

Bowdoin College's 2021 Honorary Degree Recipients

For the Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

WILLIAM HARBOUR, LHD

William Harbour, renowned as a civil rights activist, was a student at Tennessee State University in May 1961 when he participated in the Freedom Rides, first traveling on a Greyhound bus from Nashville to Montgomery, Alabama, then later from Nashville to Jackson, Mississippi. He and a group of other activists, both Black and white, faced violent mobs, members of the KKK, and hostile police forces as they protested enforced racial segregation on public bus systems and the nonenforcement of several Supreme Court decisions that ruled such segregation unconstitutional. Harbour was born in Piedmont, Alabama, where his father worked in a factory and owned the town's only Black barbershop and where his mother worked as a cook for white families and in the Jacksonville State University cafeteria. The first person in his family to attend college, Harbour soon joined the Nashville Student Movement, a group of activist students working for civil rights in Nashville and beyond. Harbour was jailed several times for his activism and was, along with fourteen fellow students, expelled from Tennessee State; he and the others were later reinstated, and in 2008 the university bestowed them with honorary doctorates. Harbour went on to work as a schoolteacher in Blakely, Georgia, and later worked for the federal government in Atlanta. He became an unofficial archivist of the Freedom Rider Movement and was featured in a number of documentaries, including *Freedom Riders*, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Freedom Riders National Monument, designated in 2017 at the site of the former Greyhound bus depot in Anniston, Alabama, where Freedom Riders were attacked and a bus burned. The College offered Harbour the honorary degree just prior to his death in August 2020. Bowdoin bestowed three honorary degrees posthumously in the 1980s: Elizabeth Gilmore Holt (1987); Frank A. Brown Jr. '29 (1983); and Nathan Dane II '37 (1980).