

Benjamin "Ben-Bear" Taylor (1941-2018)



Ben Taylor died on May 31, 2018, in Rennselaer, New York, following a long illness. He was born in New York City and grew up on a dairy farm near Florence, New York, where he learned the meaning of hard work. As a student at Michigan State University, he joined Friends of SNCC to support the southern civil rights movement. Together with his roommate, Ivanhoe Donaldson, he collected a truckload of donated food and clothing for black people in the Mississippi Delta who had been forced off the cotton plantations where they lived and worked. They drove the shipment to Mississippi. When they arrived in Clarksdale, both men were arrested and held in jail for ten days. The SNCC Newsletter of January 21, 1963, reported:

CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI--Two Michigan State University students, one of them a SNCC worker, were arrested here on December 28 after police searched a caravan of food and clothing they were transporting to dispossessed Negro families in the Delta. Police discovered medicine used by middle-aged women, and charged the two with "illegal possession of barbiturates." Their original \$15,000 bond (each) was reduced to \$1,500 (each), and they were released on January 7. Since then, the two—Ivanhoe Donaldson and Ben Taylor—have gone back to Clarksdale and successfully delivered 2 tons of needed clothing.

Some accounts identify both men as African-American, but this is incorrect. Ben was proud of the Native American heritage.

After graduating from MSU, Ben worked for federal anti-poverty programs in Washington, D.C. He later moved back to New York where he worked for the state Division for Youth and the New York State Office for Children and Family Services. He also spent 15 years as a mentor and counselor for young men with the North East Men's Alliance. Jack Connell, a colleague, remembered Ben as "one of the best supervisors (and human being) I had."