[10]

Vanessa Siddle Walker has characterized black teachers of this era as "hidden provocateurs" who often advocated for equality in the education of black students and a culturally relevant education for black children in desegregated schools.[11] Likewise, Tondra Loder-Jackson argues that while historically the teaching profession has often upheld the status quo, black teachers nevertheless engaged in "intellectual activism," teaching ideals of "freedom, justice, and democracy, which have stirred younger generations of students to action."[12] Martin Luther King Jr. himself advocated for teachers to become activists. At a 1960 meeting of the Virginia Teachers Association in Richmond, King called upon teachers to play an active role in the civil rights struggle and prepare their students for the "new age" of equality.[13]

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[8] For a description of how some activists and the NAACP's viewed teachers, but also for examples of teacher activism, see Scott Baker, "Pedagogies of Protest: African American Teachers and the History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940–1963," *Teachers College Record* 113, no. 12 (Dec. 2011), 2777–2803; and Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

[9] Adam Fairclough, "'Being in the Field of Education and Also Being a Negro… Seems Tragic…': Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 87, no.1 (June 2000), 75–76.

[10] Adam Fairclough, "The Costs of *Brown*: Black Teachers and School Integration," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004), 43–55; and Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

[11] Vanessa Siddle Walker, "School 'Outer-gration' and 'Tokenism': Segregated Black Educators Critique the Promise of Education Reform in the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Journal of Negro Education* 84, no. 2 (Spring 2015), 111–24.

[12] Tondra Loder-Jackson, *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 8.

[13] Thomas P. Lee "Anti-Integration Moves Rapped by VTA Speaker," *Richmond Times Dispatch*," Nov. 3, 1956, 1, 5.

The idea that black teachers resisted activism during the civil rights era contradicts the stories I heard growing up in Rock Hill. In addition to Massey, I attended church with Cynthia Plair Roddey, the first black student to enroll at Winthrop College in 1964 and a well-known teacher both in Rock Hill and Charlotte, North Carolina. I also learned about Sam Foster, a black educator who became principal of the then new Northwestern High School in 1971, and I personally knew Brother David Boone, a white minister who served at St. Mary's Catholic Church and was a well-known civil rights activist throughout the 1960s. These were only a few of the many educators who embodied the notion of teachers as activists.[14]

Several historians have written about the active role of teachers in the struggle for black freedom. James D. Anderson, Ronald Butchart, Linda Perkins, V. P. Franklin, Michael Fultz, Christopher Span, and others have documented the role of black teachers in the black freedom struggle in the nineteenth century. For the most part, their work collectively has explored the important role black teachers played in the education of black people.[15]

Vanessa Siddle Walker, Michelle Foster, Jerome E. Morris, Hilton Kelly, Tondra Loder-Jackson, Scott Baker, Sonya Ramsey, Karen Johnson, Adah Ward Randolph, Jon Hale, Zoë Burkholder, Ishamail Conway, Candace Cunningham, and Alexander Hyres, among others, have explored the role of teachers in the black freedom struggle in the twentieth century. *Teachers in the Movement* extends the work of these historians by going inside the classroom to hear from the

[14]"Winthrop College Admits First Negro," *(Greenwood, SC) Index Journal*, July 20, 1964, 1. "Oratorian Brother David Boone, Civil Rights Activist, Dies at 84," *Catholic Miscellany*, Nov. 16, 2017, https://themiscellany.org/2017/11/16/oratorian-brother-david-boone-civil-rights-activist-dies-at-84/. For an excellent discussion of Sam Foster's educational contributions in Rock Hill, see Terrance J. Alridge, "A Case Study of Emmett Scott High School from 1965 to 1970" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2009). See also Samuel Foster, interview by author, Rock Hill, S. C., June 21, 2017, TIM Collection.

[15]James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Linda M. Perkins, *Fanny Jackson Coppin and the Institute for Colored Youth, 1865–1902* (New York: Garland, 1987); V. P. Franklin, "'They Rose and Fell Together': African American Educators and Community Leadership, 1795–1954," *Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (Oct. 1990), 39–64; Michael Fultz, "Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900–1940," *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 2 (Spring 1995), 196–210; Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Christopher Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

teachers themselves about what they taught, how they taught, and what influenced their teaching.[16] In this vein, Larry Cuban's *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890–1990* has also been helpful. While not focused on teachers in the civil rights movement, the book examines teachers' lives and work in the United States over a hundred-year period. Relying on school reports, surveys, teachers' reports, and students' recollections, Cuban reveals a diversity of teaching methods and demonstrates how these methods were influenced by the politics and social milieu of their time.[17]

