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CONTACT: Miguel A. Gonzalez, NEA Communications
202-822-7823, mgonzalez@nea.org

NEA honors civil rights activist Dr. Charles Prickett with human and civil rights award

Dr. Prickett is among a dozen recipients of the prestigious NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards

HOUSTON—Civil rights activist, lecturer, and attorney Dr. Charles Prickett received the NEA Carter G. Woodson Memorial Award in recognition of his life’s dedication to the service of others.

“Dr. Charles Prickett is an inspirational example of what activism can achieve,” said Lily Eskelsen García, NEA president. “His work as a young person during the Civil Rights Movement was brave and vital, and we are grateful that he shares his stunning stories in a way that continually inspires others. Dr. Prickett is a reminder that we can all take action, join movements we are passionate about, and truly make meaningful change.”

School was instrumental in giving Dr. Prickett an outlet to become an activist. When Dr. Prickett attended Southern Illinois University, he joined the school’s chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), where he found a diverse group of likeminded individuals who were devoted to civil rights activism.

In 1964, Dr. Prickett joined an incredibly important youth movement, known as “Freedom Summer.” Dr. Prickett and thousands of other young people went to Mississippi, volunteering in dangerous conditions to provide remedial education in the form of “Freedom Schools.” There, these young people would help African Americans work on improving literacy, so that they would be able to vote. Alongside basic literacy, these “Freedom Schools” also imparted empowering lessons in black history.

Registering voters was likely the most instrumental part of this “Freedom Summer,” and Dr. Prickett was on the front lines, registering hundreds of black voters at the polls. The volunteers persevered, despite the peril of operating in a state that was notorious for disenfranchising black voters with racist literacy tests, poll taxes, and even violent deterrence.

Dr. Prickett did not quit there, but continued to be involved in civil rights struggles; he fought for black farmers’ right to access federally subsidized farming programs, he marched over the Edmund Pettus Bridge to Selma alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and he worked with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to stress the importance of including black voices at the 1964 National Convention.

As an active participant in the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Prickett has an outstanding opportunity to share his stories as a way to inspire and influence others. Today, he tours the nation’s schools speaking and rousing a new generation of young people to make a difference.

Dr. Charles Prickett was one out of 12 outstanding heroes honored at NEA’s 2019 NEA Human & Civil Rights Awards, which took place on July 3, in Houston, Texas. Click on link to view video tribute of Dr. Prickett.

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