

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorie Ladner

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Ladner, Dorie, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 24, 2008 and May 2, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:14:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and city social service worker Dorie Ladner (1942 - ) is a founding member of the Council of Federated Organizations, and participated in the March on Washington, the Selma to Montgomery March, and the Poor People's March. She was the SNCC project director in Natchez, Mississippi, and a clinical social worker in the Washington, D.C. General Emergency Room and Psychiatry Department. Ladner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 24, 2008 and May 2, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_079
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist Dorie Ann Ladner was born on June 28, 1942, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. As an adolescent, she became involved in the NAACP Youth Chapter where Clyde Kennard served as advisor. Ladner got involved in the Civil Rights Movement and wanted to be an activist after hearing about the murder of Emmitt Till. After graduating from Earl Travillion High School as salutatorian, alongside

her sister, Joyce Ladner, she went on to enroll at Jackson State University. Dedicated to the fight for civil rights, during their freshmen year at Jackson State, she and her sister attended state NAACP meetings with Medgar Evers and Eileen Beard. That same year, Ladner was expelled from Jackson State for participating in a protest against the jailing of nine students from Tougaloo College. In 1961, Ladner enrolled at Tougaloo College where she became engaged with the Freedom Riders. During the early 1960s, racial hostilities in the South caused Ladner to drop out of school three times to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1962, she was arrested along with Charles Bracey, a Tougaloo College student, for attempting to integrate the Woolworth's lunch counter. She joined with SNCC Project Director Robert Moses and others from SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to register disenfranchised black voters and integrate public accommodations. Ladner's civil rights work was exemplified when she became one of the founding members of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in Clarksdale, Mississippi, which included: NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and SCLC.

Then, in 1964, Ladner became a key organizer in the Freedom Summer Project sponsored by the COFO. Throughout her years of working with SNCC, she served on the front line of the Civil Rights Movement in various capacities. She participated in every civil rights march from 1963 to 1968 including the March on Washington in 1963, the Selma to Montgomery March of 1965 and the Poor People's March in 1968. She was the SNCC project director in Natchez, Mississippi, from 1964 to 1966, and lectured at universities, churches, and other institutions to raise money for the organization. In addition, Ladner was a supporter of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement and worked in the presidential campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern. She went on to serve as a community organizer for the Anti Poverty Program in St. Louis, Missouri, and was an advocate for civil rights in housing and employment. Ladner has also worked for the Martin Luther King Library Documentation Center to help collect the history of people who were participants in the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1973, after her marriage and the birth of her only child, Yodit, Ladner earned her B.A. degree from Tougaloo College. In 1974, she moved to Washington, D.C., and enrolled at the Howard University School of Social Work where she earned her MSW degree in 1975. Ladner has served as a clinical social worker in both the Washington, D.C. General Emergency Room and Psychiatry Department for thirty years. Since her retirement, she has continued her work as a social activist by participating in genealogical research, public speaking, anti-war activities (marches against the war in Iraq), and volunteering in the presidential campaign of Barack Obama.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorie Ladner was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 24, 2008 and May 2, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and city social service worker Dorie Ladner (1942 - ) is a founding member of the Council of Federated Organizations, and participated in the March on Washington, the Selma to Montgomery March, and the Poor People's March. She was the SNCC project director in Natchez, Mississippi, and a clinical social worker in the Washington, D.C. General Emergency Room and Psychiatry Department.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## **Persons:**

Ladner, Dorie, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Ladner, Dorie, 1942---Interviews

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African American--Civil Rights Leaders

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African American--Social workers--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Council of Federated Organizations (U.S.)

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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City Social Service Worker

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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# Administrative Information

## Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

## Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, July 24, 2008 and May 2, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:00 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner was born on June 28, 1942 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi to Annie Woullard Perryman and Eunice Ladner. Her paternal ancestors originated in Jamaica. In

the early 1900s, her paternal grandmother, Della McLeod Ladner, left Georgia in search of economic opportunities in Mississippi, where Ladner's father was born. Ladner's maternal family descended from Simeon Woolard, an English immigrant to North Carolina. Her maternal great-great-grandfather, Benjamin Woulard, was white, and married a black Creek woman named Mary Woulard. In 1820, they migrated to the newly incorporated State of Mississippi, where they and their five children established homesteads. Many years later, Ladner's maternal grandfather, Joseph Woulard, refused to leave Wayne County, Mississippi when the government attempted to relocate Native Americans to Oklahoma. He raised Ladner's mother on the family land, where most of their neighbors were relatives. Ladner also talks about the varied spellings of her maternal family's surname.

African American civil rights leaders.

