

Stories from the Trenches: Women on the Move(ments), 1940s-2018  
2018 Women's History Month Finale Panel  
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Transcribed by Bailey McAlister and Kiahna Kuykendal

Dr. Bohannon: We'll go ahead and get started. We do have a couple of classes with people who are missing, but who may be coming late, um, and so just kind of be aware that's happening, So, um, good morning. My name is Jeanne Bohannon for those of you who don't know me. And on behalf of the Rich Foundation, the Department of English and our student researchers on the Atlanta Student Movement Project, I want to welcome you to the finale event of KSU's 2018 Women's History Month celebration. Today we have with us notable scholars who will share their personal and professional observations and experiences regarding women and the roles they play and continue to play and civil rights movements in the US and worldwide.

We also have with us today professor Tony Grooms, who will read from his new book *The Vain Conversation*. June Davis our keynote speaker is, among countless other distinctions, one of the first freedom riders and a leader of the sit-ins and economic boycotts conducted by the Atlanta Student Movement in 1960 and 61. Our writing 3150 class, these our are student scholars from that class, developed and created this program today with innovative ideas through live-streaming and tweeting with social media promotion, and with the event coordination. Everything you experience today is the result of many hours of their hard work they willingly put in to make sure you, our audience, has the opportunity to learn from the vital primary source speakers we have with us today. So, if you want to learn more or you want to participate in this project, let me give a shameless plug here.

So, I'd like to invite you to enroll in writing 3150 this summer semester. This is a course where all of our work to recover the voices of the people, places, and events of the Atlanta Student Movement will continue. We also have flyers on the table. So if you're interested in participating in this unique opportunity, be sure to pick one up on your way out, or you can enroll for the class - it's the only writing 3150 course offered this summer. Please enroll because that's what we're doing this summer. We're continuing the work of the Atlanta Student Movement project. So I would like to remind you also at the conclusion of the keynote and perhaps during the key note, if our keynote speaker would like to, will host a Q&A session where you can ask our panelists more about their experiences in civil and human rights. We have note cards on the tables if

you want to write your question down and our student researchers will ask you and- they will ask you to hand it to them, if you want to, and they'll ask it for you. We also have roving mics so that you can ask it yourself. And please remember, also, to tweet interesting things that you hear today by tagging the project which is-

Well we're live tweeting @KennesawEnglish. The project is @AtlantaMovement and the Department of English twitter handle. So if you follow us at twitter, @KennesawEnglish, on Instagram, or @Atlstudentmovement, and we're going to use the #WHM2018. And so lastly, I want to give a shout out to our event planners, both of whom are downstairs getting people to come upstairs I think. Hannah and Alley, they have put this event together. They worked side by side with university events and UITS, and I wanted to thank them and all of our student researchers. You put this thing together for all of your work because this is all- this is what you did. So now I want to turn things over to our student scholars who will direct the rest of the panel.

Hilton:

My name is Tessa Hilton and I am going to introduce Anthony Grooms. Anthony Grooms has won the Lillian Smith prize for fiction for *Troubles No More, Stories*, and *Bombingham*, The Sokolov Scholarship of the Bread Loaf Writers conference, the Lamar Lectureship of Wesleyan College, and an arts administration fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts. Grooms teaches creative writing, the short story, and American literature at Kennesaw State University. His novel *Bombingham* tells untold stories of the 1960s civil rights movement. Grooms received the Hurston Wright legacy award for his novel *Bombingham* in 2002. His new novel *The Vain Conversation*, released in February 2018, relates the story- relates the journey of Lonnie Henson, a white boy in rural Bethany, Georgia at the end of World War II. Please join me in welcoming Anthony Grooms.

Grooms:

Thank you, Tessa. Tessa is a wonderful poet among other things. We enjoyed her poetry at the Decatur book festival just last summer, wasn't it? Yes. Thank you all for coming. And especially I welcome the Davis family. I appreciate your making the journey to visit us at Kennesaw. So, um, I was told by Dr. Bohannon that this program was organized like a church service. So I guess I'm giving the opening benediction here, which reminds me of what the, uh, the poet Anne Sexton said of her poems. She has a smokey, raspy cigarette voice. She says "My poems are my prayers."

So I guess this scene from *The Vain Conversation* is my prayer. Here, through the observation of her husband, Bertrand Johnson, we meet Lou

Ellen Johnson, a school teacher in rural Bethany, Georgia in 1946. Lou Ellen has already suffered a great deal of racial violence and as a result of it, she is collecting articles for her own American history book and this is through the lens of a Bertrand:

"Slowly Lou Ellen turned a page in her scrapbook, the sound of the page turning indicated that the paper was heavy and soft. Bertrand had seen the book many times. She called it her true book of American history. She had been a history major when he met her and she said she was collecting information for her own history of the United States. No happy slaves doing master's bidding would be in her book. No mammies wet nursing the mistress's children. Enough of that. She said this would be a book of the naked nature of America, as beastly as it was foul. 'But Lou Ellen,' he occasionally argued, 'Not all white people are bad. And even if they were, you can't think that way. For one thing, it's not Christian and for another, it will eat you up. Hating eats you up just as badly as being hated.' She often dismissed him with a wave of her hand or countered that 'It hadn't eaten up the whites, they seemed to be doing mighty well.'

He glimpsed at a page, a picture of men hanging from a tree branch. She was studying the picture, it seemed, rereading the caption for how many times he couldn't imagine. The article was from the Chicago Defender about a lynching in southern Indiana nearly 20 years before. Two boys just teenagers have been accused of raping a white woman and murdering her boyfriend. Without trial, they were taken from their cells by a crowd, were beaten and hanged. Bertrand knew that reading the scrapbook just before bedtime, Lou Ellen wouldn't sleep. The more she read, the more upset she would become, but he could do nothing about it. 'Lou Ellen, honey, come to bed now. Let it go for now.' She looked more closely at the photograph as if counting the details. Bertrand knew she was going inside of it, removing herself from the bedroom and throwing herself into the frame of the picture with all of its anxiety and tension.

She would be one in the crowd, perhaps even the photographer examining the bodies of the boys that swung from the trees like scarecrows, limp and tattered. In her mind, she ran her hands over their bloodied heads, their necks caught at odd angles. She looked into their dull eyes, oddly peaceful and already drying out. She was already becoming an unseen guest among the onlookers, or part of the crowd of whites, men, women, and children. There was a couple holding lovingly to each other as if they were on a date at a fair. The people wore ordinary clothes, casual suits, open collared shirts, Straw hats, Calico dresses. She saw no hoods or sheets, no monstrous costumes with

flaming crosses. There were the typical people of a typical town. She might have seen one of them just last night at the county fair or she might see them tomorrow, strolling along Bethany's main street.

They were townspeople and in typical postures that would have been at any typical gathering of such people. They had not turned into monsters, neither their veins empty of blood and filled with gasoline. They could have been witnessing anything, a freak show, a wedding or pig roast. "That it was a lynching, wasn't so uncommon," she would've thought. She had told him that the Romans flocked to see men chop each other to pieces with swords. In England, people jostle with one another to watch beheadings and drawings and quarterings. Spectacles - to watch someone's intestines being drawn from his body and his body being sawed into quarters. What must go through people's minds to watch such things. 'She couldn't do it,' she said, 'She could never do it.' And yet something in her said she could kill those whites in the picture if she had to, but that would be different. She would kill them, but it would be no spectacle."

I'd like to finish with just a short passage from my novel *Bombingham*. In *Bombingham*, a young soldier in the Vietnam War is recounting his time in, uh, in the Birmingham movement. And here he is, remembering the funeral of his mother in small town Coosada, Alabama. There's also a mention of Pueblo which is a village in Vietnam.

"The countryside had been baked by drought. The crops were stunted and brown. And the plowed areas had a dead color as if the red soil had been dusted with talc. I had this sensation, sitting quiet, numbness with my family, that we were moving through a dream scape. Not nightmarish, but visionary. Something about the place was also like something about every place I had ever been and would ever go. The scientists tell us that the entire universe was at one place at the beginning and so all of it was right here on the road side, on the way to my mother's funeral. What was the difference after all between a crossroads, like Coosada and a hamlet like [[inaudible]]. Between Birmingham and Danang. Are they not just places full of people and people full of hopes and struggles? Here a field there, a patty here, peanuts, there, rice. Here, a church, there, a temple. We are always ready are we not? To point out the obvious differences, but just below the surface or maybe just on top of it, visible to those who would see it, invisible to those who would not, is the incontrovertible truth that the world is a tumultuous place and every soul in it suffers. Thank you.

Kuykendall:

Good morning everyone. My name is Kiahna Kuykendall and I am a student that has been given the opportunity to work on the Atlanta Student Movement project along with Dr. Bohannon. Today I've been given the pleasure to introduce to you our next speaker. She earned her BA in English from Albany State University, her MA in African American and African Diaspora studies from Indiana University and her Ph.D in African American literature from Florida State University. Her current book length project, *Chronicling Stankonia: OutKast and the Rise of the Hip Hop South*, explores how Atlanta, Georgia hip hop duo Outkast influences renderings of the black American south after the civil rights movement. Today, she will discuss with us the ways hip hop bridges the American Black South to the present and the role of women throughout the civil rights movement to present day. And so ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Dr. Regina. Bradley.

Bradley:

Hey there. I'm sorry. Good morning. Thank you so much. I never get used to doing these introductions. Like it's almost like they're giving you your flowers when you're dead and you just have to sit there like, yeah, just tell me about myself. So thank you again for the, for the, for the wonderful introduction. And thank you so much for coming. I cannot wait to hear your story. Um, so I usually start these types of conversations with a couple of receipts. And what I mean by that is I'm going to tell you, you know, who I'm is, and why I feel I can kind of talk about this stuff. So I'm from Albany, Georgia, which is a nice little city, about three and a half hours if you going 75, uh, in southwest Georgia. And a lot of folks would know Albany as the chronic failure of the civil rights movement, and what I mean by that is when Dr King came to Albany, he wanted to share the dream and folks like Laurie Pritchett and others were like, no we don't want that dream – get out.

