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#### ABSTRACT

The first goal of the project was to develop a model for a class on Oral Histories of Women in the Development of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services. As an experienced Law School Clinic Professor, and as a veteran Legal Services attorney, I am grounded in the history of access to justice in Mississippi and in the history of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services. However, I needed a working knowledge of skills necessary to develop an oral history class. Initially I explored the idea of enrolling in an oral history class at the University of Mississippi or another university. However, after discussing the fellowship goals with an oral history professor and oral historians, I became convinced that the best way to prepare for the development of the class was to take the fellowship time to participate in field work as a volunteer in the 2019 North Mississippi Rural Legal Services Oral History Project. My field work as a volunteer coordinator with the NMRLS Oral History Project in the Summer of 2019 was a great learning process. Working with Dr. Roy DeBerry, Executive Director of the Hill Country Project, April Grayson, an experienced oral historian, and Morgan Cutturini, English Professor and Director of the ICC Film Project, I have developed skills in the Summer of 2019 that have prepared me to launch the class during a future semester.

#### INTRODUCTION

The civil rights movement in Mississippi has been written about extensively and preserved through oral histories and documentaries. However, the essential role of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in the access to justice movement has not been fully recorded. The goal of this Fellowship is to investigate and preserve the history of women who played an important role in the development of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services. Felice Batlan’s statement in the introduction of *Women and Justice for the Poor* is as true for Mississippi as it was for New York: “The development of organized free legal aid for the poor in the United States has a rich history that has been overlooked, even buried.”

# The Contribution of Women to the Development of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services



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#### METHODOLOGY

As a volunteer in the Summer of 2019 I planned the project; arranged skills training for all student participants; affiliated the film crew and student historians Professor Morgan Cutturini, provided student film-makers and oral historians in the Summer of 2019; arranged all interview sessions, including location, set up, participation by interviewees who gave their oral histories, and participated in the sessions as an interviewer. Many of the people interviewed are some of the most critical knowledge-keepers of the contribution of women to the development of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, the focus of the Fellowship. The raw footage of the interviews contains much information that informs inquiry into the contribution of women to the fundamental access to justice movement that led to the creation of an open society in North Mississippi. The summer of 2019 project was a success with 10 people interviewed after much advance planning: two all-day in-state interview sessions and two out-of-state interview sessions; and three editing sessions. The final leg of my field work included a reception and a video presentation for the general public on August 24, 2019, at the Offices of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services with excerpts from many of the interview sessions, that gave the viewing public an introduction to the NMRLS oral history project.

#### UPDATE

Many of the people interviewed are some of the most critical knowledge-keepers of the contribution of women to the development of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, the focus of the Fellowship. The raw footage of the interviews contains much information that informs inquiry into the contribution of women to the fundamental access to justice movement that led to the creation of an open society in North Mississippi. The summer of 2019 project was a success with 10 people interviewed after much advance planning: two all-day in-state interview sessions and two out-of-state interview sessions; and three editing sessions. The final leg of my field work was a reception and a video presentation for the general public on August 24, 2019, at the Offices of NMRLS with excerpts from many of the interview sessions, that introduced the viewing public to the NMRLS oral history project. I have also developed an outline for the future project work and of resources to accomplish the work of the Fellowship that includes: additional crucial interviews, the project focus; project goals and deliverables; a list of resources for developing the project and potential funding sources; a list of curriculum guides for similar projects from throughout the country; and a short list of the most promising examples of oral history classes located at Law Schools, graduate schools and undergraduate schools to contact for assistance in developing the future Fellowship class.