

Social Justice and Contemplative Practice: *Honoring the Legacy of Dr. Oliver Hill, Jr*

2021 Keynote Panelists

Dr. Michelle C. Chatman



Dr. Michelle C. Chatman is Associate Professor in the Crime, Justice, and Security Studies Program at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). She earned her Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology at American University. As a sociocultural anthropologist, she researches gentrification and urban inequality, Black family well-being, youth justice, and healing-centered social change. Dr. Chatman has lectured broadly on the intersection of contemplative approaches and social justice at numerous institutions throughout the U.S. and abroad and is an emerging leader in this area. She has delivered two TEDx talks, *How Africa Changed My Life* and *Healing the Harm in Schools*, along with numerous other public lectures and presentations.

She serves as the board president for the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMIND), a global organization devoted to advancing compassion, justice, and healing through the transformative power of contemplative practices. Dr. Chatman is enthusiastic about spreading culturally relevant and critical contemplative approaches that foster belonging, justice, and anti-oppressive, liberated learning environments. In 2018, she founded the Black Mindfulness Summit, a community of mindfulness and contemplative practitioners from the African Diaspora.

Dr. Chatman is a former research fellow in the Robert Wood Johnson IRL program, where she designed and piloted a mindfulness-based youth violence prevention program (Project Youth MIND). Her current research, funded by the National Science Foundation, examines decolonizing computer science education for women of color through ancestral knowledge systems.

David J. Dennis, Sr,



David J. (Dave) Dennis, Sr., interrupted his collegiate experience during his freshman year in 1961 at Dillard University in New Orleans LA to work in the 60s civil rights movement in the South, particularly Mississippi and Louisiana, where he was arrested over 30 times in relation to his activities to register disenfranchised voters.

He was on the first freedom bus ride from Montgomery AL to Jackson MS in 1961. He served in both states as field secretary for CORE (Congress on Racial Equality). He was a co-director of COFO (Council of Federated Organizations) and of the effort to organize Freedom Summer 1964. He worked closely with Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney who were murdered along with Andrew Goodman as Freedom Summer began. Dave spoke in Mississippi at the funeral for James Chaney, delivering a eulogy that will long be remembered. He returned to Dillard University in 1965 where he graduated in 1968.

Continuing his education, Dave left for law school at the University of Michigan; there he graduated in 1971. In 1972, he was an organizer of a successful challenge to the Louisiana Democratic Party 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.

Dave's practice of law gave way in 1991 to his work with Bob Moses--a fellow veteran of the civil rights movement in Mississippi--and the Algebra Project. In the 60s, the most pressing need for African American residents in Mississippi for citizenship was to be able to register to vote unobstructed. Dave became committed in the early 90s to the pressing need of quality education as necessary for first class citizenship, joining Bob in his work to increase participation of low-performing students in the gatekeeper course Algebra I by or before the eighth grade. Without

early access to Algebra I, students cannot complete a heavy mathematics program in high school enabling them to go into careers in science and technology. Dave and Bob have begun to pursue “quality education as a constitutional right”. The current climate in which the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is under assault underscores that citizens must be ever vigilant in our efforts to maintain safeguards to our citizenship already hard-won and to continue the pursuit of those necessary elements for full citizenship that are yet to be secured.

Dave, father to 6 and grandfather to 11, currently resides in Summerville SC with his wife Nancy Ledford Dennis and pups, Pippa and Missy. He is active with two organizations— the Southern Initiative Algebra Project and Dave Dennis Connections.

Dr. Ashlee C. Fowlkes



Dr. Ashlee C. Fowlkes is the CEO of Fowlkes Consulting. He is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and has worked in the field of Diversity and Inclusion for over 10 years. He is an LGBTQ+ Subject Matter Expert and Thought Leader. His passion for LGBTQ+ sensitivity and inclusion is palpable and has resulted in him becoming a highly sought after speaker and consultant.

He has provided training and consultation in multiple settings, which include but are not limited to: the financial sector, the prison system, institutions of higher education and healthcare institutions. A transgender man himself, Dr. Fowlkes has a profound appreciation for the impact (both blatant and subtle) of diversity and inclusion efforts in the workplace. Dr. Fowlkes is a Forbes Contributor, where he writes about LGBTQ+ inclusion, equality, and the Pink Economy.

ZewelANJI “Zewe” Serpell



ZewelANJI “Zewe” Serpell is an Associate Professor and most recently the Director of Graduate Studies in the Psychology Department at VCU. Her research focuses on optimizing the learning experiences of African-American students, and has been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, Institutes for Education Sciences, and American Psychological Association.

Her work considers sociocultural processes, and advances in cognitive science to develop and test school-based programs. In addition to numerous peer-reviewed papers, she has co-edited two books on school mental health, and is a co-author of the National Academies of Sciences 2018 report entitled “How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures.” She is a fellow of the American Psychological Association’s Minority Fellowship Program, a postdoctoral NSF research fellow of the Quality Education for Minorities Network, a faculty fellow of the National Center for Research on Early Childhood Education at the University of Virginia, and most recently served as a AAAS/AERA Science and Technology congressional fellow on Capitol Hill.

Zewe earned her B.A. from Clark University in Worcester, MA., and her M.S. and Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Howard University in Washington, DC.

Renee Hill

Renée Hill was married to Oliver Hill, Jr. for 39 years. They have three children: Jananda, Maia and Jamaa, and three grandchildren: Jelani, Julian and Jaden.

She is a retired associate professor of philosophy at Virginia State University and the administrator of the VSU mindfulness center, the Oasis.