Um, so the street committee says that somebody anonymously paid for Dr King to be released from jail and that, that impacted how he thought about the other, uh, movement sections that he participated in. Um, so there was that. My grandmother, uh, who I uplift today, uh, Sarah Barnett is an educator. My late grandfather, Eugene Barnett, was also an educator and was one of the original down south Georgia boys, so to speak, if you're familiar at all of southern hip hop. And my grandmother was from Leary, Georgia. And I learned about civil rights movement not by sitting in class, not by getting to college, but my grandparents told me stories. And what was interesting is that stories weren't what you normally see in a textbook. Usually when you hear about the civil rights movement in the textbook, you get the one paragraph, you get the bolded terms such as Dr Martin Luther King is a bolded term, not an actual activist. And then it's summer vacation.

And I was curious about why there was this resistance to teach us about the civil rights movement, especially with me being from Albany. Um, and my grandparents filled in the gap for me and they would tell me these stories. They would tell me stories about Bernice Johnson Reagon and Sweet Honey in the Rock and how they would sing in the jails to keep each other uplifted. And also when they were marching, I actually got to meet and speak with folks like Rutha Mae Harris who was also one of the freedom singers that were trying to keep the spirits uplifted. Um, I was taught Dr. Janie C. Rambeau who was a student at Albany State, my alma mater and was suspended and expelled because she decided to participate in the movement. And when I actually got to Albany State as a third generation HBCU graduate, a third generation Albany State graduate, I had never heard the stories about why these students were expelled and it wasn't until decades later that they actually got a reprieve in an honorary degree from Albany State.

So I have always been connected to at least the idea of the civil rights movement, um, whether it's through a creative imagining, which, Professor Grooms, I love Bombingham. I was- I'm still spellbound by that book. Um, I also read Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry. Um, I listened to Melba Pattillo Beales's Warriors Don't Cry. So there was always an understanding that black women were at the forefront of this movement and it never crossed my mind that they weren't a significant part of it until you get to graduate school and graduate school just destroys all the little hopes, dreams, visions of what you think you know about particular topics. And then there was conversations about where do women fit. It wasn't until I was 18 years old that I knew the name Fannie Lou Hamer and where the idea "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired" comes from.

So black women have always held the yoke of the civil rights movement. What's particularly challenging is we are still playing catch up to record and honor these stories that these women are telling and also the understanding that there is one particular way to protest and that's where the idea of hip hop comes in. Usually when we think about hip hop, we automatically go to, you know, New York, possibly the west coast, maybe a little bit of Chicago. Never south, we never go south and I had been in my feelings as somebody who listens to southern hip hop, especially being from Georgia and Atlanta. The significance of Atlanta. You have Outkast, Goodie Mob, Pastor Troy, Lil John and the Eastside Boys. All of these folks who sound familiar to us now, but once upon a time they were not considered to be legitimate hip hop acts. And it wasn't until the 1995 source awards where Outkast was booted off stage

by New Yorkers because they're haters and there was a reckoning that, hmm, when Andre Benjamin Aka Andre 3000 says that "The south got something to say," it was a rallying cry for not only southern hip hop artists all the way from Miami to Atlanta to Houston to New Orleans, but also for young southerners to realize that they too could contribute to the world around them in unique and creative ways.

And that is what I feel part of my mission is. Part of my research focuses on the contemporary African American south and one of the challenges is, of doing that, is because often when we have conversation about black southerners, we often refer them to three major historical moments. You think about the Antebellum era, which is the slave era. So the Gone with the Wind, fabulous idea, the plantations. Then you go to Reconstruction and Jim Crow because that is visible segregation. That is a visibly recognizable understanding of what segregation looks like in the Jim Crow South, and then you get to the civil rights movement where there's footage, where there are stories, and then after that, that's pretty much it.

They're like, oh, the civil rights movement, that is the modernization of the south. So for those of us who were born way after the movement started, there is no room for us to articulate one, how the movement has helped shape our understandings of southern identity, but two, also how we can use it as a departure point for thinking about contemporary southern blackness and hip hop is one of the ways to do that. Um, where the hip hop movement in New York kind of starts with the 1970s, the 1980s, poverty, crack epidemic, reaganomics. In the south, genesis point for southern hip-hop is the civil rights movement. It has always been the civil rights movement. When you listen to artists, they talk about the challenges of the civil rights movement and they also have an honest reckoning with the understanding that the civil rights movement wasn't the be all, end all.

It didn't completely change everything, but it did give us a step in the right direction and hip hop in the south reckons with that, whether it's Outkast, UGK, Eightball and MJG. Um, so there are these interesting kind of overlap dynamics that improve that. But I want to take a step back just a second because I'm a story teller and I often use myself at the, you know, the mercy of my students. Um, and, and there, there are two stories that I want to tell before I sit down and the first story is actually about my great grandmother, um, Mary Jones Berkley. And um, I remember my grandmother telling her story because in the south, black women are the gatekeepers of memory. They share stories. They remind us about what happened, what could happen, what did happen, what did

not happen. And, um, my grandmother was telling me about my mom Mary, and she was talking about her father who was lynched when she was two years old and it was because he was an owner or part owner of a lumber company because lumber was a big deal in Georgia in the 1920s and 1930s, and he worked in [inaudible] Georgia.

Um, so if you're at all familiar with Georgia, [inaudible] is on the way to-like you're going towards Savannah. Um, and he was murdered because he had a car. And the person who murdered him basically slit his throat. And, um, they went to trial, but he wasn't found guilty which sounds very familiar to a particular moment that we're living in now. And my great grandmother refused to bring him up ever again because it was too painful. Um, and she was saying that, that was her form of resistance. And I think one of the things that we need to understand, especially if we think about black women during these movements, is that black women's resistance isn't necessarily the formula and doesn't follow a particular formula for being counted as protests, right? And what if you weren't on the front lines? What if you were just making sandwiches or bagged lunches or making signs? Which is what my grandmother and grandfather did because in Albany, at the time, if they were at all recognized as being part of the movement they lost their jobs and they had children to take care of.

So they would, um, put a little something extra in the church plate, they would make signs, they would make bag lunches. Um, they would participate on the margins of the movement in order to make sure that the center was still functioning and going- going strong. And I think that that's important to think about is the work that black women do. Both the visible labor like Ms Davis and the invisible labor that takes place behind the scenes and that we cannot discount what the women behind the scenes were doing. But yet when we have these conversations about the movement, that's exactly what happens. So it's one of those things to kind of think through. Not only where women's bodies roles fit into the civil rights movement, but also where their work as, you know, as 20K Bambara would say, as memory workers, right? They work the memory, they make sure that we do not forget, even if it's just a kernel, right?

Um, the act of reclamation is particularly important when thinking about southern identities because the south isn't linear. We don't just have one thing happen and then we keep it moving. Um, you can look at how many civil rights or civil war reenactments we have, for example, and they're like, this is the year we're going to win, like something's going to change. But we are consistently revisiting the past. Um, and as we revisit the past, we also need to revisit those who were part of the past. And that



includes black women. So as I stand here, I'd like to challenge you to not only think about what the civil rights movement means for you, especially as we're in this contemporary or, as I theorize, the hip hop south, but also what are some of the ways that you are trying to retain and reclaim some of the narratives that have been lost along the way in favor of this collected, um, if not linear understanding of the movement that we have been taught to be the norm. So yeah, I mean in terms of hip hop, um, we're, we're not going to get away from it and, and hip hop is a useful, complicated tool to do those things. So that's, you know, that's my little five minute spiel. Um, but I, I thank you again for your time and I cannot wait to hear your story. Thank you so much for your, for your courage and we honor you today. Thank you.

Wilkinson:

Hello friends. I am Raychle Wilkinson, and I'm an English major here at Kennesaw State, and I have known and worked with Dr. Bohannon for about a year now. And I was lucky enough to take a class with Professor Smith-McKoy last semester. Sheila Smith-McKoy is a professor and the chair of the English Department here at Kennesaw state. Her research focuses on the relationships among African and African diaspora countries and cultures. She teaches African American, African, Afro-Caribbean, and other African descent literatures and cultures. And in addition, her focus areas include health and bioethics. A poet, a literary critic, and a fiction writer, Smith-McKoy is editor emeritus of Obsidian Literature and the African Diaspora. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including the critically acclaimed Schaumburg series, African American women writers, 1910 to 1940s, Journal of Ethnic American literature, Lithium obsidian literature in the African diaspora, research for African literatures, Black Gold, an anthology, and Valley Voices. Her books include When Whites Riot: Writing Race and Violence in American and South African cultures, The Elizabeth Keckley reader, Writing Self, Writing Nation, Artistry, Culture and Commerce, and One Window's Light: a collection of haiku. So, please join me in welcoming Sheila Smith-McKoy.

Smith-McKoy:

Since I'm taller than Regina, I'm going to make the adjustment of the microphone. So thank you for that lovely introduction. Thank you all for being here. Thank you, Tony, for the loveliness of your work. Thank you, Gina Bradley, for continuing this tradition in such an awesome way and Ms. Davis, we look forward to sharing your story as well. Many people enjoin the civil rights movement in this era through men stories. That's why this is a very important event and why the work that these students are doing with Dr Bohannon is critically important. How many of you know the Sam Cooke song, "I was born by a river and a little tent and like that river, I've been rolling ever since." Well, I wasn't born by a river in a

little tent. I am a product of strivers who made the civil rights movement what it was. I would like to take this moment to kind of complicate that history, not only in salute to my mother who continues to be a powerful force at the age of 88, but in the lives of other people during this era who weren't born just in the underclass, who were strivers in making a middle class who continue to build this country and make it what it is today.

I actually was born not near a river but in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1958. That places us squarely four years after what event? Brown versus Board of Education, which was designed to desegregate schools in this country. Now, pursuant to that, the other part of my identity you need to understand is that I not only lived through two school - one school desegregation, but two. And it didn't happen in 1954. I was born in 1958. I started school at an all-black Catholic school in Raleigh, North Carolina named after one of the few black patron saints that the Catholic Church recognizes, St Monica's, who was the mother of St Augustine. That church, the building continues to stand, but it was all black because we were living in a segregated society even in the 1960s when I began school. It wasn't until I was in the fourth grade that the Catholic schools desegregated, but they only desegregated one school, which meant they closed the black Catholic school and integrated us into Sacred Heart Cathedral.

