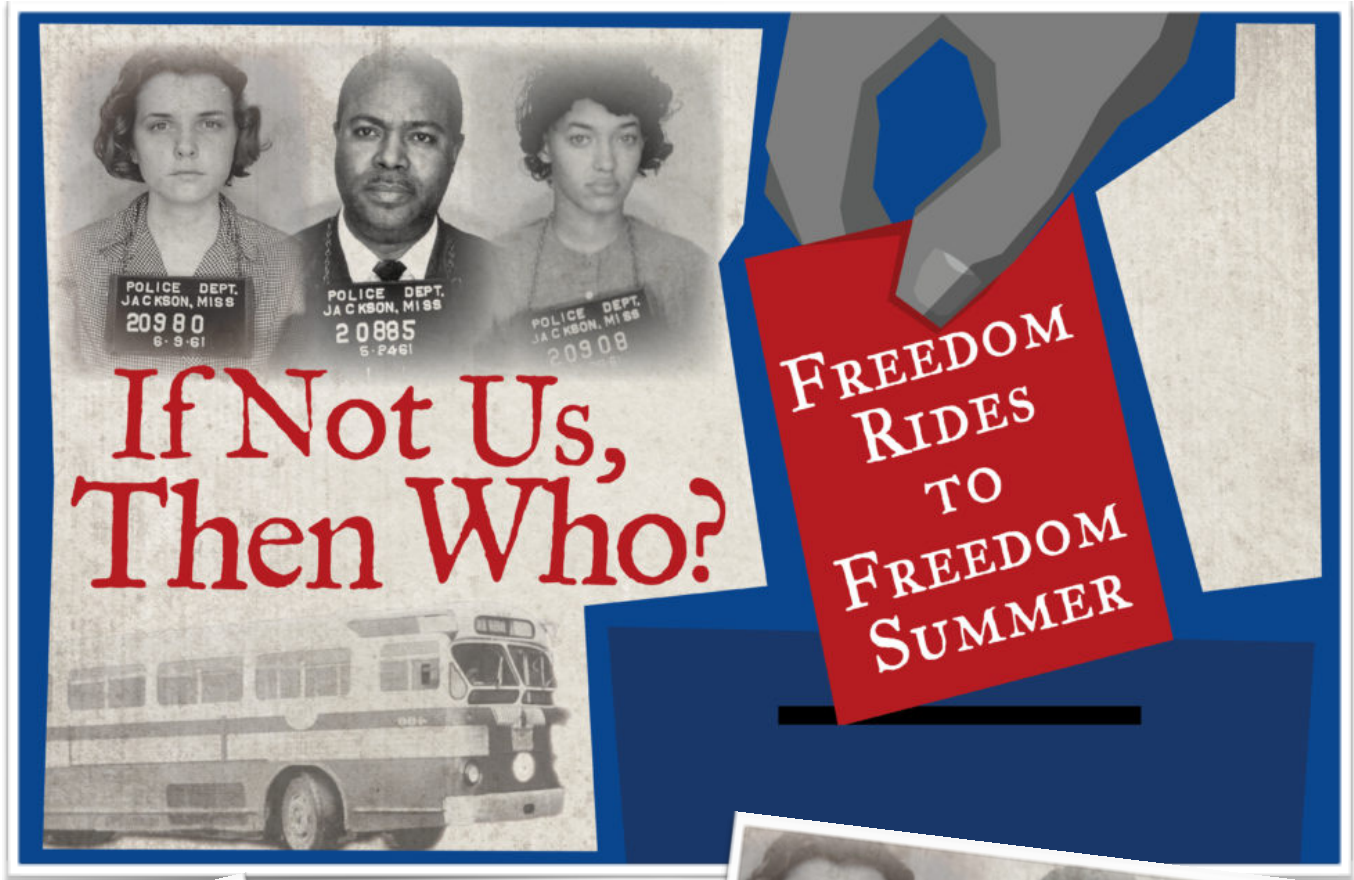


# New Stage Theatre

Arts in Education Tours 2018-2019



FREEDOM  
RIDES

FREEDOM  
SUMMER



If Not Us,  
Then Who?

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The Play: Building an Original Script .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play.....</b>	<b>4-8</b>
<b>New Stage Theatre Professional Acting Company .....</b>	<b>9</b>

## **Freedom Rides of 1961**

<b>Who Were the Freedom Riders? .....</b>	<b>11-13</b>
<b>Riding the Bus: Custom, Race and Laws .....</b>	<b>14-16</b>
<b>Riding for Change: Nonviolence .....</b>	<b>17-19</b>
<b>The World Is Watching: The Media and the Freedom Rides.....</b>	<b>20-22</b>
<b>Democracy in Action: Making Choices.....</b>	<b>23-25</b>

## **Freedom Summer of 1964**

<b>The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer.....</b>	<b>27-29</b>
<b>The Story of SNCC: The Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee .....</b>	<b>30-32</b>
<b>Democracy in Action: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party .....</b>	<b>33-34</b>
<b>The Mississippi Project: Freedom Schools .....</b>	<b>35-37</b>
<b>Connecting History: Slavery to Civil Rights .....</b>	<b>38-40</b>
<b>Civil Rights Timeline and Freedom School Map .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Evaluation Forms .....</b>	<b>42-43</b>