[16]Vanessa Siddle Walker, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools* (New York: New Press, 2018); Michele Foster, *Black Teachers on Teaching* (New York: New Press, 1997); Jerome E. Morris, "Forgotten Voices of Black Educators: Critical Race Perspectives on the Implementation of a Desegregation Plan," *Educational Policy* 15, no. 4 (Sept. 2001), 575–600; Hilton Kelly, *Race, Remembering, and Jim Crow's Teachers* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Tondra Loder-Jackson, *Schoolhouse Activists*; Baker, "Pedagogies of Protest"; Karen A. Johnson, Abdul Pitre, and Kenneth L. Johnson, eds., *African American Women Educators: Critical Examination of Their Pedagogies, Educational Ideas, and Activism from the Nineteenth Century to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2014); Adah L. Ward Randolph, "'It Is Better to Light a Candle than to Curse the Darkness': Ethel Thompson Overby and Democratic Schooling in Richmond, Virginia, 1910–1958," *Educational Studies* 48, no. 3 (May 2012), 220–43; Sonya Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Jon Hale, "'The Fight Was Instilled in Us': High School Activism and the Civil Rights Movement in Charleston," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 114, no. 1 (Jan. 2013), 4–28; Zoë Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900–1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ishmail A. Conway, "Central Virginia Dreamkeepers: Narratives of African American Teachers that Taught Before, During and After the *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education* Decision" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2000); Candace Cunningham, "'I Hope They Fire Me': Black Teachers in the Fight for Equal Education, 1910–1970" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2018); and Alexander Hyres, "Persistence and Resistance: African American High School Teachers and Students During the Long Civil Rights Movement in Charlottesville, Virginia, 1926–1974" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2018).

[17]Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890–1990* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993). Also helpful in my thinking about teachers' and educators' work has been Craig Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black Schools: The Secondary School Study, 1940–1946* (Columbia: Museum of Education, University of South Carolina, 2015); Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994); Linda C. Tillman, "African American Principals and the Legacy of Brown," *Review of Research in Education* 28 (2004), 101–146; and Sonya Douglass Horsford, "From Negro Student to Black Superintendent: Counternarratives on Segregation and Desegregation," *Journal of Negro Education* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 172–187. I am also encouraged by the work of historian Jarvis Givens, who is doing important work on Carter G. Woodson's

Methodology

As a historian who works closely with education researchers and social scientists, I am often asked, "What are your methods?" This question is not new to historians. My methodology for studying teachers is very much grounded in my experiences conversing with teachers and elders in my community.[18]

One of my first memories of grasping the power of oral tradition dates back to 1977, when I watched the television miniseries *Roots*. In the final episode, Alex Haley, played by James Earl Jones, travels to Gambia, West Africa, to search for evidence of his ancestor Kunta Kinte, who had been kidnapped and brought to America two centuries earlier. During his youth in Tennessee, Haley often heard the story of Kunta Kinte being kidnapped when he went in search of wood to make a drum. To trace the story of the "old African," as Haley calls Kunta Kinte, Haley listened to the local griot recite the history of the tribe.[19] The griot tells the story of a young man named Kinte who was kidnapped by slavers when he went to obtain wood for a drum. In amazement, Haley declared, "You old African! I found you! Kunta Kinte! I found you!" This scene had a powerful impact on my love for the oral tradition as history.[20]

The image of the griot in *Roots* affected me profoundly. In my work, I view both my interviewees and myself as griots. The teachers

influence on teachers' pedagogy. See Jarvis R. Givens, "Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness: Resurrecting the Educational Praxis of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 1875–1950" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

[18]For a discussion regarding the debates about historical methodology, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory,* 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). For a discussion of historical methodology, see Derrick P. Alridge, "The Dilemmas, Challenges, and Duality of an African-American Educational Historian," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 9 (Dec. 2003), 25–34.

[19]The griot in West Africa is the storyteller, poet, musician, and preserver and disseminator of knowledge. The term *griot* is derived from the French word *guirot*, which means "storyteller." See Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[20]*Roots,* "Part VIII," written by M. Charles Cohen and Alex Haley, ABC, Jan. 30, 1977. For a detailed account of Haley's search for Kunta Kinte, see Jervis Anderson, "Sources: Alex Haley's 'Roots,'" *The New Yorker*, Feb. 6, 1977, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1977/02/14/sources. Although the scene of the griot in the film influenced my love for oral traditions as history, it should be noted that parts of Haley's work was fiction and plagiarized from Harold Courlander's *The African* published in 1967. See Eleanor Bley Griffiths, "Is Roots a true story? Why this tale of slavery and family history is so controversial," https://www.radiotimes.com/news/2017-03-01/is-roots-a-true-story-why-this-tale-of-slavery-and-family-history-is-so-controversial/.