We were not allowed to go to the more prominent wealthy Catholic school, which was just a few miles away. I lived through a second desegregation when the public schools desegregated in that space later on in the 1970s and yet another that I forgot to mention when school systems finally had to consolidate and address those things when I was going into the ninth grade. So it's a long way from 1954 to when I entered the ninth grade. So I want you to be aware of those things. The civil rights movement was complicated, just like the times in which you live. The Vietnam War was ongoing and again, we had people who had to continue to build their lives despite the limitations that were day to day things for our lives. I dare any of you to call me old, but you can do so after the show, I'll take it well.

But I recall going to Belk's department store, which was much like Rich's department stores when African Americans could only shop on the basement level. It was a three level store that became prominent. You know it now as Belk's now, but it was Hudson Belk during the time that it first opened in Raleigh, North Carolina. The cafeteria was also segregated. The restrooms were segregated. There were two restrooms side by side, one for colored, which is a term that we can deconstruct later. One for whites. My mother, as I said, has always been amazing, but

one of my earliest memories of her is being in Belk's department store when the black restroom was filthy and she refused to let us use it. She took us instead and we were about to enter the white restroom and when the clerk came up and reminded us of where we were supposed to be on our appropriate place and my mother said "They can either use this clean restroom or they can go on the floor and you can clean it up later." And she was serious, so we got to use the white restroom.

After that, she built a very strong relationship with the management of Belk's and at the time she was working at St Agnes hospital, one of many hospitals in this country, again, that served African-Americans. St Agnes Hospital was on the campus of St Augustine's college. It was the only black teaching hospital between Philadelphia and Florida during the time that it was open from the late 1880s until it closed in 1960. It closed because Raleigh, North Carolina and the state of North Carolina opened what was supposed to be the integrated Wake county medical center. It was, however, not expressly integrated. They were segregated wards and black doctors were prohibited from working on white clients. So part of what I'm going to do today is to integrate my mother's story with the civil rights movement and my own growth as a scholar and an intellectual and why programs like this are necessary and indeed why the project that Dr. Bohannon has undertaken with our students are also necessary.

My mother, Mary Smith, Mary Booker Smith Morrison, don't let me leave out one of her names, came of age at a very interesting time. Her parents were farmers. They were able to break into the middle class, not with their older children, but with their three youngest girls. There were eight children. The oldest of her siblings, his pathway to middle class was to be a butler for a white family in Burlington. Those were the possibilities for his time. By the time the last three children were born, my mother was the youngest. They had the opportunity to go to college, but they had that opportunity because my, my grandfather's farm was stable and strong. He had children who could work that farm who were in the middle ages in that family, but as soon as he died, all of those girls who had- the two girls who had not finished had to leave school.

My mother left school and married and one of her first jobs was working at St Agnes Hospital. That black hospital that became the last space in which black people could be born at that time and treated. How many of you know the boxer Jack Johnson? Heavyweight boxer. He's the one that the term the "great white hope" was built around because of his reputation. He died simply because he had a car accident in Henderson, North Carolina, which is near the Virginia border. The White Hospital in Henderson did not admit him though he was famous and they knew who

he was. He had to go from Henderson, the almost hour drive to Raleigh, to be admitted into St Agnes Hospital and he got there too late to save him. That hospital did not have electricity in its operatory. That meant that the operatory was run because there were skylights on that third floor. The remnants of that building still exists on that campus. If you want to know more about that, please see my documentary, St Agnes, the Untold Story, which of course features my mother as one of the last living people who worked at that hospital.

Her next job, uh, she broke the color bar at the city of Raleigh. She became the first noncustodial employee of the city of Raleigh. For those of you who aren't familiar with that term, that means she was the first black person employed for the city of Raleigh who was not working to clean. Her job was to take money at the cashiers. It was an outside drive through cashier, um, and she faced a lot of discrimination even at that time. The fact that she was hired made the national news, not just the local news, it was picked up by the AP wire and circulated around the country. She got letters from everywhere, some of them positive and some of them negative. I have a poem about that experience. And I'm not going to use the n word. I'm going to use a modification of a version of the n word. And you'll see it when it comes. This is called Third Time's the Charm.

"It made the first page of the newspaper, 'city of Raleigh Hires First Negro noncustodial employee.' She sat in the drive through window of the municipal building, cashiering, and representing the race. She took them all: water bills, tickets, checks, cash and folding money. Accustomed as she was to their surprise smiles, she noted the slight hesitations and the averted eyes, the wonder of her blackness in the white spaces of their minds. The day he came, she saw his persona mimicked in the wasteful roar of his truck. Of his large, yes, a half ton more than anyone needed to leave, to drive to town to pay a bill. She recognized him and the diehard cracker look of the farmer whose land her parents had sharecropped when she was a child. And the look of wild abandon when he had had, when they picked up and left quote, 'after all he had done for them.'

'I can take your payments here, sir.' She said with the voice that rivalled honey for its sweetness. So when he put nothing in the drawer and said instead, 'I don't give my money to no n-words,' she had already started to smile. She directed him politely up to the second floor. And when he left the truck in the no parking zone, she quietly picked up the phone and informed her favorite policeman that there was a truck parked in that no parking zone. When he came back to the truck, he cussed the ticket and walked back up and again asked, despite the word cashier appeared in

big black letters above her booth, where he could pay that ticket. 'I can take it right here, sir,' She said to his reddened face. But then after taking the time to remind her of the n-word again, he went back upstairs and having taken the lead in their little racial dance, she called upstairs the second time and in a smiling voice suggested that the officer come right down. That second ticket almost glowed in the afternoon sun. And she waited until the third time when he walked up to the booth and gave her his money and she wasn't an n-word anymore.'

The second time my mother broke the color bar was to be the first black employee for an insurance company, mutual of New York. And the third and probably most important time that she broke that color bar, was to become the first black EEO officer for the state of North Carolina where she worked for the Department of Administration. Her story and my father's story are interweaved in the fact that they were strivers. My father owned his own business. He knew not to drive, uh, his, his, uh, expensive cars to get the money, he knew not to wear his tailor made suits to pick up his money. He knew to go in his old truck and his work clothes to get his money. And that is why he became a successful business man and gave us the opportunity to go to that private school, Catholic school, even though we were not Catholic because they could afford to pay the money.

So part of what I want you to understand is that the project that Dr Bohannon's students are undertaking are part of a necessary reclamation. Um, I have a concept, the theoretical concept that I refer to as limbo time and that is a reference when writers, particularly African writers, write about the past, the present, and the future all at once. That these spaces coexist together. And that is what is necessary about us and our long-term American project to move beyond the limitations of race. History is not forgotten. It is just buried and not taught and not passed from one generation to the next. Until you have a moment where there's an interruption in the funk of time and you recognize for the first time whether you're black, African American, Asian, yellow, purple, orange, that race exists and it has weight and that there's something that you can do about it.

And that is why most of us engage in the enterprise of education and these reclamation projects because unless the past, the present and the future can exist in the history of our ancestors. In your lived experience, in the present, and your intention to change this enterprise, then we won't have done our jobs. So I'm gonna end by sharing a poem kind of about you and kind of about me. It's called Their Children's Children and it is dedicated to Laura Davis and the other women who died at the

hands of those unknown. For those of you who have not studied lynching history in this country, typically after lynching victims were found or revealed, the police report said that they died quote 'at the hands of those unknown.' Laura Davis is one of a handful of women who have been recognized in our history. We know many names other than Laura Davis, but she was memorialized in a project called Without Sanctuary that reviewed lynching memorabilia, postcards. "Wish you were here. Look at the coon we barbecued yesterday. Love X, Y, and Z." That has been archived from the southern memories of lynching. So, here we go. Their Children's Children.

"Before class, I placed the seven tissue boxes in the room. I placed them carefully mindful of who sits where. My students have been with me just long enough to settle into habits of being in my class, the silent ones, the talker, the one who sits over there, careful to say just enough, though I noticed that her perfectly preserved books have never been opened. In an email last night, a reprise of the one last week, I have warned them that this day could be triggering and because America has not prepared them, I must. I start the loop of Billie Holiday's version of Strange Fruit. The perfect song for this awakening, a song with its own missing nations, its own history gift wrapped in it, seeing your other bluesy Jewish, white, black rhythm. The website they should have but have not reviewed before class already open.

I start the class precisely on time. Allow the lynching images to flash on the projector screen, on their consciousness. Mindful that these millennials, despite the bubbles in which they had been raised and tenaciously hold onto, are here to save themselves. To save us. I watch as the fierce facades of their innocence fails. When the last image fades, I silence Billie Holiday on the last "strange" and wait. I hear the silence of my black students and I walked behind each one supporting them with my presence. The other students work through the text book stages of their grief, lingering awhile on anger. They didn't know, couldn't have known, as I eviscerate their logic. The one with the perfect books raises her hand and quietly speaks, 'I think my grandparents might've done some of these things,' and her voice breaks. For a heartbeat, I watched the progress of just one of her tears and wonder if her grandparents could have conceived that this awakening as they posed for the pictures, the dead hanging limply behind them. Not one of my students leaves before I talk them through this moment, offering them the bomb of something akin to wisdom. I exercise the line lines of race without leaving a scar. Outside the world awaits them, but the sin of honeysuckle hangs in the air, a gift for them and for their children's children. Thank you.

Wilkinson:

Hello again, my friends. Um, now it's time for me to share a bit of knowledge with you about our keynote speaker today. Norma June, as she was known in her Spelman days, was born a warrior. As a child growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, she was subject to the same unjust public segregation laws as her family and friends. But as early as age five, she refused to drink from the colored only water fountains and could hold her own against even the older children in her grade school. By the way, she was also smart. She started school at just four years old. She would often say of her early years "If you said the wrong thing to me, who knows what I might do. I was known to fight and use four letter words." Norma June attended Spelman college where her godmother was the chair of the French department.

