

## LESSON 1 HANDOUT

# Stories of Resistance—Oral History Transcripts

### Don Hubbard

*Hubbard was interviewed by Mark Cave at Hubbard Mansion Bed and Breakfast on September 18, 2017, for the NOLA Resistance oral history project. This is an excerpt from their 120-minute interview.*

There was a thing that when I was in school, I remember we got dressed up to go down to the McDonogh monument, which is a square that's right across the street from Gallier Hall, and the kids in public schools would bring flowers to put at the monument for John McDonogh. My mother dressed me up and got me ready to go to the monument and I remember my mother came and it was mandatory, that public school children had to do that. I remember, I might have been in second grade, we were lined up to go and put our flowers at the monument and my mother came and she took me by the hand and said, "Come on let's go," and I didn't understand why we left. Later on I found out that my mother was concerned that they had the black kids waiting in the back of the line in the hot sun while the white kids went first. And we were to be last in line, and she refused to allow me to stand out in that hot weather, waiting to go put a flower at McDonogh's monument, so she came and took me. And the school told her that it was mandatory that all the kids go to the McDonogh monument, and my mother said not only was I not going to do it, but they were still going to allow me to go to school. So I never went. So then from that, you start to understand different things that your parents put into your head.

Like, for an example, you know if you went to Canal Street, you were not going to be hungry, you'll eat before you leave home, you're not going to need a hot dog. This is the way that we have to go to Canal Street. When my mother went to pay a bill or to shop, if we saw the kids at the lunch counters, we were not going to be hungry because my mother had conditioned me not to want anything, because she didn't want to tell me that I couldn't eat there. But I was always a kid who wanted to know why. Why, momma, why we can't sit in the front of the streetcar? Why can't we ride in front of the bus? My mother always—and it stuck with me—she always had one answer. She said, "Baby, they're waiting for you to change it." And I didn't understand it. She said, "They're waiting for you to change it." So, later on in life, you get to say well, now I understand what she means, they're waiting for you to change it. So that was my introduction to civil rights, between my dad and my mom, and my grandmother teaching voter registration in our home, and figuring I had to do something to change it.

### **Malik Rahim**

*Rahim was interviewed by Mark Cave at his home in Algiers, Louisiana, on February 27, 2018, for the NOLA Resistance oral history project. Below are two excerpts from their 95-minute interview.*

CAVE: How did you get involved in activism?

RAHIM: I got involved—I was working on a job at, on Peters Road doing pipeline construction and I was hired as the welder's helper. And I asked about, how could I become a welder? And he told me they didn't hire niggers as welders. We got into some words. The foreman came, and I was

immediately fired, you know. Wasn't no questions of what happened. It's just that, you know, you talk back to this white guy, you fired. And I was let go. Mind you, I was a veteran. He never served in the service. And I wasn't even asked. So, with that, I knew I wasn't going to work anymore. I knew then I couldn't work on no job and tolerate this. So, I then get into activism. I got into selling weed in the projects and Fisher homes and I once told Geronimo, up in LA, before I left to move back to New Orleans, that if the party was started in New Orleans, that I would get involved. And one day one of the guys came in the breezeway that I used to hang out in and—with a Panther paper. And when I seen the paper, I said, "Man, where you get the pa—?" He said, "Man, they got some brothers on Canal Street selling Panther papers." So, I went out there and a brother from Plaquemines Parish named Alton Edwards sold me the paper. We talked a while. And I told him that if he ever come across the river, that I would show him around. And the next day, he came. And that evening, I went to their meeting, at that time it was in a residence, a public housing home, up in St. Thomas housing project. I went to the meetings there. I started going on a regular, just every day. And soon as we was able to get enough money saved to rent an apartment, my wife and I, and at that time I had two children, we all joined the party. We was the first family to join the NCCF in New Orleans. The NCCF was the National Committee to Combat Fascism. That was the first step in becoming a party—a chapter of the Black Panther Party.

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CAVE: What kind of community actions did you engage in when you were in the Desire projects?

RAHIM: Well one of the first things we did, we established a free breakfast program. My first wife, Barbara Thomas, she ran the—she started the breakfast program. But by the time that we found—

the end was a community-driven breakfast program. Then we did a cleanup program. We believed that no civilized people live in filth, so at that time, the projects was in deplorable condition. So, we did a cleanup. Then we started a pest control program to deal with the fact that this housing development was allowed to become inundated with rodents and different insects, roaches, so we did community pest control. It wasn't like what was known to happen, like, you spray for the roaches in your house and they just go to your neighbor's house. And then when they out, they come back to yours. But in the interim, you and your neighbor is constantly battling among each other, because they didn't know that all these roaches is coming because you didn't spray at your house. So, again, you know, that made us start the pest control program.

And then we went into a crime abatement program. The first, what you would call neighborhood watch in New Orleans, we started. And the first drug-free zone in New Orleans, we started. We went out and asked guys that was selling drugs, "Don't sell them around children. Don't sell them around the elderly. If you have to do this, then don't do it where it have this type of impact upon your community." Because all of us was from other public housing, basically, other housing developments in other part of the city, you dig, but we was there to help them in their city, I mean, in their community. And for that, we had to respect, you know, what guys would give us. We started the first cleanup program in the city, the first drug-free zone, and then we started the sickle cell awareness, which is one of the things I'm truly proud of out of the things that we did at Desire, you dig, but we started the sickle cell. But not only did we start sickle cell awareness and testing, but we also started testing for high blood pressure and diabetes and a lot of people found out that they was diabetic or that they had high blood pressure by coming to our office.