I interview impart their memories and histories to me, and I help preserve this history to pass on to future generations. The information they share about their lives and teaching cannot be found in documents, and thus I am also a griot in conveying their narratives to future generations. I have learned the importance of listening to these teachers and allowing them and their stories to speak for themselves. In the context of these stories, teachers often discuss other teachers they have taught with and suggest I contact these colleagues to hear more and to fill in the holes of their stories.[21]

My research has taken me to large cities like Charlotte and Raleigh, North Carolina; Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Richmond, Virginia. It has also taken me to small towns and hamlets like Chester, South Carolina; Elizabeth City, North Carolina; Danville, Staunton, Waynesboro, Lynchburg, and Victoria, Virginia, among many other places throughout the South. When arriving in these towns, I often think of W. E. B. Du Bois's experiences as a student at Fisk University and as a teacher in a rural black Tennessee school in the late 1880s, a mere twenty years removed from slavery. Recounting this period of his life in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote these beautiful words:

> Once upon a time I taught school in the hills of Tennessee, where the broad dark vale of the Mississippi begins to roll and crumple to greet the Alleghanies. I was a Fisk student then, and all Fisk men thought that Tennessee—beyond the Veil—was theirs alone.[22]

As I travel to small towns and large cities throughout the South, I imagine Du Bois's experience teaching in the "hills of Tennessee." I also realize how privileged I am to have teachers allow me a glimpse into their lives and the lives of their students. For me, this work is not just scholarly research. It is spiritual work that resonates with my soul.

Johnnie Fullerwinder: Teacher Integration in Virginia

One of the first teachers I interviewed was Johnnie M. Fullerwinder. I first learned of Fullerwinder from Shontell White, a University of

[21] In addition to oral history, this paper also draws on methods in intellectual history. For an excellent description of intellectual history, see Richard E. Beringer, *Historical Analysis: Contemporary Approaches to Clio's Craft* (New York: John Wiley, 1978), 7-55.

[22] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903), 60. Scholar Larry Lee Rowley reminded me that Du Bois detailed his travel and works with teachers in Tennessee in *The Souls of Black Folk.* Thereafter, I have reflected on this passage in the *Souls of Black Folk.*

Figure 1. Johnnie Fullerwinder (courtesy of the Teachers in the Movement Project. Photo by Ryan J. Heathcock)

Virginia undergraduate from Danville, Virginia. Although White and I were well prepared for the interview, I could not help but be nervous because of the great respect I have for Fullerwinder.

When I entered Fullerwinder's home, I recalled that she was a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority and I vaguely remember seeing evidence of this in her home. I told Fullerwinder that my mother was also an AKA and was also from South Carolina. I mentioned that I was a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity—which I knew her husband also belonged to. In the back of my mind, I knew we must know some of the same families, though perhaps from different generations. Engaging Fullerwinder through our shared identity as black Greeks and South Carolina natives offered one approach to helping her see me beyond my researcher identity.[23]

Fullerwinder graduated from Carver High School in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in 1958, then headed to Salisbury, North Carolina, to attend Livingstone College on an academic scholarship. She majored in teaching with a focus on science and graduated in 1962. As in Spartanburg, Jim Crow was ever present in Salisbury. Nevertheless, Fullerwinder found that her Livingstone professors, like her high school teachers, were dedicated to their students' intellectual enrichment.[24]

[23]Johnnie M. Fullerwinder, interview by author and Shontell White, Danville, VA, March 11, 2015, TIM Collection, https://vimeo.com/198131407. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority is an African American sorority founded in 1908 at Howard University. Omega Psi Phi was founded at Howard University in 1911.

[24]Johnnie Mullins Fullerwinder, *Failure Was Not an Option!: A Test Case in School Integration* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009).

After graduating, Fullerwinder returned to Carver High School in Spartanburg, this time as a teacher. As in many black schools in the South, Carver's resources were minimal. With no access to mimeograph machines, teachers wrote lessons on the board in longhand for students to copy. The textbooks, which had been discarded by white schools, were old and outdated, and Fullerwinder remembered having only two microscopes for six classes of students.[25]

Yet despite the challenges presented by this lack of resources, Carver was rich in culture and support. Teachers in all-black schools with few resources nevertheless provided students with a culturally relevant education, intellectual nourishment, and a sense of racial pride. Such intangibles were essential for black students to succeed in the context of Jim Crow society.

In 1966, Fullerwinder left Carver for George Washington High School in Danville, Virginia, in the southern part of the state. As the first African American teacher at predominately white George Washington, Fullerwinder encountered racism daily. She told me she often felt invisible and ignored by her fellow teachers; after her first teachers' meeting, for example, her colleagues walked off without her, leaving her standing alone.

Despite Fullerwinder's heroic undertaking as the school's first black teacher, her arrival was barely covered by the local paper. The *Danville Register* merely noted, "George Washington High School chalked up a first during the day. A Negro science teacher was present, marking the first faculty integration during the regular school year in the city's history."[26] Fullerwinder's situation resembled that of many black teachers across the country who were quietly integrating white schools, often enduring many challenges to bring about school desegregation.