While at Spelman, she and dozens of her Spelman sisters sat in on October 19th, 1960 at the Magnolia tearoom at Rich's department store in downtown Atlanta to eat lunch. More than 50 students were arrested that day along with Dr Martin Luther King Jr, who joined the sit-in at the student's request. Norma June represented a group of 15 students in front of the county judge on a trespassed law violation. She listened politely as he informed her that these students' cases would be dismissed, but if she tried a stunt like this again, he would send her to jail. He asked her if she understood. "Yes, your honor," she replied. The next day, Norma June Wilson led a group of students and another sit in at the terminal railway station. In fact, over the next few, more than 2000 protesters effectively shut 16 area lunch counters down.- 16 Atlanta lunch counters down. And Norma June's group was sent to the Fulton county work farm, which we know was located on the west side of the county near the county line with Cobb county in what is now the Fulton industrial district.

She will talk more about her leadership during this struggle in her keynote, but I wanted to set the stage for you with a story that I think is indicative of June's warrior spirit. In an interview for the book, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement*, she describes the sit-in strategy as a hit quad, which she notes- when she notes that it would create a new sense by sitting in at one restaurant leaving upon request and hitting another target. "As other times we stayed and waited to be arrested." On December of 1960 while other students tested the recently passed Supreme Court Law forbidding public bus terminals to segregate eating facilities by riding from Birmingham to Atlanta, June, along with Spelman sister Betty Williamson and Ben Brown from Clark College, boarded a bus bound for Jacksonville via Macon. It was during this first freedom ride that June came face to face with armed

white supremacists and for the first time she joined the fight for civil rights and the-- for the first time since she joined the fight for civil rights feared for her life.

What is most amazing to me as a student is that amidst all of these courageous actions, She graduated Spelman next year in 1961. After pursuing graduate work at Tennessee State University, she raised two children with her husband, Dr. Leo Davis, himself a noted chemistry professor and prolific researcher. June served more than 20 years at the University of Iowa, retiring as the university's Assistant vice president for finance and university services. She has served on the Iowa Board ad hoc commission to study racism in public schools and with on the board of directors at the Iowa Crisis Center and board of Trustees of the Iowa city commission school district. Her honors include, among many, the Phoebe Sudlowe exceptional woman award and the University of Iowa's distinguished achievement award. In her retirement, she is also active in the friends of Alvin Ailey Organization in Kansas City, Missouri helping more than twenty eight thousand students attend summer dance camps and bringing together people of diverse backgrounds through the art of dance. She is also the subject of a new book that describes the extraordinary accomplishments of extraordinary elders in the African American community. So please join me in welcoming our Women's History Month finale keynote speaker June Davis.

Davis:

I feel a little out of place. I'm in the midst of scholars. We've heard three scholars, and I'm by no means a scholar. You will have to put up with me. Good morning. Glad to be with you. Thank you very much for the more than gracious introduction. Now I have problems with trying to live up to the things that you said. I'm not sure I can do that. Before I get started, I have to say that my sister here and I have things in common and that my grandmother grew up in Albany, Georgia, and uh, my great grandfather founded a business there well over 100 years ago. And so we don't know how families- we haven't had time to talk about this yet- may have crossed paths through the years.

Dr. Bohannon invited me here today to talk about my experiences in the-- can everybody hear me? In the Atlanta civil rights movement, which automatically says I'm a black woman so I don't have to say that. But I cannot resist giving a shout out to some other things that are going on right now in the country about women. And that is the #MeToo Movement and the #TimesUp. And particularly the #MeToo movement because it was started by a black woman in 1996 and someone came along later not knowing what had happened prior to that and put a Hashtag in front of it and property rights it, of course, it's on social media



all over, everywhere. It's become a rallying cry for women around the areas of sexual assault and harassment. In the #TimesUp movement, they've been looking more at workplace, um, and trying to establish ground rules for behavior by men toward women in the workplace. And I have to mention that because of the years that I spent at Iowa, one of those years, I spent as an affirmative action director for the university and I kid you not but probably five sixths of my time was spent on sexual harassment cases. They're very difficult. Very insidious to the workplace. They weren't all men, some of them were women who were sexually harassing too. So it goes both ways.

Social movements represent organizational empowerment groups and those to very much social movements. And these groups, through these movements, are able to [inaudible] challenges against the power structure. And I love them because they're truly changed from the bottom. They're not from the top. The civil rights movement is recognized as one of the most famous social movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I could go so far as to say that it was a radical movement as well as a social movement because it demanded fundamental changes to the value system. And demanded civil rights and equality to all without regard to race. That's a difficult concept for some people to deal with. Black women occupy a unique space in this society so we occupied a unique space in the civil rights movement. We are susceptible to both racism and sexism. In the civil rights movement, it wasn't so much racism as it was sexism.

We learned early in our lives as black women that we need to be very proactive and take charge of our lives. Some will say we got an attitude. As one who's been here almost 78 years, we need attitude. It is our armor, it's our first line of defense and because of this attitude, as Regina already said, we played a major role in the civil rights movement. I'm going to try to give you a glimpse at the Atlanta civil rights movement, uh, through the lens of a black college female. We have to remember that I was only 19 years old when we started that here in Atlanta. I was a junior at Spelman, as someone said, and the Atlanta University students organized and formed what we call the committee on appeal for human rights.

The original participants were leaders on their six campuses and we were selected, believe it or not, by the president of the school to do this, but most of us had been selected by our student bodies to be leaders on our respective campuses. So we sort of had two anointments. I believe that the presidents did this because Greensboro had happened and the sit-ins had already occurred there and they were trying to get out front and ahead of this and probably trying to deter it if possible. But they never

really said that. They were much more subtle about that than that. We set up this manifesto, which we call the appeal for human rights and listed the- out the injustices and equalities as we saw them not only in Atlanta, but specifically Atlanta, but across the world for African Americans.

We were able to get the manifesto put in the newspaper and then what was then the Atlanta Constitution. We took out a full page ad. Senator Jacob Javits of New York was sent a copy of this and he included it in the congressional records, which we thought was fabulous at the time to be recognized and validated in that way. From the beginning of our movement, I served as a member of executive committee and chaired a subcommittee on planning and executing our actions, which we lovingly call the Action Committee. I felt really primed for this task because things had been building up with me a long time, the colored fountains in Jacksonville, Florida, sitting at the back of the bus were things that were not my favorite in the world to say the least. And I was ready to fight for changes, but it took me a little while to think about it because a lot was on the line.

Um, college was on the line. My parents had two other children coming along behind me. Money was a question. Uh, so there were a lot of things. Was I really going to do it or not? After a couple of weeks, I decided I really would do it, not just be around the edges, but be in the middle of it. I was gung-ho from that point on. I don't know how I managed to get through college in that time period. Our efforts here in Atlanta included marches, sit-ins, pickets of businesses, discriminated against blacks both by refusing services but by refusing to hire blacks. Uh one of our major activities here was the jail without bail, which I'll get to later. We conducted kneel-ins at churches, we filed lawsuits. So we hit Atlanta on all kinds of fronts. They were not quite prepared to say the least for what we had done.

Um, the governor at the time I think was Vandiver- he didn't believe we had written the manifesto and sort of accused us of having outsiders do this who were either socialists or communists. He didn't really use those words, but it was very clear in his language what he thought about it. During our first march, Taylor Branch, a historian, quoted someone saying 'God I didn't know there were that many sit-ins in college.' So they were just surprised- they were just totally surprised by us. One of the most historically significant things we did was the [inaudible] on Richard's. And, uh, someone- who was it?- you talked about it. And, um, Richard's was a symbol of a lot of things. It wasn't just a symbol in Atlanta, but it was a symbol as one of the, probably biggest department store in this part of

the country. And people would get in their cars and get on buses and come to shop at Rich's.

And so that made it a particularly interesting target for us to see what we could, what we could do about it. So the first thing we did was plan a sit-in and not only did we plan to sit in Rich's that day but at 10:00 that day we also had eight other establishments that I had organized to be hit at the same time. So we were trying to disperse the law enforcement across the downtown area of Atlanta. We didn't want to give them just one place to focus on, we wanted to give them several places to focus on. It's always a method in madness. I mean there really is.

We asked Martin, I'm going to call him the formal name once and after that I'll just say Martin because that's how I am. But we asked Dr Martin Luther King Jr to join us that day. We had an arrangement with him because he had just moved to Atlanta from Montgomery, that he, uh- that this was our thing. This was the students, and we did not want him to be involved out front with us. But that didn't deter us from having conversations with him on a regular basis, seeking his advice and talking with him, seeking his counsel. When we, when we started this, this was not our first city, this was our second big one. Um, we decided that we needed to protect our parents. You talked about your parents losing their jobs. We were aware that our parents could lose their jobs. So when people got arrested, they were instructed to say only their name and Spelman college or Morehouse College or Atlanta University or wherever and give a street address and give you a age. If they wanted to know any more than that, let them go find that information out. Because a lot of us had parents who worked the cities, not just Atlanta, but other cities and for counties and for states in the south and their jobs could be on the line.

We felt we had very little to lose. No one was depending upon us to provide a living for them. Um, and so we could afford to take the chances, but we didn't want our parents, our elders to have to take those to take those same chances. We formulated our groups all- we were very structured here in Atlanta. We've been criticized for- through the years in history for being so structured. And, and also I think we took a very intellectual approach to it. Um, because Atlanta was different. Atlanta was not Birmingham. Atlanta wasn't Raleigh. Atlanta was not like any other city in the south. It still isn't. It is more so now than it was then. And it was beginning to build what I call this economic powerhouse that we have built in Atlanta and blacks and whites wanted that economic power house to be built here.

They already had the beginnings of it going and had a very large black middle class for a southern city. They had a black, but very large black, educated middle class and they were educating more everyday with these six HBCUs that were in town. So there was a lot on the line for them, for the black community, for the elders in the black community, uh, and for the white community. And Atlanta likes to say in those days they were too busy to hate. Well that's not exactly true, but they were too busy wanting to keep this economic engine going for all races. And it was going positively. Everybody was- most everybody was mostly winning as far as economics were concerned. They thought. So, the black communities sort of turned on us, didn't like what we were doing, but that was okay. They learned. We ran the black newspaper out of business because they refused to carry our ads or put anything about us. So we started our own newspaper, which is still in existence today. Atlanta Inquiry is still going. Julian Bond was the first editor of the Atlanta Inquiry when we started, so we not only took on the white establishment, we took on the black establishment as well. We didn't know any better.