African American social workers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:50 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner's paternal great-grandfather, Abram Ladner, owned over one thousand acres of land in Mississippi. After he was accidentally poisoned, the family moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where Ladner's father, Eunice Ladner, grew up. He was a distant cousin of Thomas Ladnier, a famous trumpeter who toured internationally. Ladner's father attended the Piney Woods Country Life School until the eleventh grade, when he ran away and joined the U.S. military. After returning from Mississippi's Camp Shelby, he met Ladner's mother, Annie Woulard Perryman, who was living with her brother in Hattiesburg. The couple gave birth to Ladner and her younger sister, Joyce Ladner, before divorcing. Ladner was raised by her mother and maternal grandparents in Palmers Crossing, Mississippi, a residential community built for African American soldiers, where a few white families also lived. The town's Embassy Club and Hi-Hat Club often hosted musical acts like B. B. King as part of the Chitlin' Circuit.

United States--Race relations.

Bruce, Blanche Kelso, 1841-1898.

## Southern States--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:00 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner and her sister, Joyce Ladner, moved with their mother to Hattiesburg, Mississippi after she married their stepfather, William Perryman. Ladner began her education at the all-black De Priest School, where the students received secondhand books from the white schools. She heard about the lynchings of Mack Charles Parker and Willie McGee at a young age, although racial violence was rarely covered in the local news. When she was thirteen years old, Emmett Till was murdered, and Ladner began to follow the Civil Rights Movement. She bought copies of the Pittsburgh Courier and Jet magazine, and learned about her constitutional rights. Upon entering Earl Travillion High School, Ladner and her sister were recruited to join the NAACP by a member of their church, Eileen Beard, who was the sister of civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer. Ladner attended NAACP meetings with Medgar Evers, Clyde Kennard and Roy Wilkins in Jackson, Mississippi, where she eventually matriculated at Jackson State College.

Soul music.

King, B. B.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner met frequently with NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers while attending Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi. When Tougaloo College students planned a sit-in at the public library in Jackson, Ladner joined the demonstration. The group formed a prayer circle outside the library, and were met with police dogs. When they attempted a nonviolent march in downtown Jackson instead, the police countered with more dogs and tear gas. Ladner spent the following summer in Chicago, Illinois, and transferred at the start of the school year to Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. When Freedom Riders Diane Nash, Marion Barry, John Lewis and Reverend James Bevel were released from the nearby Mississippi State Penitentiary, several of them stayed in

Jackson, where Ladner began working with them. She joined SNCC in 1962, and helped found the Council of Federated Organizations, a network of civil rights groups. Ladner also remembers the prevalence of racial violence in the Mississippi Delta.

Till, Emmett, 1941-1955

Rural Schools--Southern States

Parker, Mack Charles

McGee, Willie

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:30 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner worked as a voter registration activist in Indianola, Mississippi. There, she met sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer, whose civil rights career began after she was denied work for attempting to register. Ladner was often threatened with violence because of her civil rights activities, and eventually left Mississippi to work in Atlanta, Georgia and Chicago, Illinois. At this point in the interview, Ladner remembers her advisor from the NAACP Youth Council, Clyde Kennard, who was targeted for attempting to integrate Mississippi Southern University. He was arrested under allegations of bringing moonshine onto the campus, and then charged with purchasing stolen chicken feed. Kennard, who was suffering from stomach cancer, was sentenced to hard labor at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. After the testimony against him was proven false, Kennard was released, just prior to his death in 1963. Later that year, Ladner's mentor, Medgar Evers, was murdered at his home.

African American civil rights workers--History--20th century.

African Americans--Mississippi--Delta (Region)--Social conditions.

Council of Federated Organizations (U.S.).

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:00 2008/05/02

Dorie Ladner initiated a demonstration during the funeral of NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers in 1963. She led

the mourners to the Mississippi State Capitol, where many of them were arrested, including Ladner and photographer Ernest Withers. She attempted to hide Withers' film from the police, but eventually surrendered it under threat of torture. Ladner attended the trial of Evers' murderer, Byron De La Beckwith, where Ku Klux Klan members were vocal in the courtroom. The trial resulted in two hung juries. Later in 1963, Ladner attended the funeral of the four girls killed in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1964, Ladner represented SNCC in Natchez, Mississippi, where she was arrested for distributing flyers on citizenship classes, and her cash and jewelry were confiscated by the police. When a number of other organizers were arrested during a nighttime protest, Ladner helped secure their bail bonds. She also witnessed the attempted bombing of the SNCC office in Natchez.

