

For Immediate Release

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Dave Dennis, civil rights activist, to keynote MLK Convocation on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Rides and receive *For My People* Award along with Dr. Doris A. Derby and his son, David Dennis, Jr.

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Jackson, MS—The Margaret Walker Center is pleased to announce that David J. (Dave) Dennis, Sr., will be the keynote speaker for the 53rd annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Virtual Birthday Convocation at 10 a.m., Friday, Jan. 15, 2021.

Dennis is a civil rights veteran who has worked and fought for 60 years to help people gain their civil and human rights in Mississippi and Louisiana. He was one of the original Freedom Riders who rode from Montgomery to Jackson in 1961. He served as field secretary for the Congress of Racial Equality and co-director of the Council of Federated Organizations and helped organize Freedom Summer in 1964.

After Freedom Summer, Dennis returned to Dillard University, completing his degree in 1968, and earning his law degree at the University of Michigan. In 1972, he became an organizer challenging the Louisiana Democratic structure that resulted in an African American chairman and a majority African American delegation being sent to the national convention, the first time since Reconstruction.

“It is a high honor, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Rides, to have Dave Dennis as this year's keynote speaker for our MLK Convocation at JSU. As a Freedom Rider and activist in Mississippi and across the country, Dave Dennis deserves our deepest respect and admiration,” said Dr. Robert Luckett, director of the Margaret Walker Center.

Margaret Walker began MLK Convocation at Jackson State to honor King just nine months after his assassination in 1968, making it one of the oldest celebrations of his life in the nation.

On 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14, 2021, the Margaret Walker Center will host its 26th annual For My People Awards, sponsored by AARP Mississippi. This year's Awards ceremony will feature three recipients in a virtual conversation, *A Movement: The Past to the Present*. For their contributions to African American history and culture, Dennis, Sr., and Dr. Doris Derby, a civil rights activist and photographer, will be honored along with Dave Dennis, Jr., an activist, scholar, and son of Dennis, Sr. Moderating the panel discussion is Lance Wheeler, education and public relations manager for the Margaret Walker Center.



David Dennis, Jr.



Dr. Doris A. Derby

The For My People Awards are named after Margaret Walker's classic poem, and past recipients have included James Meredith, Unita Blackwell, Robert Clark, Lerone Bennett, Andrew Young, Reena Evers-Everette and Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Dennis, Jr., will be the first recipient of the Margaret Walker Center's For My People – Doris Derby Legacy Award. Derby made a lifelong commitment to defending human rights and training new generations under her tutelage as an activist, scholar, artist and educator. The award honors descendants of activists who continue the traditions of the social justice movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

Both events will be available to view for free on the Jackson State University and Margaret Walker Center Facebook pages. For more information, contact the Center's staff at 601-979-3935 or mwa@jsums.edu.