We didn't know any better. When we asked King to join us at Rich's, he was very hesitant about that and rightfully so. He'd been to jail before in Montgomery, but he had not purposely gone to jail. This time, it was going to be a purposeful act on his part to do that, so like me trying to decide if I was going to participate in this whole deal, he had to think about what he had to lose as well. We got arrested and some of us got arrested by the city of Atlanta. Others who were arrested by Fulton County. King got into Fulton County group and when they realized they had Martin Luther King Jr with them, they went back and looked and found out that he had an outstanding traffic warrant. So they saw this as an opportunity.

He and the students that were with him in the Fulton County jail refused bail immediately. You have to understand, with Atlanta, we had lots of money. We had lots of resources here, so getting a lawyer was no- we had lawyers on standby. Every time we planned something, the lawyers knew it, they were on stand-by, bond when it was ready. Nobody had to stay in jail. You could always, always get out. I mean we had cars. We had two way radios, uh, Taylor Branch talks about how well equipped we were for anything that we wanted to do. So King refused bail the first night and then they decided they weren't going to give him bail after that. And the students stayed in there with him too for one or two nights. They moved him to Greenville which is a state prison. They took him out of the Fulton county jail with shackles on his ankles, shackled in handcuffs, and put him in the back of a car with a police dog next to him. And drove him off to Greenville.

When he and his, when his lawyer decided they wanted bail, they refused to give him bail. So someone had the bright idea that we should contact the Kennedy campaign. This was in October, election was coming up in November, and see if we could get some help. And so the initial contact was made through the campaign which Bobby Kennedy was running at the time. And Bobby said, 'This is illegal. They can't hold him for these reasons and not give him bail. They have to let him out.' So he and some of his cohorts called judges and whatever in Atlanta and explained some of the facts of life and it took a while. I mean, it didn't happen immediately and it finally dawned on them that, um, they both gonna be in big trouble, very big trouble if they didn't get this black man out of Greenville. So they let him go. Then the Democratic Party saw an opportunity there. Well, in the meantime, John, who was running, called Coretta Scott King, Martin's wife, she was pregnant at the time. And didn't promise to get him out, but sort of sympathetically saying, "We are with you."

He didn't, he didn't make any promises. He wasn't sure he was going to be able to pull that off. Let's see. It was not his idea to do it in the first place. It was Bobby's idea to, to do it. So no one paid to get King out of jail. They let him out legally. It didn't cost us a nickel to do that. They did what was right, he got out of jail. Um, this action on the part of the Kennedy campaign has been given credit historically for playing a really large part in John F Kennedy getting elected. Those of you who are old enough to remember, he got elected by a very small margin. What they did was the campaign decided, "How can we use this without looking blatant about it?" So they put together a sheet which they call the blue bomb. It was because it was on blue, a cheap blue paper so they called it the blue bomb. And distributed it at some of the large metropolitan black churches on the east side of the Mississippi River, Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, places like that. They said it turned the tide. You would have to know your history in that blacks during that time, were Republicans, they were in the Party of Lincoln. When I came to college at Spelman, almost all of all our professors were republicans.

So this had to make the blacks change more than just their vote. They had to change the way they were thinking about their political alliances. In fact, Martin's father had sworn he would never vote for a Republican. I mean, during this particular time he was quoted as saying this and he said it prettily not a Catholic. In fact, John F Kennedy commented on that and he said, just something like, "Just imagine Martin Luther King's father making such a racist comment." He's, he, he, he was said to have laughed and said, "But we all have fathers don't we?" Do what you gotta do. So

the votes came in from the black community for, um, for John F Kennedy. So our, our little efforts here in Atlanta to, um, do something about Rich's and about sit-ins, about counters, sitting in at counters, eating, may have helped elect a president. Whether you agree with his politics or not, the fact that these small acts that we were doing here would have a national impact. It's pretty impressive.

I was arrested many, many times. I, I have no idea how many. In fact, a lot of that time period even while I was in the midst of it is a blur because of the rapidity of what I was doing. Um, the number of balls that I was, I was trying to juggle. Um, it was tough being chair of the actual committee meant I had to be committed to do what I was asking in recruiting everybody else to do. I couldn't sit in the office or go to class every day and say you go to jail or you put yourself in a position where you could go to jail unless I was willing to do the same thing. So I felt I had to be an example and I had to be a super example because that's the way I think about myself.

If I'm going to do something, then I do it. And I really go after it. Sometimes I was in jail for a few hours. Sometimes for days and once I spent about two weeks in. A member of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation once told me that, um, if I ever thought about getting a job in the state of Georgia, forget it. He said, "Your record is too long. You will never, you will never work in Georgia." I said, "Don't worry, I don't plan to." I've selected about three of these instances to, um, of when I was jailed to talk- to describe to you. In my introduction, that young woman already selected two of them. But I can, I can give you more details. As I go through these three things, if there are questions that you have that you just can't wait to ask until the end, you know, raise your hand. And, and I don't mind being interrupted.

Um, the first one, I thought, I said we'll do three of these. The first one when I was sentenced to 10 days in an Atlanta prison farm which you mentioned. We only served three days. This was in October of 1960. It was the day after Rich's and when the judge saw me that day, that she recounted, he wanted to arrest all of us, but I was the leader of the movement. A thing I didn't tell you was each time we sent a group out there was someone who was the leader/spokesperson for the group so no one had to try to remember what was going on. Only one person had to take care of that and therefore that was going to take care of everybody in the group. So if you had to tell a lie, you told it. But you only had to remember it, nobody else had to remember it.

So that day when we were arrested at the Rich's, it was a young white man in the group. A student. And I don't know who he was or where he came from. And the judge wanted him to disavow himself from being involved with us. And he refused to. And the judge kept questioning him and kept questioning. Finally had him standing in front of him, had me come up and stand in front of him. I think he thought that was going to change his mind in some way and the young man just wouldn't. And he looked at me and he said, "Ms. Wilson, if I see you again, you're going to jail." And that's when I said "Yes sir." So I kind of made sure he saw me again.

The next day we went to the uh, Terminal Railway Station and about 22 of us were arrested for disorderly conduct, distribution, I mean, yeah, disturbance and loafing, was disturbing the peace. And all of these people had been arrested the day before at Rich's but had been released. So it was just a two day thing for us. All the women in the group were from Spelman, there will only seven. So out of 22, the rest were men. Martin Luther's, Martin's youngest son, or younger brother, AD, was a part of the male group, but he was an untraditional student and he was in his twenties. So he was something like, like a grownup. And we usually... we were planned, if we knew what was going to happen ahead of time, I would have planned it differently. But he and I didn't have time to discuss what happened if we got arrested and separated and therefore I was not going to be able to be in charge, which is exactly what happened. Ended up not being in charge. We had never been in a work camp or camp before or prison farm. No one knew what that was like. We were totally without communications. We could not see our families. We could not talk to our ministers. Not our lawyers which we had always been able to have contact with, we were not allowed a phone call. No one in Atlanta knew what a prison farm was like, so no one knew what was happening to us. So everybody was very, very nervous. My mother was so taken aback by this that she had to be hospitalized.

When we got there, walked in the building and it was at least a two story building. The women's quarters was on the left beyond the kitchen, and as we walked through the kitchen, we got to the end and it was sort of a like an eating area and there were white female inmates there peeling potatoes and letting the peels drop on the floor. That's just the first symptom of when I realized how this place was going to operate. So we had to walk through the peels like any black woman had to walk through those potato peelings for hours to get to the black women's quarters. It was, the quarters were a dorm room, I mean a huge dorm room with double decker beds on either side, high up windows, strings hanging from the windows, from the ceiling, which were probably wax or somewhere

because flies and other kind of insects have been caught on them. So that's what they were there for, to catch the- catch the insect- insects.

It was dirty to say the least, the bathroom was dirty. Everything was, was dirty. Um, in my wisdom as a 19 year old and having these six other women with me, some of which had never been in jail before, and now I've got them in a place that I'm unfamiliar with and not sure how to protect them. I decided that since the beds was so close together that we would select seven beds next to each other on the top bunk, so if we needed to, we could walk and touch each other, or yet - I didn't know what. I didn't know what was gonna happen, but it just. It just seemed like the logical thing at the time for me to do, which it was. That night when we went to bed, we didn't even know it was night because they never turned the lights out. The, let's put it, a man and I, I didn't know at the time there was going to be a guard, but a man walked in with a rifle, unzipped his, dropped his pants and raped the prisoner underneath me.

I was very frightened. I wasn't frightened of what was going to happen that minute. I was frightened what was going to come next. I saw this as a clear message to young college students. "You're next, you're next. I'm coming for you." So the next morning when I got up, I asked for a meeting with the warden. Some nerve. Um, I got it. I went to see him. I explained to him what had happened the night before. I had two other requests. I didn't make a request about that. I just said, this is what happened. Just the facts. I expressed no emotional feelings about what had happened. I'm assuming that he's a decent person and he doesn't expect that that's gonna happen in his prison. That's my- that's how I approached him under that assumption. It was cold in there. It was October. I wanted sweaters or something for us because we had to wear uniforms and they were pretty flimsy dresses that we wore. They didn't fit us and buttons were all in the wrong places and in the front. So we needed, we weren't really covered up as a women should be in the front, and it was just disgraceful.

But anyway, and the third thing was I found out the first night that we had to work 12 hour shift, everybody worked a 12 hour shifts. It's a self-sustaining farm, it was. And so we worked six to six. Day or night. And so my third request was that we, the women, be permitted to work the same shift. I said, I don't care which shift it is, but just so we all work the same shift. That's the method of protecting us, that we were all together. I didn't want, I didn't want to be in bed asleep, worrying what was happening to somebody who was working the shift that I wasn't working. So it was selfish on my part, I guess, that I wanted to, wanted to do that.



