

# Movement Lawyering in the Twenty-First Century: Strengthening Community Bonds in Times of Political Austerity

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Andrew R. Hairston, J.D.  
September 16, 2025  
Western New England School of Law

# General Background

Became a lawyer nine years ago

Have primarily worked on education justice and school-to-prison pipeline issues across my career in DC and Texas

Supported work in Louisiana during my time at Advancement Project to have the voting rights of people who were formerly incarcerated

Presently serving on the board of directors of an abortion fund in Texas and a non-profit focused on tackling the intersections of the criminal legal & immigration systems



# Additional General Background

In leadership at Ebenezer Third Baptist Church in Austin

Have experience in criminal defense and civil litigation

Concluded the third regular legislative session I've worked in Texas in 2025

## Public Education



# Past Work

- Supported a federal trial on the remedies in Maryland concerning the funding and programming of the four public historically Black universities in the state
- Served as counsel on a state court lawsuit in Louisiana that sought a determination that the text of the Louisiana Constitution supports the idea that folks on probation and parole should vote
- Filed administrative complaints with the state education agency in Texas and the federal government on behalf of children in Beaumont, Bonham, and Corpus Christi

# Limitations

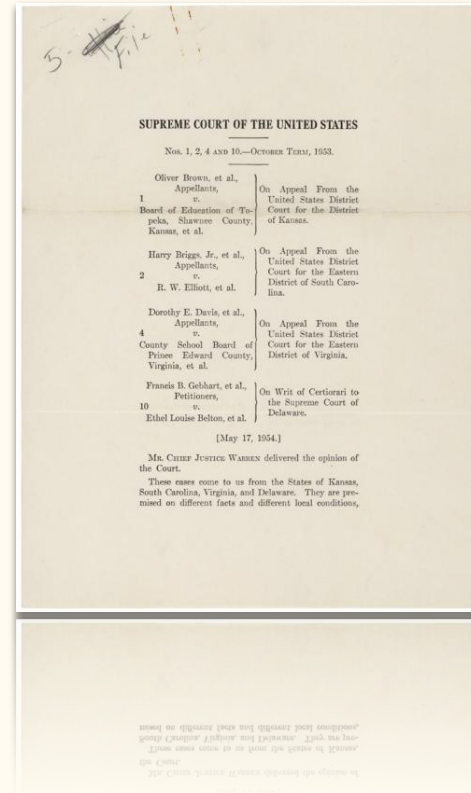
- Eleven years passed between the filing of the initial complaint in Maryland and the trial on the remedies
- The Louisiana Supreme Court denied the writ application on the state court voting rights issue for folks on probation and parole
- In 2025, we continue to receive intakes about young people being called monkeys and the n-word in their schools

# Movement Lawyering

Do these names inspire any reactions?

- Thurgood Marshall
- Ella Baker
- A. Philip Randolph
- Student organizers who staged actions at lunch counters in the South

What relationships do you believe they had with each other?



Source: National Archives

# Case Study: Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)





# Background on DSC

- National coalition that began in 2006
- Comprised of young people, parents, organizers, lawyers, and educators who are supporting local campaigns against the school-to-prison pipeline
- Engaged in federal organizing over a decade ago that led the Obama Administration to issue guidance that reinforces that school discipline must be non-discriminatory





# Structure of DSC

Over 100 members across the United States

Leadership body is a coordinating committee comprised of about 15 people from about a dozen organizations

The entire membership meets every other year at a biennial meeting; other convenings occur with varying levels of frequency across the years

# Southern Regional Organizing

Mississippi in 2023

Texas in 2024

Louisiana in 2025

Following in the examples of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and millions of working class people in the South

This work has not yet resulted in the filing of a lawsuit or administrative complaint; it emphasizes the vital relationships within a social movement



# Strategic Considerations

As a lawyer, what is your existing relationship with a base-building organization or coalition in the community?

How can you strengthen those ties?

Will the relief sought through traditional legal avenues yield better conditions for large groups of working class people?

How might the relationships you've built as a movement lawyer factor into your future advocacy?

# Recommended Reading

*Louder Than Words* (2001)

*What Faith Leaders Can Do To End the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (Sojourners, 2014)

*Introducing Texas Appleseed's Education Justice Project* (The Core Blog, 2020)

Questions?

Thank you!

Stay in touch:

737-900-9437

[ahairston@texasappleseed.org](mailto:ahairston@texasappleseed.org)