

Thomas Madison Armstrong III
1961 Freedom Rider
BIO

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Contact:

Thomas Armstrong
The FootSoldiers' Journey, Inc.
PO Box 5933
Naperville, Illinois 60567-5933
Mobile (630) 337-1148

Thomas Madison Armstrong III is a veteran of the early 1960s civil rights movement in his native Mississippi, the very heart of white resistance in the South.

He is a Civic Education Consultant who works with teachers and students to learn about the civil rights movement. Personal and professional development is enhanced by those choosing to participate.

As a student at historically black Tougaloo College from 1959-1963, he joined a small group of colleagues and faculty members who launched early protests for voting rights and equal public accommodations. These were demonstrations led by NAACP leaders, such as the late Medgar Evers, and peopled by ordinary men and women of the South, both black and white.

He is a retired transportation contracts manager, having worked at the United States Postal Service for 37 years. These days he mostly spends time with his family, helping neighbors, and volunteering at the American Red Cross.

He did not speak publicly about his civil rights experiences for some 38 years. He has only broken his silence at the urging of family members, and out of his own concern that the history is being oversimplified to but a few names of icons.

Since he began responding to invitations to talk about his experience in recent years, he has conducted intergenerational discussions about the personal power of civic education, and has worked to further the nation's democratic ideals at such places as the Freedom Riders Teen Town hall Webcast at the National Underground Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH, sponsored by the National Museum of American History, and the African American Leadership Roundtable in Chicago, Illinois.

He has provided presentations on Civic Education and Engagement at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. the university of Illinois, Springfield Illinois, the Freedom Riders 50th Anniversary, Jackson, MS and Chicago, IL; Mississippi State Dept. of Archives and History, Jackson, MS; Historic Prentiss Institute All School Reunion, Prentiss, MS; Hue-Man Bookstore, New York, NY., Colorado State University, Pueblo, Colorado, as well as many Churches, Town Halls, Cultural and Civic Centers, Colleges, Universities, and Libraries throughout the States of Illinois and Mississippi.

He has also conducted presentations for the Jefferson Davis County Mississippi School District; and Tougaloo College,.

He has co-authored, with New York-based journalist, Natalie Bell, a memoir about his life-altering, freedom-fighting experience. The book, titled *Autobiography Of A Freedom Rider*, is part memoir and historical narrative. It will underscore the importance of historical narratives of black Southerners who led and participated in the movement.

Autobiography Of A Freedom Rider has been credited as an important first-person narrative of the Civil Rights Movement by college historians, Publisher's Weekly and other industry reviewers.

Natalie Bell is a journalist based in Mississippi. She has worked for more than 25 years as a news reporter for broadcast and print news organizations in the Northeast, Midwest and Southern U.S. Her work has been carried by national and international news organizations, such as Dow Jones & Co. and National Public Radio. She is specialized in covering public affairs, in particular education. As a Fulbright-Hayes fellow, she covered political and cultural transition in post-apartheid South Africa. She was a delegate to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in 2001. She has also taught journalism and media studies as an adjunct professor. Bell has family roots in Prentiss, Mississippi, and met Armstrong while researching her family history. She is a native of Nashville, Tennessee, and has lived and worked as a television news reporter in Mississippi.