



**\*\*In Memoriam: Honoring the Legacy of Hollis Watkins Muhammad\*\***

It is with heavy hearts that we at Southern Echo, Inc. reflect upon the passing of Hollis Watkins Muhammad, and pay tribute to a remarkable individual whose life was dedicated to the pursuit of justice, civil rights, and equality. Though we grieve this loss, we stand firm and ever ready to continue his work knowing that while this icon of the Civil Rights Movement is no longer with us, Hollis has left an indelible mark on the fabric of American and African American history.

Born on July 29, 1941, in Chisholm Mission, Lincoln County, Mississippi, and departing from this world on September 20, 2023, Hollis' involvement with the Civil Rights Movement began at a young age. In 1961, at the tender age of 19, he made the courageous decision to put aside his college ambitions and come back to Mississippi to participate in the Freedom Rides beginning to take place in his home state. From that moment on, Hollis would always choose to stand with his fellow Mississippians in the struggle for civil rights, embodying a steadfast dedication to the cause that lasted throughout his life.

Back home, Hollis sought ways to become involved in the Movement, becoming a mentor and eventual role model for other young activists. A fortuitous meeting with SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) organizer Bob Moses and Hollis' election to president of the then newly formed Pike County Nonviolent Direct Action Committee, marked the beginning of his tireless efforts to empower African Americans to exercise their right to vote and dismantle the shackles of segregation. Working with both organizations, Hollis conducted voter registration and canvassing drives as well as non-violent sit-ins that protested the racist and prejudiced based segregation laws of the state. In fact, it was at his first sit-in at a nearby Woolworth department store that resulted in his arrest by local law enforcement.

Though recently and unjustly incarcerated, Hollis was not deterred in his fight for equal rights, and soon joined the grassroots organizing efforts around voting happening in Hattiesburg, Mississippi under the direction of Vernon Dahmer. From there, he traveled to Greenwood, Mississippi where he began the Holmes County project through which many activists would play a key role in much of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

Hollis never wavered in his commitment to the struggle for civil rights. Throughout his life, he lived humbly, always mindful of the communities he worked with and never taking their hospitality for granted. He knew the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity, and he exemplified this dedication by never abandoning his mission, even when confronted with violence from known terrorist organizations like the KKK.

Additionally, Hollis was a pioneer in the creation of the Freedom Schools, but his fearless activism extended far past the turbulent era of the 1950s and 60s. In 1989, he founded Southern Echo, Inc., an organization founded on the principle that the organizing torch must be passed on from generation to generation to ensure the continued momentum of change that would stamp out prejudice and oppression once and for all. His legacy remains as, thirty years later, Southern Echo continues to train civil rights activists and build new leaders while addressing the current needs and injustices facing Mississippi's most disenfranchised and marginalized communities. Furthermore, and under his careful mentorship, Southern Echo has expanded its directive to include fighting for change in all areas of public policy including education, healthcare, juvenile justice, and even redistricting, all to ensure accountability for the needs of the state's most vulnerable communities.

Hollis' life serves as a testament to courage, resilience, and the unwavering belief that change is possible. His dedication to justice, equality, and the rights of all people inspired generations of activists and served as a guiding light for those who dared to challenge the status quo.

As we bid farewell to Hollis Watkins Muhammad, we honor his legacy by reaffirming our commitment to the principles for which he tirelessly fought. The battle for equality is not over, and as we remember his life and work, let us be inspired to carry on the fight for a more just and equitable world.

In memory of Hollis Watkins Muhammad, may we continue to strive for a world where justice, equality, and human rights prevail.