



the
SNCC Legacy Project
Founded in 2010

A celebration of life for SNCC veteran

JESSE MORRIS

February 8, 1937 - March 18, 2021



Inside the William J. Clinton Presidential Library, March 2010. Photo credit: Al White

[Jesse Turner Morris, Jr.](#) was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on February 8, 1937 to Amanda Louise Wooten Morris and Jesse Turner Morris. In the early part of his life the family lived in Wilmington, Delaware. Jesse would later move to Los Angeles, California where he graduated from Polytechnic High School. Jesse's love for math led him to obtain his BS in Economics from UCLA, where he was a member of the swim team. He furthered his education by obtaining a master's degree in Agricultural Economics from Iowa State University.

In the early 1960s Jesse moved to Jackson, Mississippi and began in earnest his work to empower Black southerners working with the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee \(SNCC\)](#) and the [Council of Federated Organizations \(COFO\)](#). Through his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, he met [Euveste Simpson](#), with whom he had a 22-year marriage and five children. Black institution building was one of his long-term goals, and in 1966, he helped establish the [Poor People's Corporation](#), which provided loans and assistance to poor people to start cooperative businesses and actualize a life beyond the limitations of the racist system of sharecropping.

His commitment to Black empowerment was unwavering and continued long after the Movement ended. He served as director of the Emergency Land Fund for 15 years continuing the work that initially brought him to Mississippi, fighting to prevent Black people from losing their land. During this time, he served on the Editorial Board of *The Review of Black Political Economy*. In 1984, he became the first Executive Director of the Mississippi Food Bank, a clearinghouse for food for charitable organizations in central Mississippi. In later years, he worked with the U.N.I. Teaching Youth program and volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children, while continuing to support voter registration efforts and initiatives to preserve civil rights history.

At times overbearing, demanding, and isolating, he loved a good joke or prank and was always an advocate of Black self-determination. He was complicated – remarkably intelligent, a flawed husband and father, a kind grandfather; he was human.

Jesse transitioned on March 18, 2021, being ushered from this life with words of comfort from his granddaughters Maya Morris and Kamaria Thomas. He is survived by his children, Earl Morris (Natilyn), Orlando Morris (Trish), and Omar Morris of Jackson, Mississippi, Tiyi Morris (Judson L. Jeffries) of Westerville, Ohio, and Jessica Morris (Thomas Anderson) of Coconut Creek, Florida.

Twelve grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; one sister, Yvonne Simpson of Carson, California; one brother-in-law, William DeVeaux of Mableton, Georgia; a dear cousin, Cecilia Morris of East Point, Georgia; a special niece, Linda Hughes of New Orleans, Louisiana; a wonderful extended family of cousins, nieces, and nephews; and a core of loyal friends and comrades, like Frank Figgers and MacArthur Cotton.

He was preceded in death by his parents and two sisters, Sylvia (Toni) Morris Bennett and Patricia Ann Morris (Pam) DeVeaux.



With Frank Figgers at the William J. Clinton Presidential Library March 2010. Photo credit: Al White

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