

**National Education Association**  
**2011 Carter G. Woodson Memorial Award Recipient**  
**Jeffrey Steinberg (Non-Member)**  
Millbrae, California

In an era when high-speed technology allows the instant communication of national and international events, the full impact of momentous happenings that took place only last week is quickly drowned in a flood of other occurrences – perhaps an attack on U.S. armed forces, or a natural disaster, or a violent incident in another city, or even a fad. How difficult this abundance of late-breaking news makes the teaching of history! Those who try to enlighten the youngest generations about significant events of the past find their task formidable and often discouraging. How do they give students a true sense of the lives and actions of heroic individuals who brought about changes that decades or centuries later still affect the lives and liberties of all Americans?

Jeffrey Steinberg, known to his colleagues as “Jeff,” found an answer over a decade ago. On a trip through the American South in the 1990s, this high school history teacher from the San Francisco Bay area became increasingly aware that the impact of the Civil Rights Movement could be felt and conveyed best in the places in which the pivotal action and the incidents leading up to it had taken place. Knowing that the life-changing events of the 1950s and ‘60s had dimmed into stock images and slogans, he recognized that such mementoes had little power to communicate the realities of the Movement to young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to bring that history to life for his students and turn them from passive observers of the past to active leaders in the cause of social justice, Jeff designed and developed a curriculum that would introduce contemporary teenagers to the historic facts of the Movement and help them understand the roles of its leaders. Calling his curriculum *Sojourn to the Past*, he envisioned it as an extended field trip with a difference from the usual excursions to museums and battlefields. From first sharing with his class his own visit to the South he has evolved a ten-day study trip that introduces 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, teachers, and others to the full impact of the Civil Rights Movement and inspires them to become a new generation of advocates for social justice.

*Sojourn* begins with Dr. Martin Luther King’s Six Principles of Nonviolence, keeps them constantly in participants’ minds, and ends with each sojourner focusing on at least one principle with which she or he can identify and learning how to use it as a basis for an individual action plan. The itinerary takes the students from Atlanta to other key places, including Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, Little Rock, and Memphis, where Dr. King was assassinated. As they travel, they are guided through the rigorous curriculum, combining research, discussion, and self reflection with site visits. They have interactive sessions with individuals who took part in the protests, experienced the tragedies, and finally triumphed with the enactment of federal legislation that reversed the injustices that had restricted the rights of African Americans.

Currently executive director of *Sojourn*, which has grown to include students and teachers from all over the nation, Jeff Steinberg has continued to lead thousands through the challenging curriculum and pass on his vision to a new generation of history teachers. Some of his former students are now using the program to teach their own high school classes about the Civil Rights Movement. In July 2010, the U.S. Congress voted unanimously to recognize and honor Jeff’s *Sojourn to the Past* as the longest running civil rights/social justice education program for young people in the United States.