

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Ella Baker

student organizer, activist

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes"

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Background Information

Born: December 13, 1903; Died: December 13, 1986

Ella Baker grew up in North Carolina. She was close with her family and community. As a young girl, Baker knew about the many challenges that Black people went through. Her grandparents were forcibly enslaved on a plantation. Baker's family members were all activists. They fought to better the lives of Black people. Baker grew up surrounded by a strong and supportive community. This helped her realize the importance of finding strength in herself and others.

During college, Baker participated in protests. One thing she protested was her school's unfair dress code. She graduated from Shaw University in 1922 with the highest grades in her entire class. She moved to New York after college and was inspired by the way people in the North were unafraid to speak their mind.

Baker's Resistance

Ella Baker was a leader in famous organizations during the Civil Rights Movement. She was an assistant secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was also one of the founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was a group of college students who fought for civil rights. Baker made sure the SNCC did not fall apart because of disagreements between its members.

She also helped spread the peaceful "sit-in" movement that was started by Black college students. Baker tried to get young people to join her civil rights organizations. She wanted young people to believe that they could be activists on their own, without adults giving them directions.¹

Achievements

Baker helped young people realize that they could create change on their own. She put her faith in students to fight for civil rights. She played a big part in organizing for the NAACP and the SNCC but was not recognized right away. After her death, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1994.² In Oakland, California, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights was founded in 1996. The center continues to work toward justice and peace in the United States, just like she did.

¹ Payne, C. (1989). Ella Baker and Models of Social Change. *Signs*, 14(4), 885-899. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174689>

² National Women's Hall of Fame: Ella Baker. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/ella-baker/>

Essential Questions

1. What are 2-3 things Ella Baker did to fight for justice?

2. Ella Baker believed in the power of young people to change the world. What are some examples of young people making a difference today?

3. *"We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes"*
 - a. Why do you think some people choose to fight for freedom and justice, and other people do not?