During her first few weeks at the school, Fullerwinder recalls being mocked by some of her students. On one occasion, students held their noses as she passed their desks, insinuating that she smelled. In the face of such challenges, Fullerwinder made it clear to her students that her goal as their teacher was to help them become better science students. She informed them that, although she was black, race would not be a topic of discussion in their classwork.[27]

The resources available to teachers at George Washington contrasted starkly with those at Carver. At George Washington, Fullerwinder had fifty to sixty microscopes, new textbooks, paper for teachers, and mimeograph machines, and she could order any specimens she needed for class dissections. Fullerwinder's pedagogy

[25] Fullerwinder, interview.
[26] "New School Year Starts for Over 7,000," *Danville (VA) Register*, Sept. 2, 1966, 5B.
[27] Fullerwinder, interview.

emphasized experiential engagement. She utilized hands-on activities and did little lecturing. She took students to the library and on trips to experience science in the field and beyond the classroom.[28] Word of Fullerwinder's teaching approach spread quickly around the school, and students began to request her as their science teacher in subsequent semesters.[29] Fullerwinder recalls:

> I thought of myself as being somewhat of a pioneer, a trailblazer, someone that would make it easier for others to follow. I felt that if I had not been successful with everyone watching me, that it would have delayed significantly the merging of all the schools together, so I felt I had to do an exceptional job to show, first of all, that black people are capable of being able to teach. That we're knowledgeable. That I could demonstrate good classroom management skills.[30]

Like other teachers of the Jim Crow era, Fullerwinder understood that she must be exemplary to gain respect for her teaching. She noted, "I was not going to be outdone. . . . I would show that black teachers were . . . able to do an effective job of teaching students regardless of whatever color they were."[31]

Over time, Fullerwinder began to reach out to her fellow teachers. Eventually, she observed, her colleagues began to admire her teaching skills and began to talk with her more frequently. Although she did not see herself as an activist in the traditional sense, Fullerwinder recognized that the commitment she made as George Washington's first black teacher and her efforts to provide her students with the best education possible were, in fact, forms of activism. Her experiential approach of taking students outside the classroom to conduct science in the real world and teaching them to engage each other with respect, regardless of race, might also be viewed as a form of activism.[32]

To be clear, Fullerwinder came to George Washington with confidence in her abilities and felt prepared, even though she had previously taught at a segregated school with fewer resources. In reflecting on her time at Carver and George Washington High Schools, Fullerwinder praised the abilities of teachers and students in both settings and noted that black teachers and students at Carver were just as capable as the teachers and students at George Washington. She stated, "I'd always been led to believe that blacks were intellectually inferior. I found that it was the farthest thing from the truth. There was no

[28] Fullerwinder, interview.
[29] Fullerwinder, interview.
[30] Fullerwinder, interview.
[31] Fullerwinder, interview.
[32] Fullerwinder, interview.

difference between the black students and the white students that I had experienced, because I had the opportunity to do both."[33]

Fullerwinder reported that she did not see herself as an activist in the traditional sense. Engaging in activism was especially difficult for female teachers, she stated, as they were expected to be married and focus solely on teaching. This was especially true for black women teachers.

Nonetheless, Fullerwinder viewed promoting ideals of freedom and civil rights as part of her responsibility as a teacher. She also saw her role as George Washington High School's first black teacher as part of the larger civil rights struggle. At the end of the interview, White asked Fullerwinder what she would want students today to know about the civil rights movement:

> I would want them to know that the civil rights struggle was a painful and sometimes deadly movement, but its goal was quite admirable: to make sure that every person had access to the same rights, to eliminate segregation of races. I saw firsthand that the doctrine of separate but equal was just a farce, so until people could actually get together in the same area, they would never have equal access.[34]

Fullerwinder unquestionably played an activist role in Danville that helped bring integration to fruition.

Nancy Samuels: A White Teacher at a Predominately Black School

During the years of segregated schooling, white teachers also taught black students in the South. In 1965, Nancy Samuels graduated from Stafford High School in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and enrolled in Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Lynchburg in the 1960s was a conservative town and home to evangelical minister Jerry Falwell. Despite the conservatism she encountered attending college in a small southern town, Samuels's experiences at Lynchburg College were enlightening. She became engaged in activism by protesting a local paper's refusal to report the deaths of black citizens on the obituary page. She also protested, with fellow students, a white church's refusal to accept black parishioners. Samuels credits her Christian upbringing and her exposure to students from the North with igniting

[33] Fullerwinder, interview.
[34] Fullerwinder, interview.

her activism in college. Her college experiences would later have a strong influence on her pedagogy as a classroom teacher.[35]