He, um, he adhered to everything I asked and when we went to bed that night and I hadn't asked about the guard, there was no white male guard with a gun at the door anymore. There was a white female without a gun. Guns were gone. So I had taken care of that, that problem kind of more easily than I had imagined. My next problem was trying to communicate, excuse me, with the men to see what was going on with them because no one in the male group had ever lead a group. And I was thinking that AD was going to step up to that role since he was the oldest one in the group and he was Martin's brother. And so he would automatically be given a certain level of respect because of those two things. So I found a trustee there, a white, a black female who had known me in one of my previous prison tenures.

So things do come in handy sometimes. And uh, she, we, she took a message to the men for me and she said, "Do you want to write this down?" I said, "No, because if you get caught, they're going to throw you in the hole." Which is a very small little cell, um, dark, no windows. You get bread and water, and you're held without any communication with anybody. I think they may slide some food under the bars, but that's about it. I said, "We don't want that to happen to you." So I gave her a verbal message and we worked out a deal that if everything was okay on my side of the world, he would see me when he came in from the fields because they, the men all worked in the fields during the day. He would see me standing in the kitchen. If he did not see me, then he was to know that this something, that something was wrong.

And if something was wrong on his side of the world, he was to give me a high sign, some sort of way, with a hand or something, shoulder, stumble on the floor. It didn't matter, just do something out of the ordinary so that I would know something was wrong. Now what I could do about it, I have not the foggiest idea since we couldn't talk to anybody, had no communications. I just, I think I assumed that that could not last for 10 days, that somehow Atlanta was going to find a way for us to be able to communicate with people. I didn't expect to be let out. But, and the work farm was not a particularly dangerous place to be except for that guard that night. But because they were, um, it was a sort of a rotating group of women and they did rotate in and out, I understand. Prostitutes. People with minor crimes. And I think 10 to 15 days was probably the maximum sentence that anyone had that was in there, which was unlike what we had later on in Fulton County jail. Well I, you know I had told the warden when I went to see him that the conditions at the prison farm were going to be public knowledge and he said, "Well, why is that?" I said, "I'm the editor of the student newspaper. I'll give you one guess what's gonna happen when I get out of here." And I said, "I have a phone call

relationship with Ralph McGill" who was editor of the Atlanta Constitution at the time. And I said, "So it will be known."

I got out, I did an interview, had one of the, one of the reporters on the Spelman spotlight interview me. That was published. I was in the hospital. They put me in the hospital because I was so worn out. I had ulcers and low blood pressure and I was a mess physically. And so I was in the hospital until I missed the Constitution. And so I don't know if anything ever appeared in the Constitution, but I do know about two weeks later, front page of the Constitution, the Georgia prison farm system was being investigated. So we got something else going. Not something we had started out to do, but something of value, anyway, was done.

The next thing I'm going to talk about is my time with the what we call the first freedom ride. She said to you, I went to Jacksonville. The reason we did that is because in November of 1960, the supreme court made a decision that outlawed racial segregation in the restaurants, in waiting rooms, and bus terminals that cross state lines. And when I read that, I saw an opportunity. I said, let's go, let's see what we can do about this. And they said, "How are we gonna do this, June?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. Let's put some of us on buses and there's gotta be some food somewhere along the way, some lunch counters we can sit in." And I said, "What we'll do is we'll, we'll have, we'll have one person in each group who is going home for the weekend, so if you're asked, you're just taking friends home." So we sent a group to Chattanooga. We sent a group to Birmingham. I took a group to Jacksonville and Lonnie King, who was our leader here, and I have discussed, didn't we send a fourth group and we don't know where? So I mean, you know, all of us as we age have, have lost some of the, some of the particulars of things.

So I get on the bus with two people here in Atlanta and we head for Macon, Georgia. It's about lunchtime when we get there. It didn't matter. The lunch counter was open, three of us walked through the, through the line and we just was so casual about it. We took everybody by surprise, I mean nobody had time to be angry or upset and I told the cashier, I said, "I'm paying for everybody." And she said, "Oh, okay." And so she let them go through with their trays and they sat down. All the tables were for two, so they were ahead of me, so they sat in a table, so I sat at a table across from them. And we're sitting there. They said, "June, what's going to happen now?" I said, "I don't know. Police will probably show up." By this time a young white male walks in, comes right over to my table, sits down with me, and he says, "Hello, Norma June."

He doesn't tell me who he is. He knows who I am. He knows why I'm there. He's not from Macon, Georgia. I have no idea. We had quite a few sympathizers who were white kids and adults who participated with us, but this was just so out of the blue and here I am totally out of my element in a whole other town, and this man walks up. So I said to him, I said, "We're probably going to be arrested." I wrote down a phone number. I said, "If we are, here's the phone number in Atlanta, call and tell them that we got arrested." I momentarily had forgotten, but it wouldn't have mattered, I still would've given a phone number. That part of my planning was that we had a car, someone was driving a car who was tailing us so that we were never totally alone. Plus I didn't want to go back on the bus and so we were going ride back in the car from Jacksonville to Atlanta.

And this was a Friday. So, we got arrested, no one putting the handcuffs on us. No one did anything like that. Took us to the police station and the sheriff said, "Guess I'm gonna have to put you in jail." I said, "I guess you will." I said, "But I think you better talk with your lawyer first." And he said, "Why do I have to talk with my lawyer?" I said, "Because there's been a Supreme Court decision that is in effect. It says, what we did was perfectly legal." He said, "You're joking." "No, not joking." So he leaves me in his office and he goes off and comes back. About 10, 15 minutes later, he said, "Young lady, you were right."

Did I not know that all the time? Sure I knew that all the time. He said, "Now, what am I going to do with you until I can get you to Jacksonville?" I think he, he got concerned and as he should've been concerned. Because he was going to have to- he was going to be held responsible, so he said, "Do you happen to know anyone in Macon?" Well, I did. A friend of mine who just graduated from Spelman the year before had been an attendant to Ms. Maria White, which is Morehouse's queen, and she married a young man from Macon, and I happened to remember the last name. And I gave him the name and he said, "Oh, they're a prominent family in town." I said, "Sure." So he found a phone number for me and I called and asked her. I said, "Margaret," I told her what happened, "Can we come and stay at your house until the bus leaves?"

And of course she had to ask her mother in law, she was staying with her in-laws. She was gone awhile and I'm sure there was some consternation and concern about taking in these people as to what was going to happen. They took us in. The, the, uh, sheriff's office took us over to the house. They had drawn the blinds, pulled all the drapes together, the house was dark, but we hadn't been there more than five or ten minutes before people started knocking on the door. The black community came

in droves. They were crying, they were happy, they were scared. They wanted to come in and touch us, basically. They wanted to give us hugs and physically just touch us to see if this was really happening. It was one of the most humbling experiences I've ever had in my life. To see the looks, and they were mostly older people, see the looks on their faces of being frightened but being proud of us at the same time.

We stayed there until about dark. I'm sure there was another bus before dark, but I think the sheriff had decided that it would be safer for all concerned if we waited until after dark to leave. And so they, they took us to the bus station and when we got out of this, uh, sort of hearse from the funeral home, that was all windows were dark and, and everything. So nobody could see us because they were not only afraid for themselves, they were afraid for our lives as well. People were not happy in Macon, I'm sure. And I'm sure the word spread like wildfire of what had, what had happened. We got on the- we got there, and there was all sorts of news people, television channels, flashlights going off, cameras going everywhere and I had already said to the other two, to Betty and Ben, we will give no interviews. We have no comment. We don't even say no comment. You just don't say anything.

We got ready to get on the bus. We found out that the Georgia Bureau of Investigation had sent three other agents to go with us and so we got on the bus first, sat in the front with them as directed, and everybody else got on the bus. It was a local. The bus was, meaning it was going to have several stops before we got to Jacksonville. So whenever the bus stopped, the GBI people would let anybody get off who wanted to get off. And if even one of the three of us wanted to get off, our official escort went with us. If I had to go to the bathroom, he went with me, check the bathroom before he let me go inside, and stood at the door. And they were often, of course. So that's how we get to Jacksonville. When we got there, we were on our own. The Jacksonville bus station at that time had a huge wall of windows out to this, to this what to the streets, was sort of a narrow terminal and this big huge wall windows. So when we came in from the bus, I could see the Ku Klux Klan armed and totally on guard and walking up and down outside. That was when I thought, "This might not turn out well."

I had never thought about death before in Atlanta. As I said, this was an economic engine here. We didn't have to bother with dogs very much. I think only once or twice early on. No water hoses, uh, no rough treatment of people. Mayor Hartsfield would not permit that. And I can't think of the police chief's name, but he was sort of the same mode, we just don't want that trouble here in Atlanta. So one of them said to me,

one of the students said to me, "We're gonna try to sit down here." I said, "You know, I think we've had enough excitement for the day. So let's pass on this one." I call my father on the phone. This was before cell phones. I had to go find a payphone, made sure I had the right change, called my dad on the phone and said, "Okay, what's the plan?"

He knew we were coming. And told me that he was, he was sending someone to, to pick us up. And so he told me where that person was going to be, it was at the back of the bus station. So we, we just, we didn't have any luggage. All we had was what we were carrying with us. We didn't want to be bothered with luggage. And we walked, I lead the way, we walked to the back of the bus station. They let us walk out. Klan didn't seem to notice that we had gone. They still marching. Chanting. We turned the corner and walked about two blocks and got in the car and went home. I don't know what the Klan was thinking. I say probably sometime turned around and said, 'Hey, what happened to those kids we were looking for?' Well those kids you were looking for had just disappeared.

On Sunday when we drove back to Atlanta, uh, as we approached Macon, I said to the driver, Reverend Bennet, I said, "Let's stop and see if by chance we got in the newspaper." He said, "June, they don't put black folks in the newspaper." I say, "I don't know, maybe." So we did. We stopped. And lo and behold, we weren't on the front page of one newspaper in Macon, Georgia. We were on the front page of both papers in Macon, Georgia. And, um, it was, uh, I don't know. We were, we were happy about what happened in Macon, um, Birmingham people were not as lucky. They ran into, if anybody knows their civil rights history, Bull Connor, who was the infamous sheriff in Birmingham, and so they got arrested and treated, treated pretty badly, but they were still released. And they came back on a train. I guess I didn't send a car with them and I don't know why, but supposedly came back on the train.

