

Common Questions Asked of Civil Rights Movement Veterans by Students

Questions Asked by Elementary & Middle School Students:

About the Civil Rights Movement:

- How did it feel to drink from separate water fountains?
- What was it like to live with segregation? Did you ride on a segregated bus?
- Did you attend a segregated school? How did that feel?
- How did you feel when segregation ended?
- Did you get bullied a lot for being Black and not being able to vote?
- Did you think less of yourself because you didn't have the right to vote?
- How do you think African Americans were treated?
- How did you feel when you were working in the South?
- Did you ever encounter problems with a police officer?
- Were you arrested for being Black (or for no reason because you are Black)?
- Did you ever encounter members of the KKK and did you get hurt from them?
- Did you know of anyone who went to jail?
- Were you ever spit on or yelled at during the CRM?
- Were you ever mistreated? Attacked?
- Did you ever have a dangerous encounter?
- Did any of your friends die or get injured?
- What was it like to have your life on the line all time?
- Did you ever worry about your family getting hurt?
- Was there a strategy you used to be nonviolent or was it easy to be nonviolent?
- Were there any times you considered giving up or becoming violent? What were they?
- How hard was it to coordinate the freedom rides?
- What were the main emotions you felt during the freedom rides?
- What worries and fears did you have when you were a freedom rider?
- What did you do on the bus (did you just talk, read, plan, etc)?
- What was the best experience you had while Freedom Riding?
- What was the most difficult part of the protests for you? Why?
- Were there any people you worked with that wanted to use violence?
- How were people different between the North and the South?

- Were you successful integrating something?
- What made you decide to work on voting rights instead of desegregation of schools
- Did everyone want to register to vote?
- What kind of tests or requirements were used to discourage or bar Blacks from voting?
- Was it hard to register to vote?
- Did you often have to convince black people to vote?
- What would you do if someone did not want to vote?
- What were some challenges people had while trying to get people to vote?
- How did it feel to finally vote?!!
- Were you concerned you would not get the right to vote after all of the hard work?
- Did you ever question Martin Luther King's idea of how freedom should be achieved?
- Were there any African-American people who didn't support your cause? Why?
- Can you describe SNCC? How was it working there?
- How were the Freedom Rides organized?
- What all did you do? And what were your jobs?
- How were you [as a white person] accepted by the Black community in the South?
- As a white activist were you treated as badly as Blacks by the southern whites?
- How did you cooperate with other people in the Movement?
- How did your parents and friends feel about you doing this?
- What emotions did you feel when you did the sit ins?
- Did you ever feel like giving up?
- What kept you moving forward?
- What was your favorite accomplishment?

Questions About Today:

- Are you surprised about race relations today?
- How do you feel about race relations today?
- Have we made progress or not?
- How far do you think we have come since the 60's?
- Was it worse then, or is it worse now?
- How do you feel about marches today?
- What messages do you have for kids today?

Personal Questions:

- Why did you want to join the CRM? What made you want to be a part of it?

- How old were you at the time of the Movement?
- Were other members of your family mistreated for their race?
- Did other members of your family support your involvement?
- What were the challenges you faced?
- What did you love about working in the South?
- Were you ever depressed by the events of the CRM?
- How did it feel to have your life on the line?
- Is there anything you would have done differently during that time in your life?
- Did you agree with the Black Panther movement?
- Did you know MLK? Malcolm X? Huey Newton? Rosa Parks? Ruby Bridges?
- Was it hard to have boyfriend/girlfriend of different color?
- How do you feel knowing that you've been involved in such a big movement in U.S history and somewhat shaped the country into what it is today?

