



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

March 27th, 2025 at 6 PM CT

***Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* by Barbara Ransby**

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the Black Freedom Movement? How does this framing move us past just studying the modern civil rights struggle? Why should we look at freedom movements both prior to and after the civil rights movement of the 1960s?
2. How did Baker's upbringing in North Carolina affect how she saw the broader struggle for basic necessities and civil rights? What were some of Ella Baker's early influences in public service and community building? In what ways did some of these influences and beliefs become a staple of her political philosophy and/or challenged later in life?
3. Growing up under Jim Crow, Baker was fully aware of the social and economic limitations imposed on Black women. How did Baker resist those limitations?
4. How did Harlem's vibrant activism and intellectual scene contribute to Baker's political maturation? What were some of the perspectives that Baker began to incorporate and adopt into her own practice of activism?
5. Baker valued many things, but especially youth leadership and education. In what ways did both of these values show up in Baker's activism and leadership? What role did she envision young people playing in changing the status quo?

6. Who were some of the women that supported Baker and provided mentorship throughout her life? What role did these sisterly bonds play in allowing Baker to do all of the things that she did in her career as an organizer? What united them as a support system?
7. What can we learn from Ella Baker's leadership and organizational tactics? What are some of the skills and attributes she had that enabled her to be a successful organizer? Who are some other leaders, locally or nationally, that embody similar values?
8. Over the course of her life, Baker worked with many different leaders and organizations on both the national level and the local level. What were some of the critiques she had of certain strategies and leadership styles? Do you share those critiques?
9. How did Baker feel about SNCC's trajectory? What do the various coalitions tell us about the complexity of the long struggle for Black freedom? What tensions existed between organizations and why is it important to understand them?
10. Ella Baker became a resident "Griot" at the SNCC offices near the end of her career. What impact did her presence have on the next generation? Why is it important to preserve and share stories like hers?