In 1968, Samuels became a teacher at Brookland Middle School in Henrico County, Virginia. Henrico was a suburban school district with a predominantly white student population. During this period Samuels met her future husband, who was African American. Reflecting on this time, Samuels recalls her bewilderment at her family's concerns about her dating a black man. As a Christian, Samuels embraced the principle of treating all people equally, noting, "I sincerely bought into all of it." In addition, her father and grandfather were well known in her hometown as fair business people and had taught her not to judge people based on race. She characterized her childhood as "idyllic" and described growing up in a loving family and a church community that emphasized the equality of all people. Despite concerns from her family, the two continued their relationship and eventually married.[36]

After her marriage, Samuels transferred to the Richmond Public Schools, and in 1971 accepted a position at Maggie Walker High School, a predominantly African American school. Maggie Walker was a good fit for Samuels. She recalls readily identifying with the students, whose energy and quick wit matched her own. Samuels taught English and literature, which she used as a tool to engage students on controversial issues regarding race and civil rights, topics that in the early 1970s were still raw in Richmond and throughout the South.[37]

In 1977, shortly after *Roots* aired on national television, Samuels used the miniseries as a foundation for a discussion of race. Samuels recalled:

> The main thing I remember, as far as maybe being tension at Walker when I was there, was when *Roots* was on TV. That, I don't know, it was on one or two weeks. It was on every night. And I remember I had to come back—we met as a staff and we talked about it, how to handle it. We decided that we would discuss it. We wouldn't let it boil. So by being an English teacher, that was even easier for me, in an English class to do. Of course, it was from a novel, so that was even better. So we discussed it every day. The kids were allowed to speak and say how they felt. They were

[35]Nancy Samuels, interview by Victor Luftig and Derrick P. Alridge, Richmond, VA, Sept. 21, 2015, TIM Collection, https://teachersinthemovement.com/video-library/; and "Student Group Pickets Papers in Lynchburg," *Washington Post-and Times Herald,* Nov. 16, 1968, B4. To be clear, I am not arguing that Samuels activism is typical of white teachers during the civil rights era. However, she is one of several white teachers in my study who taught in predominately black schools and engaged in forms of teacher activism.

[36]Samuels, interview.

[37]Samuels, interview.

> integrated classes. And the white kids, there was a little trepidation there every morning. But by the time they got through the day and they'd been able to talk about it in classes, I felt that it worked out that it was a very positive thing the way we handled it.[38]

Samuels remembered that her black students came to class upset by the way enslaved blacks were treated in the film. At the same time, her white students did not want to be blamed for the way their ancestors treated blacks. These reactions provided a teachable moment that forced students to discuss the historical legacy of slavery. *Roots* also helped students to evaluate the civil rights movement. From that point on, Samuels was even more convinced of the power of media and literature as pedagogical tools of activism.[39]

Throughout her career, Samuels drew on excerpts from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the work of LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., and the literary works of Toni Morrison. She noted that "my main goal was to impart the joy of learning and that it was an ongoing, lifetime thing." Samuels noted that it was her goal to empower students by encouraging them to form their own opinions. She provides an example regarding poetry as a pedagogical tool. "Students would say, 'Well, what do you think, Mrs. Samuels?' I'd say, 'It isn't what I think, especially on interpreting poetry. What do you think the poet meant?'" She taught her students that the "beauty of literature" was that all individuals could develop their own interpretations. Samuels believed her pedagogical approach provided a means of teaching what today some call "difficult" history and literature.[40]

Walter Nathaniel Ridley: Higher Education Leadership and Civil Rights

As in K-12, I have found that higher education is also replete with examples of pedagogical and administrative activism. This is vividly illustrated by the story of college professor and administrator Walter Nathaniel Ridley, the University of Virginia's first black graduate. As a student at Howard University (receiving a BA in 1931 and MA in 1933), Ridley was influenced by other prominent race leaders of the twentieth century, including Howard University president Mordecai

[38] Samuels, interview.
[39] Samuels, interview.
[40] Samuels, interview.

Johnson, professor Ernest E. Just; historian Carter G. Woodson, and Charles H. Thompson, founder of the *Journal of Negro Education*.[41]

From 1936 to 1957, Ridley was a professor of psychology at Virginia State College, becoming chair of the department in 1943. Ridley was popular on campus and well known among students and faculty. His colleague, education professor Margaret Dabney, recalled that "he was a counselor for the young people" and he advised youth groups and engaged in civil rights activities. He could be both jovial and professional. She described Ridley as a "larger-than-life man. Very sure of himself and his opinions." She noted that he was an intellectual who expressed "broad interest in a variety of topics and issues" and could speak knowledgeably on many different subjects.[42]

While at Virginia State, Ridley served as president of the American Teachers Association (ATA), an organization he believed should be engaged in the larger black freedom struggle. On September 26, 1946, he wrote Du Bois a letter proclaiming the ATA's support for the Pan-African Congress. He noted, "The American Teachers Association has great interest in movements designed to bring greater freedom to all people. . . . In the name of the Association, I endorse the petition and I wish to indicate our intentions to support the purpose of the movement."[43]

However, in 1950, Ridley decided that he wanted to complete his EdD. He had done his doctoral coursework at Ohio State and the University of Minnesota but wanted to complete his doctorate at the University of Virginia (UVA) stating "I don't know any reason why I shouldn't be able to come to the University of Virginia. I said my father paid taxes in the state, I'm a tax paying citizen." At that time, several southern states prohibited black students from attending in-state schools, instead paying their tuition to attend schools in the North.