The third thing is when I was sentenced to a year in jail and spent two weeks of that, of that year. And that was the Fulton County jail. And that was, that was in February of 61. I am now a senior, second semester senior. So I have survived academically that long, uh, but after a year-long sentence, I didn't expect to be able to survive to graduate. So I wrote my parents a letter and I said, if you've already paid tuition, get it back because I'm not going to be in school this semester. We'll have to look at another opportunity later on. Um, we were, we were filling the jails, the jails, with um, well just Fulton county jail without bail, with more than 76 or so people were arrested in two or three day period. We put a big strain on their housekeeping, so to speak.

They ran out of beds, which was part of our strategy. That's why we got criticized. See everybody, a lot of students in other places went at things much more in your face and we were much more subtle about how we, how we did things. Um, so I don't have any horror stories of being shot at or anything, anything quite like that. So we get into the Fulton county jail and I go- about the second and third day we had told Lonnie our leader and Herschelle who was our co-leader, had been arrested, but they took bail because we needed our leaders to be out because when we made this decision, we knew there was going to be some negotiations. That was why we did it in the first place, to have negotiations with the city, to force them to come to the table yet again. And we'd had some before, um. When I was in the prison farm, there had been a negotiation that took place. So we were always angling for another negotiation for another time to talk about something else that they could do for us or the black community that we wanted. That we would be, that would make us a little happier.

So maybe next time it wouldn't put 70-something to jail, maybe we only do 30. But anyway, um, so we, um, we were there and we discussed whether I should go or not and they said, "But June, you, you, you, you run into action, you, you're the one that's planning everything, don't you think we need you to stay out." And so we talked about this a couple of days and then we decided that the women in there, a lot of them had never been in jail before and they may need a calm head to be there with them. Somebody who had been in jail before. And so I went in and so, negotiations, I said we were out in two weeks. And sure enough they kind of did need me. Um, I knew some trustees again from some other prior experiences in jail. So we were given some leeway to do things like keep our mirrors and a nail files and stuff. There were contraband for us as far as jails were concerned. And it was another pair of eyes to, to be on us, to know what was happening with us. In the Fulton County jail, and you're all in one, everybody's in one jail cell. So we had at least two women in the jail with us in a cell with us who were in for murder.

That was a little non-pulsing to think about. And the first night, second night, I don't remember which. I think it was the second night, one of those women physically attacked me. I mean we had to have a fight. Literally a rolling on the floor fight. Luckily I won, plus if I hadn't have won, I had a lot of comrades there to help me. And she didn't have the numbers that I had. I forgot I had also been assaulted when I'd been in the prison farm by a white female, a female prisoner with a butcher knife. And so that was another. So I kind of, I dunno, I attract the bad aspect of some people, I guess. Maybe it's because of my attitude.

We, uh, so those are the, those are the three things. We were there for two weeks. We sang songs, even the white women wanted to sing with us, they started, we started teaching them the words to the songs that we were singing and at night they sang from their cell because there were white women there, but they just segregated them from us. So they said, "Let's sing the," whatever. They'd name a song. And we would start it off and they would sing with us. Uh, they took our books away from us. So NBC came when we first got there and someone from the Huntington Breaking report and I talked to him like I was supposed to and I said, he said, "Well, do you need anything?" I said, "Yeah, they took our books. How are we gonna study? Just in case we get out of here, we might want to study." That hit the NBC national news that night. Well, we got our books back.

Surprise, surprise. So I spent my time there, my personal time I spent sitting on the floor, I had someone bring me a wool- pair of wool pants, which we could not wear pants on Spelman's campus. Um, but I had a pair of slacks and every once in a while they let you wear them. I remember it snowed my freshman year, and I'd never seen snow before, but the word went out that we could wear pants that day. So I had someone go in my room and bring me a, bring me a sweater, every sweater and some pants and I sat in the same spot every day.

Somehow in my mind, it got softer as I sat there. Jail is a uh, I decided a state of mind as much as it is or even maybe more so than it is a physical place because you have to learn to live in that space and in those conditions and you have to go inward in order to be able to do that. And no one teaches you that because you can't teach that to anybody. It's something you have to find out for yourself. So the other girls played checkers and, and uh, we had some other games, but checkers is the only one I remember. Well I sat, and I read. Either I was reading novels or I was, I was studying, I was a, I had a double major and I had a history major. It was one of them and that required a lot of reading and a lot of writing and I was in the midst of writing a thesis which we have to do according to the University of Chicago guidelines for writing a master's thesis. Had to do one of those every semester. So I was prepping for that particular end of that particular semester.

Collaboratively I think we accomplished a lot of things here in Atlanta. A lot of very meaningful things. I think things that lasted for generations. Um, I should tell you that I graduated in 61 and things were not desegregated by that time, but on the way, and by 63 they had desegregated the lunch counters in, in Atlanta. I was on the front end.

There were many more that came behind me after that. I experienced during this movement of women being treated differently, not being given their due in a lot of instances. Many of us were overlooked and treated with less than respect. This happened both locally here in Atlanta and on a national level.

I'll give you an example. By the time the March on Washington occurred in 1963, I was married. My daughter, who's sitting over there, was born. She had just been born in January and my husband, in all of his wisdom, said that I couldn't go to the march on Washington, but he could go. And he had never lifted his finger during the civil rights movement, preferably or in any other way. I have never forgiven him for that. It's been 56 years and I'm still carrying a grudge about that. But during the March on Washington, uh, no one was permitted to give a major speech. I think a couple of women had a few statements that they could make.

This was not a happenstance. You just say, well, maybe it just happened. I would know it was not. History- history shows us that there had been an open discussion by the male organizers, including Bayard Rustin, who I thought would have known better, considering. That they decided that essentially to omit women from the podium. Wouldn't let them do anything. I should go back and say when Montgomery happened, the bus boycott, Rosa Parks, who was the spark, but had been working with the NAACP in Birmingham for years on civil rights issues in Birmingham, asked to speak. By this time, Martin had come in, had come into the Montgomery boycott. She asked to speak at this first mass meeting that they had. They told her no, she had done enough. It was just. I mean there were black women there the day on the march on Washington that were prominent. They made all the black women, including Martin's wife, Coretta, everybody, all the wives march down a different street. Men March down Pennsylvania Avenue, which has a significance to it in DC. Pennsylvania Avenue is the significant street in town and the women had to march down the side street.

So you can see that things were not perfect. There were women there such as Ella Baker, you mentioned. She was one of the founders of, of [inaudible], which was housed here in Atlanta, of which I was a founding member. Dorothy Height was there, and you young people wouldn't know her at all, but she was a civil rights advocate back in the forties and she was president of the National Council of Negro women from 1957 to 1997. She was present. And with women of that caliber available to be able to speak. I have to conclude that sexism was the reason that they were excluded. I can't call it racism, can I? I gotta call it something, so I'm calling it sexism. So we found discrimination not only without, but



women had discrimination during the civil rights movement within as well.

In spite of the sexism that I saw in the movement, and this carried on. And we had a 30 year reunion here in Atlanta and uh, things- And I came, my husband came with me and things had not changed. The same, uh, sexist behaviors that I had dealt with here in Atlanta and within the group, were still, um still here and they, they, they didn't live here anymore, but they came back for 30<sup>th</sup> reunion. In fact, I got so incensed, that one activity, I looked at my husband, I said, "We're out of here." Been here, done that, don't need to deal with that anymore. Before I dealt with it because I had a goal. This time I came to have fun and to rejoice with, with old friends and old comrades, and they were going to misbehave. I didn't need it.

Two men I ran into, I want to give you quotes from. One was supposed to be here with us today and couldn't. And it's Lonnie King, who was the leader of our student group here in Atlanta and has been active in civil rights ever since. You know our paper on women in the civil rights movement, that's the name of the paper, the Library of Congress. He was, I'm not going to give all the court because he named some people in there and I don't want to repeat those names. He said he was surprised that in Nashville, Diane Nash had been overlooked because she was the soul of the Nashville movement. And I happened to live in Nashville during her time because my husband and I got married in Nashville in 62 and I got to, I got to meet her. And she was, she was totally overlooked by the men in Nashville. And then he went on to name some other men who have become very prominent who were in Nashville at the time and she's never gotten her, her due or anything close to that.

An old friend of mine from my freshman year at Spelman and his freshman year at Morehouse, Julian Bond, who was the Georgia representative and senator here in the state of Georgia for 20 years or more. Of course there's one time the national president of the NAACP and a nationally known activist in civil rights. He's been quoted as once saying, "There's a Chinese saying: women hold up half the world. In the case of the civil rights movement, it's probably three quarters of the world." Thank you very much.

Bohannon:

So we have a few minutes for Q&A with our panelists. If you have anything you want to ask, I don't think we need mics. I think we're pretty good just to ask. So if you have anything written down or if you want us, if you want student researchers to come around and take your card they can ask it, or you can ask. Anybody? Questions, thoughts? I have one

from a student here. One of our student researchers worked really hard to make this event happen, and she had to work today, so her question, I'll let Hannah read it.

Hannah: "How does it feel to know that the plans and sit-ins that you and your colleagues just devised, make iconic history?"

Davis: It feels like all the effort and the sacrifice that we made has come to fruition in some ways. I hate to say this, but I see us moving backward now, which is very disturbing to me particularly at my age to see that happening. But I'm one of these kind of people, um, I don't take credit for any of the things that happened. For me, it was a job because I assigned it to myself to do. And so every day I, when I got up and go and did the job that day. When you do a job, you don't always expect to do that kind of job, someone to say thank you or to be appreciative in any way at all, but I'm appreciative of what we were able to accomplish. So many more came after me. My group can't take very much credit at all. We kind of got the ball rolling.

Hilton: This is for, um, everyone on the panel. Do you have a memory or experience that inspires or inspired you to keep fighting and/or writing when things got tough?

