

Baker, Ella Josephine ^[1]

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Giving light so people can find the way

By Sarajane Davis, N.C. Government & Heritage Library, 2019; Kelly Agan, N.C. Government & Heritage Library, 2020.
From the NCpedia K-8 Collection ^[2]

See also: [Ella Baker, NCpedia Biography](#) ^[3]

December 13, 1903-December 13, 1986

Can you name any of the key figures of the modern Civil Rights Movement from North Carolina?

Did you include Ella Baker on your list? If so, you know more than the average person about the people who started and pushed the Movement forward. Ms. Baker was born in Norfolk, Virginia. She moved to Littleton, North Carolina as a child. She dedicated her adult life to promoting racial equality in the United States.

In 1927 she graduated at the top of her class from Shaw University in Raleigh. Baker then worked with several civil rights organizations. The first was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She then helped with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 1955, she co-founded an organization named In Friendship. The group raised money for the Civil Rights Movement in the South. Baker's most important work was with young activists. In 1960, Baker organized a meeting for student activists. Those students founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

In the late 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement continued to grow. Young people played an important role in the expansion and success of the movement. Baker recognized that student-activists were looking for a way to elevate their voices. She helped students from North Carolina and across the South join together. She was a key mentor to SNCC members. She encouraged the students to use participatory democracy within their organization. Ms. Baker believed they should also advocate for its use across the country. Participatory Democracy empowers citizens. People find ways to contribute to and guide policy decisions on issues that matter to them. These might include education, immigration, and health care. SNCC later developed into one of the most important Civil Rights organizations.

What are some issues that you and your classmates would ask Ms. Baker's advice on if she were still alive?

Ella Baker is often called the "unsung hero" of the Civil Rights movement. An unsung hero is a person who made considerable contributions to an effort and often extreme sacrifices for an effort but has not been recognized as much as others. Here is another video "[Ella Baker and the SNCC](#)" ^[4] from PBS Learning Media.

References

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Ella Baker." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ella-Baker> ^[5]. (Accessed November 22, 2019).

No author listed. "Ella Baker." SNCC Digital Gateway. <https://snccdigital.org/people/ella-baker/> ^[6] (Accessed November 22, 2019).

Additional Resources

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Dillard, Nan. "Sweet Honey and The Rock- Ella's Song: We Who Believe in Freedom cannot rest." <https://ellabakercenter.org/blog/2013/12/ellas-song-we-who-believe-in-freedom-cannot-rest-until-it-comes> ^[8] (Accessed November 22, 2019).

"Ella Baker Bigger than a Hamburger," SNCC Digital Gateway, 10:55,<https://snccdigital.org/people/ella-baker/> [6] (Accessed November 22, 2019).

Ella Baker Educational Project of NC. <https://ebprojectofnc.org/> [9] (Accessed November 22, 2019).

"Ella Baker: Making the Struggle Every Day." YouTube video, 2:21. "Peaceable Power," March 1, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t96fnyLMihA> [10].

"Put Ella Baker Day on the Calendar." Support Ella Baker Day. <https://www.supportellabakerday.com/> [11]. (Accessed November 22, 2019).

Townes, Mitzi. "Baker, Ella." Nc Pedia. Government & Heritage Library, 2013. <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/baker-ella> [3]

"Ella Baker and the SNCC," UNC TV, Kunhardt McGee Productions, Inkwell Films, and THIRTEEN Productions in association with Ark Media, 2013, <https://unctv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mr13.socst.us.ellabaker/ella-baker-and-the-sncc/#.Xd1AUvIKiUk> [4]

Video Credits:

Leone-Getten, Siena and Paying Lor. "Ella Baker: A Legacy of Grassroots Leadership", 2015. <https://www.civilrightsteaching.org/high-school-students-film-ella-baker> [12]. (National History Day Project winners)

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