[41] Walter N. Ridley, interview by William A. Elwood, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, April 10, 1989, https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/avalon:17286; and "Biographical Note," *Walter Nathaniel Ridley Papers, 1958–1968*, University Archives G.R Little Library, Elizabeth City State University, Elizabeth City, NC.

[42] Margaret Dabney, interview by Gary Flowers and Derrick P. Alridge, March 14, 2017, Richmond, VA, TIM Collection.

[43] Walter N. Ridley to W. E. B. Du Bois, Sept. 26, 1946, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers*, MS 312, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b109-i170. The Pan-African Congresses were a series of meetings in the first half of the twentieth century bringing together black leaders, intellectuals, and activists around the world. The purpose of the meetings was to illuminate the common challenges of African peoples around the world and to identify strategies for unification, liberation, and freedom for African people throughout the diaspora.

In Virginia, this practice was codified into law with the 1936 Dovell Act, also known as the Educational Equality Act.[44]

Ridley told Lindley Stiles, the UVA Curry School of Education dean, that he had completed requirements for the doctoral degree at the University of Minnesota and believed he should be allowed to complete his EdD at UVA. Stiles informed Ridley that his request was timely because UVA president Colgate Darden wanted to admit a black student to UVA.[45]

At age 41, Ridley applied and was admitted to the EdD program. Ridley was an ideal candidate to desegregate the university. He was older and would not mingle with the undergraduates, he had an impeccable academic record, and he would not live on grounds, so housing him would not be an issue. Still employed as a professor at Virginia State, Ridley did not move to Charlottesville to attend UVA. Instead he drove the ninety-five miles from Virginia State in Petersburg to UVA, making more than ninety round trips.[46]

While attending UVA, Ridley made an impression on faculty, students, and community members alike. A legendary story relates that a Curry professor asked Ridley to teach statistics because the professor believed Ridley was capable of doing so. Legend also has it that black custodians peered through the classroom window as Ridley taught white students with a white professor looking on. When Ridley left the classroom, the custodians parted and expressed to Ridley the pride they felt for him that day.[47]

Ridley excelled as a student, receiving all As and one B+, and he received his doctorate on June 15, 1953. His dissertation was titled "Prognostic Values of Freshman Tests Used at Virginia State College." A few days prior to his graduation, Dean Stiles stated that Ridley "has demonstrated to the highest degree the qualities of leadership and of gentlemanliness we expect of University of Virginia

[44] Walter N. Ridley, interview by William A. Elwood, William A. Elwood Civil Rights Lawyers Project Collection, 1984–1989, n.d., Accession # 12801, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA. For a discussion of the Dovell Act and its history at UVA, see Malcolm Dunlop, "Defying Dovell: A Study of the Origins and Impact of Virginia's 1936 Dovell Act" (unpublished manuscript, Department of History, University of Virginia, 2017), copy in possession of author.

[45] Ridley, interview.

[46] Robert Mcg. Thomas, Jr. "Walter Ridley, 86, Who Broke the Color Barrier to Get Ph.D., Dies," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1963, 51.

[47] This story was told by Ridley's daughter in the documentary *Ridley. Ridley*, documentary film, (Charlottesville, VA: Silverthorn Films, 2008). Trailer for the film is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi78lgjeJ4A. I've heard it numerous times in my travels across the state of Virginia. It is part of the Ridley lore and very important to Ridley's story.

Figure 2. Robert Vaughan (right) talks about his, Walter Ridley's and others' civil rights activism with the author (courtesy of the Teachers in the Movement Project. Photo by Ryan J. Heathcock)

students." President Darden noted that Ridley's "excellent record leads me to believe he will reflect credit upon the University and upon the Commonwealth."[48]

At UVA, most discussions about Ridley center on his role in desegregating the university. However, his greatest contributions to the civil rights movement as an educator occurred as a professor at Virginia State and during his presidency of Elizabeth City State College (ECSC) in North Carolina from 1958 to 1968. My discussion here will focus on the latter.

Ridley was a charismatic figure and, according to my interviewees, he ran the school like the all-knowing Wizard of Oz. On any given morning, he could be observed walking his German shepherd across the immaculate campus. In my interviews with students, faculty, and staff, I heard a variety of stories about Ridley's activism. ECSC basketball coach Robert Vaughan noted that Ridley never participated in civil rights marches himself, but that behind the scenes he was always pushing the levers for black equality in Elizabeth City and throughout North Carolina. On several occasions, he even asked Coach Vaughan to participate in civil rights activities because, as president of the college, he himself could not openly participate.[49]

[48]"First Negro To Graduate From U.Va, W.N. Ridley to Get Degree Monday," *Richmond Times- Dispatch*, June 11, 1953, 7.