Hamer, Fannie Lou

Kennard, Clyde

Delta Sigma Theta Public Service Sorority

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_007, TRT: 0:29:40 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner narrates her photographs.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-).

Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963.

Beckwith, Byron De La--Trials, litigation, etc.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_008, TRT: 0:28:30 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner was instrumental in SNCC's decision to recruit northern volunteers after the murder of Louis Allen in January of 1964. At this point in the interview, Ladner describes the events that preceded Allen's assassination in Mississippi. Allen had witnessed the murder of NAACP member Herbert Lee by white state legislator E.H. Hurst in 1961, and was harassed by white supremacists for three years, until being murdered at his home the day before he planned to flee the state. After his death, the Council of Federated Organizations sought to better protect its activists, and SNCC decided to recruit volunteers from the

North to bring attention to the struggle. In the spring of 1964, Ladner mobilized white and black volunteers from northern colleges, and trained them in nonviolent action in Oxford, Ohio. She recalls a photograph taken of her in Ohio, shortly after receiving the news that CORE workers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman had been murdered in Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_009, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner helped recruit hundreds of northern volunteers for the Freedom Summer of 1964. Attorney John Doar of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) assisted with the training, and future Senator Joe Lieberman was among the students. The organizers hoped the young, white activists would attract public attention to the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. Ladner escorted the volunteers to Jackson, Mississippi, where they were instructed to assist the newly formed Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party with voter registration. The DOJ barred the student volunteers from working in Natchez, Mississippi, where the Ku Klux Klan was especially widespread; so Ladner went there with longtime activist George Green and former SNCC Chairman Charles McDew. They established a Freedom House and office that became the target of an attempted bombing. Ladner reflects upon her experiences in Natchez, where she met numerous interracial couples and the mixed race nephew of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_010, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner canvassed for volunteers to register to vote in Natchez, Mississippi during the summer of 1964. The effort was largely symbolic, as African Americans automatically failed the literacy test at the courthouse. Because of her role as an organizer, Ladner became the target of an attempted bombing by the Ku Klux Klan, and her phone line was often obstructed overnight. She initially struggled to trust the African American community in Natchez, as nearly every black resident had white relatives; but eventually developed strong relationships because of her roots in Mississippi. Ladner

talks about the cultural differences encountered by many of SNCC's northern volunteers in the South; as well as the frustrations of the white female activists, who were relegated to the SNCC offices because their presence in the field spurred violence from white supremacists. In addition, Ladner recalls her arrest for distributing leaflets, and other violations of activists' constitutional right to free speech.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_011, TRT: 0:29:20 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner was instrumental in the formation of the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) during the spring of 1964. The organization was founded to challenge the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party for its seat at the 1964 Democratic National Convention (DNC), where Ladner was among the 200 MFDP members in attendance. They secured floor passes from Representative Edith Green and Senator Wayne Morse, and MFDP founder Fannie Lou Hamer delivered a strong speech in favor of the party's inclusion in the DNC. However, President Lyndon Baines Johnson hosted an impromptu press conference to draw coverage from her address, and the DNC offered just two seats at-large with the Alaska delegation, which the MFDP rejected. During the convention, the car belonging to James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman was discovered, confirming suspicions that the missing CORE workers were murdered. Ladner was asked to testify at the trial, but refused due to fear of assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_012, TRT: 0:28:20 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner attended the SNCC retreat in Waveland, Mississippi after the defeat of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Although many SNCC members were discouraged, Ladner argued that the organization had successfully generated awareness about racial injustice in the South. In the following years, SNCC shifted its focus from Mississippi to Alabama. Ladner considered attending the first Selma to Montgomery march, but decided it was too dangerous, and returned her attention to Mississippi,

where she helped Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine and Victoria Adams challenge the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party for seats in the U.S. Congress. In 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which secured the vote for African Americans across the country. Ladner talks about SNCC's mobilization and safety strategies, and then concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her role in the struggle for civil rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorie Ladner, Section  
A2008\_079\_002\_013, TRT: 0:24:20 2008/07/24

Dorie Ladner was a civil rights activist with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In this role, she often addressed church communities, and once disregarded a preacher who attempted to silence her. At this point in the interview, Ladner talks about the philosophy of SNCC, whose members were younger and more radical than groups like the SCLC. At the March on Washington, Ladner and other SNCC members were outraged by the censorship of John Lewis' speech by older civil rights leaders. Ladner continued agitating for civil rights throughout her life. In 1971, she married Eyeloo Churnet, with whom she raised one daughter, Yodit Churnet. The couple eventually divorced. Ladner talks about her family history and the value of genealogical research. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, including her hopes for Barack Obama's presidential candidacy. Ladner concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.