

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Judy Richardson

PERSON

Richardson, Judy, 1944-

Alternative Names: Judy Richardson;

Life Dates: March 10, 1944-

Place of Birth: Tarrytown, New York, USA

Residence: Silver Spring, Maryland

Occupations: Film Producer;

Biographical Note

Film producer and former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist Judy Richardson was born to autoworker William King Richardson and state office worker Mae Louise Tucker Richardson in Tarrytown, New York. Richardson grew up in the “under the hill” section of Tarrytown; the town was in the legendary “Sleepy Hollow country” made famous by author Washington Irving. Richardson’s father helped organize the United Auto Workers (UAW) local at the Chevrolet plant in Tarrytown and died “on the line” when she was seven years old. Richardson graduated from Sleepy Hollow High School in 1962 and was accepted to Swarthmore College on a full, four-year scholarship. Later, Richardson would also attend Columbia University, Howard University, and Antioch College.

During her freshman year at Swarthmore, Richardson joined the Swarthmore Political Action Committee (SPAC), a Students for a Democratic Society affiliate. In 1963, Richardson traveled by bus on weekends, with other SPAC volunteers, to assist the Cambridge, Maryland, community in desegregating public accommodations. The Cambridge Movement was led by civil rights activist Gloria Richardson, with assistance from SNCC field secretaries such as Baltimore native Reggie Robinson. Richardson eventually joined the SNCC staff at the national office in Atlanta, where she worked closely with, among others, James Forman, Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, and Julian Bond. When the national office moved to Mississippi, during 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, Richardson relocated as well. Richardson also worked in SNCC’s projects in Lowndes County, Alabama (with Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Ture and others) and in Southwest Georgia. In 1965, Richardson became office manager for Julian Bond’s successful first campaign for the Georgia House of Representatives; she also organized a northern Freedom School to bring together young activists from SNCC’s Southern projects and Northern support offices.

In 1968, Richardson and other former SNCC staffers founded Drum and Spear Bookstore in Washington, D.C., which became the largest black bookstore in the country. Richardson was also the children's editor of Drum and Spear Press. In 1970, Richardson wrote an essay on racism in black children's books, published by Howard University's Journal of Negro Education. In 1978, Richardson began working with Henry Hampton and Blackside Productions on an early version of what would become the Eyes On The Prize series; major production for this Academy Award-nominated, six-hour PBS series began in 1986, during which time she acted as researcher and content advisor. For Eyes On The Prize II, the subsequent eight-hour series, Richardson was the series associate producer. Beginning in 1982, Richardson was director of information for the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, participating in its protests against police brutality in New York City, and its bus caravans to the Alabama Black Belt to counter the Reagan Administration's intimidation of elderly African American voters. Richardson later co-produced Blackside's 1994 Emmy and Peabody Award-winning documentary, Malcolm X: Make It Plain (for PBS's The American Experience).

Serving as a senior producer for Northern Light Productions in Boston, Richardson produced historical documentaries for broadcast and museums, with a focus on African American historical events, including: a one-hour documentary on the 1968 Orangeburg Massacre (South Carolina) for PBS; two History Channel documentaries on slavery and slave resistance; and installations for, among others, the National Park Service's Little Rock Nine Visitor's Center, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (Cincinnati), the New York State Historical Society's "Slavery in New York" exhibit, and the Paul Laurence Dunbar House (Dayton). Richardson and five other SNCC women, edited Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC. The anthology, published by University of Illinois Press, includes the courageous stories of over fifty SNCC women. It was the Press' best-selling title in 2011 and was issued in paperback in August 2012. Richardson received an Image Award for Vision and Excellence from Women in Film and Video. She lectures, writes, and conducts professional development workshops for teachers about the history and values of the Civil Rights Movement and their relevance to current issues. Richardson was awarded an honorary doctorate by Swarthmore College and became a visiting professor at Brown University in the fall of 2012.

Judy Richardson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 9, 2007, October 4, 2022, and October 6, 2022.

Related Entries

Sleepy Hollow High School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

F.R. Pearson Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Swarthmore College [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Washington Irving Intermediate School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Northern Light Productions [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Senior Producer

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1963 to 1965]

Staff Member

Drum and Spear Bookstore [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1968 to ?]

Founder

Blackside, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1986 to ?]

Producer

Brown University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2012 to ?]

Visiting Professor

Swarthmore Political Action Committee [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Director of Information