[49]Robert Vaughan interview by author, Elizabeth City, NC, March 7, 2017, TIM Collection.

Ridley was perhaps best known for a course he taught each spring for seniors about to graduate. Former student Charles Cherry recalled:

> Most memorably, however, was a class that he taught. This is the president teaching a class at the university—sort of unheard of. The name of the class was Contemporary Living. And it was taught on a Tuesday night, if I remember, and all seniors had to attend. And it didn't have a textbook, it wasn't written into the curriculum, and you didn't get credit for it, but you were there on time, ready. And we discussed everything, how do you finance, how to become an efficient leader, how to lead others, and so forth and so on.[50]

The course taught students to apply what they had learned in college to everyday life. Students in Ridley's course were required to be on time for class, dress appropriately, speak proper English, and think quickly on their feet. Ridley saw this course as a way to prepare students to participate in the civil rights movement and overcome the obstacles they would face in the real world. Cherry noted:

> I'll be honest with you, I never heard him talk that much about civil rights. But he didn't have to. He was the kind of guy who walked the walk as well as talked the talk; I mean, he would say too that one of the best attributes that you can give to the civil rights movement is be totally prepared. To give back to society, reach back and help someone else who was less fortunate—that's what we were led to believe, that once you came to and got into education, it became your duty. And I used to hear him say that once that happened, there would be less need for civil rights.[51]

Though Ridley did not push his students to participate in civil rights activities, he nevertheless expected them to be involved in the movement.

James E. Wright: Black History as Activism

In 1963, South Carolina native James E. Wright enrolled in South Carolina State College (SCSC), where he majored in history and social studies. While at SCSC, Wright did not participate in civil rights activities and remained on the periphery of activism. He later recalled that he needed to stay out of trouble because his family in Chester would not be able to get him out of jail for engaging in protests. However, he was an astute observer of the movement and soaked up as much as he could as a student.

[50] Charles Cherry, interview by author, Elizabeth City, NC, March 6, 2017. TIM Collection.

[51] Cherry, interview.

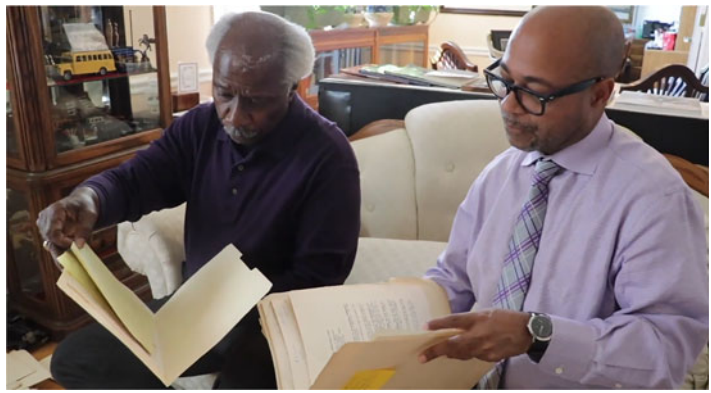

Figure 3. James E. Wright (left) shares memories with the author (courtesy of the Teachers in the Movement Project. Photo by Ryan J. Heathcock)

Several professors at SCSC had a major impact on Wright's future career as an educator. One such teacher was Marguerite Rogers Howie, Wright's main social studies professor. In addition to teaching the social science seminar and overseeing students in teacher education, Howie also taught sociology and anthropology. Wright recalled her influence on him:

> It took me a while to understand that she saw a lot of potential in me that I did not see in myself or understand. Along with the other students, she scared the hell out of all of us. She was tough. There were times when she failed entire classes at State. I remember we had to do our lesson plans, and her guiding principle was, when you prepare your lesson plan, prepare your plan as if someone else would teach it.[52]

Wright remembers Howie as a hard but fair instructor. Part of being a good teacher, she told her students, was to be organized and prepared. Howie also taught Wright and his classmates Bloom's taxonomy, which provided teachers with a means of classifying student learning according to hierarchical levels of complexity. For Howie and Wright, being an educator involved more than the practical task of teaching classes; it also entailed a knowledge of psychology, along with history and the social sciences. Howie and other SCSC teachers inspired Wright to teach "blackness and the black experience and African American studies and black studies" to his students.[53]

[52]James E. Wright, interview by author, Columbia, SC, Jan. 24, 2018. TIM Collection.

[53]Wright, interview.