## Dodie Smith-Simmons

*Smith-Simmons was interviewed by Mark Cave at the Williams Research Center in New Orleans on August 21, 2017, for the NOLA Resistance oral history project. Below is an excerpt from their 96-minute interview.*

SMITH-SIMMONS: So. And like I say, we never had a problem with the police, per se, and—with CORE, you always let the police know what you’re doing. Nothing was a surprise. The Freedom Ride—James Forman sent a letter to President Kennedy stating what was going to happen. Kennedy never responded to the letter, but he had a copy of the letter. So we did it as a way of having the media protect us against the police, the police to protect us against the mob or the crowd. So every time we did something, they knew. It was not a surprise. And I think that’s why when we went to McComb, the bus terminal was closed; said there was a gas leak. A photographer got out and was beaten. And—when we did these test rides—you had testers and you had an observer. Jerome was the observer. That meant he didn’t have—on the bus, he had no contact with us. He’d sit by himself. When we went back—after we’d gone to the black community and stayed a while, then around noon we went back to try to reenter the terminal. It was open.

Jerome got off first. And when he tried to get into the terminal, there was an elderly white man holding the door so he couldn’t get in, when somebody from the inside had to come out, he stood aside and that’s how Jerome got in, so—the rest of us got in. When we—Jerome went to the ticket counter to purchase our return tickets and the four of us testers, George Raymond, Tom

Valentine, Alice Thompson, and myself, we went to the lunch counter and sat there. The manager came out screaming, "Greyhound does not own this terminal. Please leave." George Raymond say to the waitress, "May I have a cup of coffee, please?" and the manager was still ranting and raving. George say to the waitress again, "May I have a cup of coffee, please?" Young, white McComb citizen went to the coffee pot, poured a cup of coffee, walked around the back of George Raymond, poured the hot coffee over his head and hit him in the base of the neck with the coffee cup.

At that point people hadn't realized that Jerome was a part of the group until he signaled for Alice and I to go sit in the waiting room. And when he did that, all hell broke loose. About four or five guys beat him with brass knuckles and through our training we'd been taught how to protect ourselves. Hands behind the back, you fell on the ground in a fetal position and they were kicking him and beating him and Tom Valentine was a little, short, slight guy; they'd pick him up off the stool, throw him to the ground, he would bounce up like a ball. George Raymond was being chased. This was the lunch counter, glass partition like that. He would jump over that glass position, partition. They come around and get him. He'd jump back over. And when he saw how badly Jerome was being beaten, he went over that area and they started beating on him, too. And I think had he not done that, they would have killed Jerome that day.

So when we finally got out of the terminal, Jerome was running, I was behind him. Tom Valentine tried to get into a taxi, was pulled out, was kicked in the head, was beat, I don't know what happened to George and Alice. A pickup truck drove by, being driven by a black man. Jerome dove into the back of the truck. And I'm saying, oh my God, I'm left alone. So I just ran. When we got there, there were no policemen, the first time. No policemen. Never saw one black person. But

when I ran around the terminal to the colored section, the terminal was on Canal Street and there's a group of black people and they just encircled me. And I think had it not been for those black McComb citizens, I may not be sitting here today talking to you.

So I say to myself, you're going to calm yourself down. You're going to walk out of this crowd and walk up the hill, like you're going to work in Miss Ann's kitchen and then when you get out of sight you're going to run like hell. Never been to McComb. Not knowing I was in a white neighborhood. But that's what I did. Then I heard—"Dodie!"

Looked around. These white folks know my name. And I ran even faster and when we went on these campaigns we'd dressed like we go to church. I had on heels and I ran even faster. And I heard my name again and I ran faster until the truck overtook me and it was the truck that Jerome had dove into. They had collected the other people. They took us back to the black section of McComb, to the White Castle Hotel and Café. We were treated by a doctor named James Anderson. I didn't know his name at the time, but when I went back for the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Ride I met him and got to thank him, after we cried for a while. And—so after the doctor had treated Jerome, Jerome came over to me and say, "Get Bobby Kennedy on the phone," and I'm looking at him like, man, you've had one too many hits. And I'm looking at him. He say, "Get Bobby Kennedy on the phone," so I'm just looking at—and when I went on these campaigns I always had a pad and a pencil, so I was writing down and singing in my head as the guys was being beaten. So he gave me Bobby Kennedy's direct line, which I didn't know it was his direct line at the time. So I put the money in the payphone, dialed the number. This man answered the phone and I say, "Hello. May I speak to Attorney General Bobby Kennedy?" he said, "This is he," I say, "My

name is Doratha Smith and I'm calling for Jerome Smith," he said, "I'm aware of the situation. There are FBI agents out front waiting to take you back to New Orleans." Being all of 18 and a half years old I say, "Oh no they won't. We're going back to New Orleans the way we came, by bus," and I handed the phone to Jerome. I'm sure his conversation started off with Jerome, with what he said to me about FBI agents and—we got into a taxi. Went back to the bus terminal. The crowd had doubled in size. There were police in the cell. And we say, we didn't want another beating. So we went to the highway and we flagged the bus down on the highway and that's how we got back to New Orleans. But during that time when Jerome and I was running and the crowd was—it always bothered me—there was these young white mothers with babies on their hips saying, "Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers!" and I say, I didn't understand—their babies. Why are they out here?