Bradley: Oh, me? Oh sorry. Um, yes. I have two. Um, the first one is, uh, my first year, my first year at Indiana University, it was my first year, my master's program in the spring, the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in downtown Bloomington. And I, I called my grandparents because if I don't call, they'll put out a APB on me, like every day though seriously.

And I call them, and usually I talk to my grandmother. And I was telling her like, yeah, you know, this, but you know, I don't have class today, but there's a Klan rally and my grandfather who never really said anything, he would always come on and just yell in the background, like "Tell her I said hey!" You know, stuff like that. He took the phone and was like, "I need you to stay at home today. I need you to stay at home. Don't go anywhere. You call me. Almost like more than usual." And he wouldn't tell me until later that, uh, his father was chased out of their house by the Klan, and for me, that wasn't going to be in a history book, but if my grandparents could be that courageous, then it was up to me to also be courageous enough to speak my truth and also to speak their truth because they had been told so many times before that they didn't, they didn't matter. Um, and I guess on the creative side, um, I'm also a fiction writer, so the short story collection that I wrote has, has plenty of stories that I basically kind of spooned from memory by talking with my

grandparents. Like there's, I'm a very strong advocate of respecting and honoring your elders and speaking to them because if we don't remember them and uplift them, nobody else will.

And my family has a very, a tense relationship with the University of Georgia. And the reason we have a tense relationship with the University of Georgia is because my grandfather is from Athens and he was a star football player in Clark County and University of Georgia wouldn't let him try out because they were still segregated. So this is like in the forties and fifties. If you go a couple of years later, my grandmother, who is, as I said earlier, is an educator. She was working on her- she wanted to work on her masters and she couldn't go to the University of Georgia because again, segregated. So they paid for her to go to NYU, which wasn't a weird thing. Like there are a lot of schools in the south that in order to remain segregated, they paid partial or all of a student's tuition. So they will go to Indiana University. So I was even walking in this, this journey that I didn't even realize. So they went to Indiana University, they went to New York University, they went to UCLA and they went where they were like, "We'll take your segregated money."

And just being able to recognize that and share that and remember it and use that in my classrooms, um, some of my students are here, we talk about this all the time, is being able to, again, this idea of recovery, right? Just because it's in a textbook doesn't mean that's exactly what happened with it. Um, and oftentimes if you actually just talked to the people who were there, if you have the privilege of talking to the people who actually put themselves on the line, that changes your outlook of what you could be doing. So as a scholar, as a writer, and just as a general granddaughter of the South. Like I, I'm a hardcore southerner, but one of the reasons that I'm a hardcore southerner is because my grandparents were hardcore southerners because they had to be and they wanted to be in the south. So that's what I kind of keep at the forefront as I work through my writing and pedagogy and everything like that. That somebody paid dues for me to be able to do what I'm doing today.

I, I want to add something to that. You said they weren't going to Georgia. During the time that we started the civil rights movement here in Atlanta, one of the things that grownups said they wanted to do was integrate the University of Georgia, and I got to work with them to get Charlene Hunter and Hamilton Holmes working on the process of how are we going to do that. And so I think it happened around 60, 61 is when it happened.

Audience Member: Hi, Ms. Davis. Thank you so much for being here. I have a couple of questions, but I'm going to lead with one I really want answered. So after the height of the civil rights movement, um, what impact or ramifications did you see the movement had on women? Like um, you talked about sexism during the movement. But I mean, you've been able to have a successful career. Do you find that this was possible for other women who participated in the movement?

Davis: It was very difficult. I got lucky is what I did. My husband took a job at the University of Iowa, and I went there as a stay at home mom of two and that would've been in 1968. We left, we left Washington DC right after King was assassinated and the city went up in flames. Um frightened my daughter to death. She never wanted to go back to DC again when she was little, she was afraid. Um, and I went to the University of Iowa to work. I was asked by a vice president to come and work on his stand for a while. He had some problems. He thought I could help them identify them, so I was just supposed to work part time and this was on a short term basis. Well I ended up staying. He left, I stayed, and I worked my way up to being assistant vice president. And I said it earlier, I was an affirmative action.

But during those years at Iowa, I had an opportunity to be not so much involved with civil rights movement, but in the women's movement. There weren't enough, uh, minorities in, at the University of Iowa. That was something to, but to, for me to be dealing with, but they were very active on that campus back in the early seventies. We put together, I was on the committee to put together a sexual harassment policy on, on campus that we stringently carried out. And when I was affirmative action director, we, it got very stringently carried out if it came to my knowledge to my desk to do that. And so I got very much involved with, with women. That's why I got the couple of words that you read about, because I was involved with women. Most of them were not black women because they weren't black, there weren't that many black women there.

Um. A lot of the black women who were, I think mistreated during the civil rights movement when time came, moved easily into the, into the women's movement because they saw that in that movement that they were only going to have one level of discrimination, not two. And so a lot of the black women, two of the graduate students at the University of Iowa, of course they would be older than undergraduate, fought very hard within the women's movement there. And I was one of the people that they came to for support. Um, we also started in Iowa during that time, a Way Up conference. So a Way Up conference for women in higher

education in the state of Iowa. And the women's part of the Department of Education nationally recognized us as being more in the forefront of that. So I sort of moved from the civil rights movement into the Women's movement during those 20 years that I was on campus. Yes.

Did you have another question?

Audience Member: I did. Um, I heard that Spelman President wasn't as supportive of women being involved in the movement, but there was a change with this, did you experience-?

Davis: Same President during the whole time. Albert Manley. He was a physicist. Um, he did not openly object to us. I think personally he would have preferred us not to do it. You have to think about the time, you have to think, you have to put him- He was black. You have to put him in his time. So you can't expect him to think like today's time, you put it with his time when he was very protective of us girls at Spelman. He never wanted- He and I had a sort of love hate relationship. I liked him very much. I thought he was a very gentle soul. He was easily manipulated. I could easily manipulate him. Made me love him even more. Like I could walk off campus. I knew where he walked his dog every day. And what time he came back about, he came back into campus. See Spelman has, um, those who don't know, Spelman has at that time we had a fence all around and we were not permitted to do anything that normal young ladies were permitted to do. And our hours were awful.

We had to be on campus by 6:00 and, unless you had some great permission to be somewhere you couldn't go. And when I was involved with student movement, I always had some where I needed to go. So I kind of clocked his schedule and so I'd make it a point to walk, be walking off campus as he was walking on campus. And I would pet the dog on the head and say hello to the dog, I forgot the dog's name now, and pass a few words with him. And he'd keep going. He never, it never even dawned on him that I was breaking a very big rule by walking in the direction that I was walking. Because I wasn't, didn't have any, by the time I'd catch up with him, there was nothing there but the road. So there was no building that I could have said I was going into. The only place that I was going was to the gate to get out.

He, um, none of the, none of the faculty at Spelman deterred us from, from doing what we did. I had no oppositions from any of my faculty, my teachers. They were very helpful, um, giving me, when they saw me, giving me assignments, ahead of time, that I didn't know what was coming up so I could read. If I miss, if I happened to miss an exam and I

tried not to miss any exams, but I think during those two weeks I did, they would always let me catch up with my, with my exams. I had one instructor at Morehouse who was from Austria, she was adamantly against the whole idea of what we were doing. And I, I recognize that that was partly because of her culture and her upbringing. Um, but when you throw a blue book in my face to take an exam, I kind of take exception to that.

So she was a little more than upset. Told me the day of the final exam, my senior year, where I could take the course during the summer, and I had already talked to her TA about this. But she had been marking my papers down. I took them to another German instructor. She said, "She's cheating you, Norma June." And I said, "Yeah." But it was a fight I didn't have the energy to fight at the time. I, if all things being equal, I would have gone to the president and taken and posted an argument about why she needed to be relieved of her job, but I didn't. I didn't do that this time. I decided to let the chips fall where they may and if they didn't fall on my side, I would indeed go to school sometimes. Because it was never a matter of if I was going to get a college degree, it was just a matter of when. So I just, that was just sort of a battleground I didn't want to fight with her.

A lot of what Manley did was to legally protect the institution. If I had been president, I would have probably done some of the same things like have parents sign off on certain things because you don't want to get sued, you know, and he has a responsibility for the entire university and for its economic wellbeing, and it staying in the community. Um, so I understood that administratively there were certain things he had to do that some people got angry with him for. I never got angry with him for it because he never stopped us from doing what we wanted to do. Years and years and years later my husband came to the Atlanta university center on a site visit from National Institute of Health. My husband's a chemist. And they had a, um, a biomedical program grants to HBCUs and others, uh, minorities, for minority schools.

And so he came as the part of this site team, I don't know if he was chairing the site team or not. Anyway, he had lunch with the presidents, the team had lunch with all the presidents of the colleges and he happened to sit next to Manley. So he said to Manley, he said, "Oh, by the way, my, my wife is a Spelman graduate." And he said "Oh, that's nice. What's her name?" And he said, "Norma June Wilson." And he said, "I was so glad when she graduated." I had done several other things before the civil rights movement that had brought me to his attention in a way that I was objecting to some of these decisions.

Bohannon: I think we have time for one more question.

Audience Member: Do you think that, this is a question for all of you guys, do you think that the suppression of women's voices was a result of American culture at the time or black culture which was leading the movement, of course, or were the two interwoven in a way?

Smith-Mckoy: Clearly it was a result of policy and practice. It wasn't just culture, it was also policy and practice in place. And it wasn't just America, it was global at the time. To the extent that when women were put forward in leadership positions, it was often questioned: why did the men allow that to happen? So I think it was a global problem, but it was made all the more exasperating by the fact that, um, what was ongoing in this country at this time in relation to race and rights and being. One can't forget Stokely Carmichael's famous response when he was asked about the position of women in the movement. I'll let you look that up so that you can be amused by it later, but it was a sexual reference. Um, so, um, but that doesn't mean that the women weren't there and that they weren't present. And for me, uh, what happened to women during that time and during this time, even as we are revisiting these traditional roles, it just proves that these stories are about sacrifice and sustaining that sacrifice. But it's also about the afterlife and what comes from that.

Bohannon: If we could get one more round of applause for our amazing panelists.