After graduating from SCSC and receiving his teaching certificate in 1967, Wright enrolled in a master of education program with the prospective teaching corps program at SCSC, attending graduate school from 1967 to 1968. However, Wright's time in the program did not last long. He was drafted into the army in September 1968, and by 1969 he was in Vietnam, where he served for eighteen months in communications with the 54th Signal Battalion.[54]

After completing his time in Vietnam, Wright was scheduled to go to Germany and Korea. However, he sought early dismissal to pursue his teaching career in South Carolina. After writing to Senator Fritz Hollings and his congressional representative and receiving no support, Wright wrote to Senator Strom Thurmond to request help to return to South Carolina. After two weeks, he received a letter from Thurmond informing him that he was to return to the States, first to the Pentagon and then to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Wright noted that his reassignment might be attributed to Thurmond's "strong reputation for constituent services." Such was the complexity of racism in the South. Wright served at Fort Bragg between 1970 and 1971. While there was much racial and generational tension between soldiers, Wright remembers his time in the army as a transformative experience.[55]

Wright began his first teaching job in August 1971 at Eau Claire High School in Columbia, South Carolina. At Eau Claire, debates over the civil rights movement were ubiquitous and anxieties were high. Wright's teaching method was to allow for open discussion on topics raised by the students. However, he also wanted students to be well informed and required them to be abreast of the pressing topics of the day. To facilitate learning about opposing views, Wright required students to argue positions they did not support.[56]

Memorization was also a core component of Wright's teaching philosophy. As a student himself he had been required to memorize "The American's Creed," "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the Preamble of the Constitution. In church he memorized Easter and Children's Day speeches. Wright noted that this early memorization laid the foundation for his subsequent learning, and he believed it was important for his students to do the same.[57]

At Eau Claire, Wright taught world history, civics, and US history, and he developed a course on minorities in American history

[54]Wright, interview.

[55]Wright, interview.

[56]James E. Wright, interview by author, Columbia, SC, Aug. 9, 2017. TIM Collection.

[57]Wright, interview, Jan 24, 2018.

that included lectures and quiz games on African American history. By prominently including African American leaders and other minority icons from history in his curriculum, he embraced his role as a teacher activist, promoting hidden histories and engaging with issues of race and social justice.[58]

Wright used videos, filmstrips, and music to bring African American history to life for his students. He recalled one particular lesson he taught on Malcolm X:

> One day in one of my black history classes, Black Experience, Black Studies, we used different names—I was playing either this album by Malcolm X or the Ballot or the Bullets. I had both of them. I was playing it in class, and Paul Stephens was the principal. He was a good guy, real good guy. He thought highly of me. In fact, he thought I should have been doing things that I didn't think so, but he did. He was just going through the building one day and he walked into my classroom, my Black Studies class. At the very time he walked in, Malcolm X was berating white folk. Blond hair, blue eyes—Paul Stephens looked at me and looked at the class. He said, "Well, I guess I don't belong in here." Of course, the kids cracked up and I did too.[59]

Wright's passion for teaching and his dedication to liberating his students with the knowledge of black history impacted generations of students in Columbia and throughout South Carolina. Although not an activist in the traditional sense, Wright used black history as an activist tool to educate his students.

Conclusion

My exploration of teachers' pedagogy of activism is guided by the African proverb, "Whenever an elder dies, a library burns down."[60] Fifty years after the civil rights movement, the students of that era are now in their sixties and seventies. Their teachers who are still with us are fewer in number, in their eighties, nineties, and in some cases a hundred years or older. In the time period covered by my

[58] Wright, interview, Jan 24, 2018.

[59] Wright, interview, Jan 24, 2018.

[60] Alexis Johnson, a UVA graduate student studying the history of African American education and researcher with the Teachers in the Movement project, introduced me to this proverb. It's from a statement Malian writer and historian Amadou Hampâté Bâ made during a UNESCO conference on oral cultures in November 1960. "En Afrique, quand un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle" (In Africa, when an old man dies, a library burns down). See Amadou Touré and Ntji Idriss Mariko, eds., *Amadou Hampâté Bâ, homme de science et de sagesse: mélanges pour le centième anniversaire de sa naissance d'Hampâté Bâ* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Maliennes, 2005), 55–57.

study, young people and their teachers were in the midst of the most profound social movement of the twentieth century. The ideals of freedom and liberation were integral to the social milieu of the time. These ideals were not disconnected from the pedagogy and learning taking place in schools, but were instead a central part of this education.

The stories presented here, along with many other stories recounting teachers' lives, pedagogical influences, and classroom approaches, offer brief glimpses into a vital but often overlooked dimension of education and the civil rights movement. Eliciting and documenting these stories not only supports the notion of teachers as activists, but illuminates the influential role teachers can play in contemporary movements for civil rights and social justice. As a historian of education, I am committed to engaging oral history and the history of teachers and students and more openly acknowledging the importance of the past to the present. It is my hope that the narratives provided here will remind current generations of their own vital role as teachers and activists.