Questions Asked by High School Students:

About the Civil Rights Movement:

- What were the costs of participation in the Movement?
- What were the benefits of participation in the Movement?
- Did you ever lose confidence in the movement, or feel like giving up?
- What is your opinion on using violence or self defense to achieve goals?
- What is your most memorable memory while you were in SNCC?
- How did you deal with the fact that you're life was in danger?
- What was your life like in Mississippi? Was it as bad as its portrayed in the movies?
- How socially different (in terms of racism) was Mississippi compared to San Francisco?
- What was your opinion of the Black Panther Movement?
- Initially, Malcolm X was very skeptical of the civil rights movement's strategy, even going as far as to call many of the movement's leaders "Uncle Toms." As a young person working with SNCC, what were your thoughts on Malcolm X's philosophy?
- When Malcolm X was still alive and he came back to the U.S. from Mecca, with his newfound perspective on race ("Not ALL white people are devils!"), how did you feel about his revelations?

Questions About Today:

- What advice do you have for fostering a sense of collective responsibility and empathy?
- What lessons can contemporary civil rights groups learn from past movements?
- Which strategies worked best to promote civil rights?

- How can the arts (writing, singing/hip-hop, visual art, drama, etc.) be used for advocacy?
- Is the justice struggle where you thought it would be when you were working in the '60's?
- Re Ta-Nehisi Coates in the *Atlantic*, do you feel reparations are justified?
- What is biggest difference between how Blacks are treated now as opposed to then?
- The CRM changed history. Do you think the movements today will be as effective?
- What are your thoughts on the [Parker] school shooting and the teenage activists?
- Do you see any of SNCC's methods/teachings in today's movements?
- How long do you think it will take to truly end racism?
- What is the most important advice you would give to us as young people?
- What are your opinions on Black Live's Matter?

Personal Questions:

- Who/what influenced you the most to join the civil rights movement while growing up?
- What made you want to take part of the civil rights movement?
- Did you ever have any doubts about what you might face in the SNCC?
- What are your thoughts on "*I am only one person, what can I do to make a difference?*"
- How do I carry history?
- How did you incorporate the message of the CRM in your own personal life?
- How does it feel that your work is now history that is studied in school?
- What would your life have been like if you stayed in college instead of jointing the CRM?
- How did Mississippi change you?

Questions Asked by College Students:

About the Civil Rights Movement:

- Did you have any success getting/recruiting black voters in Mississippi?
- Were there candidates that Blacks trying to register wanted to cast their votes for?
- Were anti-segregation whites running for office?
- Did you intend to target rural people in Mississippi or was it a situational coincidence?
- Mississippi is still one of the poorest and racist states today, is that because of its history?
- Were issues in the West (California) different from those in the South?
- What were the challenges of being project director at such a young age?
- What inspired you to join SNCC rather than any other organization?
- How did SNCC San Francisco's office differ from Mississippi?
- What was the recruiting process for SNCC like?

- How did you view the leadership in SNCC, compared to NAACP, SCLC and others?
- What were your thoughts on group-centered leadership?
- With SNCC's communal leadership, how did meetings with all the members go?
- Were there any problems in the SNCC group structure?
- If there were issues among the SNCC members how did you solve them?
- How many of the SNCC volunteers were white? Other races?
- What role did women play in the civil rights movement in the 1960s?
- Did the movement have equal contributions from men as well as women?
- Where there any major movements in which you questioned nonviolent direct action?
- What challenges did you encounter trying to unite and teach the community?
- Do you think the government response to the Civil Rights Movement was influenced by the political tensions with Russia during the Cold War?

Personal Questions:

- Why did you feel the need to join the civil rights movement?
- Since civil rights is a constant struggle, are you currently involved in any movements?
- Were you ever worried about being killed or severely harmed?
- Were you more afraid because you were a woman?
- How did involvement with SNCC, impact your relationship with your relatives?
- Did your family support/join you?
- How did movement involvement impact your life choices re family and social life?
- What did it feel like being a woman fighting for this cause?
- What was your favorite memory from SNCC?
- What achievement are you most proud of?
- Do you feel that your work in the south changed you?
- Were the students of SNCC negatively impacted within their educational pursuits?

Questions Asked by Teachers or Other Adults:

- What was your overall impression of the Movement?
- How did people maintain courage and perseverance in the face of adversity?
- How can people remain nonviolent when faced with violence?