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Amplifying Collections with Oral Histories in a Virtual World: The Student Help Lived Experience Project at Queens College CUNY

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2020 pandemic, the QC Department of Special Collections & Archives designed a completely remote fellowship. Using an endowment as a funding source to support graduate fellowship opportunities and the stewardship of civil rights collections, the fellowship expanded upon the collaborative *Student Help: Lived Experience* project. The goal was to document the experiences and lessons learned by students who participated in civil rights activities during the early to mid-1960s.

QC STUDENT HELP PROJECT

The QC Student Help Project was a unique approach to advocating and fighting for racial equality that centered around issues in education. The project had two initiatives:

JAMAICA STUDENT HELP PROJECT

A local tutoring initiative led by QC volunteers to assist over 1,000 under-resourced students in the Jamaica area of Queens, NY

VIRGINIA STUDENT HELP PROJECT

A group of QC volunteers prepared students in Prince Edward County, VA to resume school after being locked out due to white resistance to racial integration in public schools

AMPLIFYING EXISTING COLLECTIONS WITH ORAL HISTORIES

By using oral histories to further develop a particular collecting area, the interviewees offered passionate reflections about their experiences in retrospect. This format also allowed interviewers to elicit real, emotional reactions from the interviewees.

Many interviewees also drew upon their past donations to the college during the recording, which opened a dialogue between physical collections (correspondence, clippings, ephemera, etc.) and their reflections about participating in a unique initiative during the Civil Rights Movement.



Mike Wenger, Stan Shaw, and Mark Levy interviewed by Annie Tummino and Victoria Fernandez, October 2020.

OUTCOMES

Interviewed sixteen individuals by Zoom and/or phone conference, in addition to editing transcripts and creating finding aid records for each interview.

Reinforced relationships between the Dept. of Special Collections & Archives and previous donors/project volunteers, while fostering new connections with alumni.

Demonstrated a successful and sustainable model for future student fellowships

Developed the ***Student Help: Lived Experience Digital Guide***, a public and interactive LibGuide site that hosts a number of resources related to the Student Help Project, such as:

Finding aids	Monographs
Oral history interviews	Scholarly articles
Digitized photographs	External collections

<https://qc-cuny.libguides.com/sca/studenthelpproject>

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