

Women in the Civil Rights Movement

Ella Baker

Background

Ella Baker was the granddaughter of a former slave. Her grandmother often talked to her about the cruelty of slavery, including a whipping she received for refusing to marry someone chosen for her by her slave owner.

The things her grandmother shared with her inspired Ella to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Ella was born in Norfolk, Virginia on December 13, 1903. She attended Shaw University, a historically Black university in Raleigh, North Carolina, and graduated as class valedictorian in 1927.



Involvement In Civil Rights Movement

After graduating from Shaw University, Ella moved to New York City and joined the *Young Negroes Cooperative*, a grassroots organization formed for the purpose of developing Black economic power through collective planning.

In 1940 she became involved with the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP), serving first as a Field Secretary and then as Director of Branches from 1943 – 1946.

Ella joined the *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (SCLC) in 1957 when Martin Luther King, Jr. was serving as president. She ran SCLC's Crusade for Citizenship, its voter registration campaign.

When students in Greensboro, North Carolina began sit-ins at lunch counters to protest segregation in eating establishments, Ella returned to North Carolina to assist in that movement. She organized a conference at Shaw University and invited student sit-in leaders to attend. That conference led to the founding of the *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee* (SNCC).

Ella was active in civil rights her entire life, quietly working behind the scenes for SNCC and other organizations. She died in New York on her birthday on December 13, 1986.