
Florida Studies Hosts Florida's First Civil Rights Movement Conference

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Dramatic events in the Deep South states of Alabama and Mississippi have dominated the recorded history of the Civil Rights Movement. But the Movement also took place in cities like St. Augustine, Tallahassee, Miami, and St. Petersburg, all communities in the quasi-Southern state of Florida.

On June 3-6, University of South Florida St. Petersburg's Florida Studies Program will convene the first major conference devoted to the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Florida. The conference is the culmination of USF St. Petersburg's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It promises to be the largest gathering of Movement veterans and scholars in the state's history.

Nearly 100 Movement veterans and scholars will share their memories and observations on local, regional and national efforts to combat racial discrimination in the Sunshine State. Participants include the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and Congressman Walter Fauntroy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; St. Augustine movement founder Dr. Robert Hayling; Congress of Racial Equality leaders Patricia Stephens Due and Gordon Carey; anti-Klan activist Stetson Kennedy; former Freedom Riders Bernard Lafayette and Israel Dresner; noted journalists Eugene Patterson and Bill Maxwell; Evangeline Moore, daughter of martyred NAACP leader Harry T. Moore; and Arnett Doctor, Rosewood survivors organizer.

Featuring panel discussions, documentary films, dramatic performances, and music, the four-day event will incorporate historical scholarship and personal memories to deepen our understanding of the freedom struggle that transformed Florida's political and social landscape during the second half of the twentieth century. Sessions will encourage wide-ranging and open discussions of both past and present challenges to the realization of democratic ideals in Florida. Topics include: Florida in the Age of Jim Crow; Desegregating Florida's Schools; Labor, Race, and Economic Justice; Law, Race, and Social Justice; Women in the Movement; Direct Action-Freedom Rides and Sit-ins, Media Coverage of the Movement; the St. Augustine crisis of 1964; and the Desegregation of Sports in Florida.

A special behind-the-scenes feature of the conference is a civil rights oral history project. It is jointly administered by the *Oral History of Modern America Project* of USF St. Petersburg's Nelson Poynter Memorial Library and AARP's *Voices of Civil Rights Project*. During the conference, teams of graduate and undergraduate students will conduct audio and video interviews to capture the stories of Movement veterans.

"It is our hope that these interviews, in combination with the conference sessions, will deepen our collective understanding of the history and legacy of a movement that changed all of our lives," Florida Studies Program co-director and civil rights historian Raymond Arsenault said. "The memories and observations of the men and women who pressed the issue of racial justice during the 1950s and 1960s are an invaluable source of information, both for professional scholars and for the general citizenry of an increasingly diverse state."

The conference is free and open to the public, but requires registration at the USF St. Petersburg Snell House, located at the corner of Second Street South and Fifth Avenue. Lunches and receptions require advance reservations and payment. For more information, please call (727) 553-4840, or E-mail: mrowlan3@mail.usf.edu. The conference schedule is available via web at http://www.stpt.usf.edu/news/past_issues/docs/Civilrights.pdf.

Conference co-sponsors include: the University Honors Program of USF St. Petersburg; the Florida Humanities Council, the Tampa Bay History Center, the Florida Studies Center of the USF Library System and AARP Florida's Voices of Civil Rights Project.

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