Please help New Stage by sharing your thoughts with us! Return evaluation forms to Sharon Miles, Education  
Director/ New Stage Theatre/ 1100 Carlisle St/ Jackson, MS 39202 or scan and email to  
[smiles@newstagetheatre.com](mailto:smiles@newstagetheatre.com)

# The Play: Writing Our Own Story

In December 2017, two new museums opened in Jackson, Mississippi. The Museum of Mississippi History and The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. The opening of the two museums provides an opportunity for Mississippians to take ownership of our collected stories, embrace our past and realize that our past inspires hope for the future. **If Not Us, Then Who? Freedom Rides to Freedom Summer** is our outward expression of the inspiration we felt with the opening of the museums.

There are plenty of plays about the Civil Rights Movement that we could have chosen to tour around the state, but often those plays are written by people who do not call Mississippi home. Seldom, if ever is the collective Mississippi experience given weight that it deserves. This play will introduce a new generation of students to Medgar Evers, a champion for civil rights in Mississippi; Fannie Lou Hamer a sharecropper that became a life long activist; and Daisy Harris, one of the many brave Mississippi natives that opened her home to host volunteers for Freedom Summer. It will also provide important information about historical events that lead up to the Civil Rights Movement and the lasting impact that these historic events had on our state.

The Freedom Rides of 1961 started with 13 people and grew to 436. It was the first time that activist from different parts of the the country traveled to Mississippi in solidarity with Civil Rights leaders fighting the oppression of blacks under “Jim Crow” laws.

Freedom Summer of 1964 changed Mississippi forever. One thousand student volunteers partnered with local activist to register voters, open freedom schools and community centers and start a new political party that represented all the citizens of the state.

I am not a historian, but I am a lover of History and specifically Mississippi History. I happen to think that though our past is layered with hurt and battered pieces it is also a story of hope, persistence, unity and faith. I believe we are fuller human beings when we take ownership of our history. It’s when we study our past, that we find the energy to fight for a better Mississippi for the next generation that will follow us.

Mississippi History is worthy of art.

Sharon Miles  
Education Director  
Writer and Director

Francine Thomas Reynolds  
Artistic Director  
Script Advisor and Editor

# Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play

The Characters presented in *If Not Us, Then Who? Freedom Rides to Freedom Summer* are a combination of the many brave men and women who labored on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement. This study guide will highlight many of the key players that are mentioned in the play.



John Lewis- Often called "one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced," He is the U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district, serving in his 17th term in the House, having served since 1987, and is the senior member of the Georgia congressional delegation. John Lewis has dedicated his life to protecting human rights, securing civil liberties, and building what he calls "The Beloved Community" in America. His dedication to the highest ethical standards and moral principles has won him the admiration of many of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the United States Congress. In 1961 was one of the original freedom riders and during the height of the Movement, from 1963 to 1966, Lewis was named Chairman of the

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which he helped form. SNCC was largely responsible for organizing student activism in the Movement, including sit-ins and other activities.

Jim Zwerg- A retired minister from from Wisconsin who joined the freedom rides while he participated in a one-semester student exchange program in January 1961 at Nashville's Fisk University, a predominantly black school. Zwerg developed an interest in civil rights from his interactions with his roommate, Robert Carter, an African-American from Alabama. Zwerg recalls: " I witnessed prejudice against him... we would go to a lunch counter or cafeteria and people would get up and leave the table. When the Nashville chapter of SNCC joined the Freedom Riders in Alabama, Zwerg was the only white male in the group (many more would join in the weeks to come.) Although scared for his life, Zwerg never had second thoughts. He recalled, "My faith was never so strong as during that time. I knew I was doing what I should be doing." Zwerg was brutally beaten in Montgomery, Alabama.



Joan Trumpauer Mulholland is an American civil rights activist and a Freedom Rider from Arlington, Virginia. She is known for taking part in sit-ins, being the first white person to integrate Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. She also joined Freedom Rides and was held on death row in Parchman Penitentiary.

Mae Francis Moultrie was a civil rights activist, educator and ordained minister. She was among the original thirteen freedom riders with the Congress of Racial Equality. Mae Francis was treated for smoke inhalation after a firebomb was thrown in the back of a Greyhound bus, in Anniston, AL, in 1961.





# Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play



Oliver and Linda Brown- The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, involved several families, all trying to dismantle decades of federal education laws that condoned segregated schools for black and white students. But it began with Linda Brown and her father Oliver, who tried to enroll her at the Sumner School, an all-white elementary school in Topeka, Kansas just a few blocks from the Browns' home. The school board prohibited the child from enrolling and Brown, an assistant pastor at St. John African

Methodist Episcopal Church, was upset that his daughter had to be shuttled miles away to go to school. He partnered with the NAACP and a dozen other plaintiffs to file a lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* changed the foundation of Education in America.

Irene Morgan- Irene Morgan was a civil rights activist who, a decade prior to Rosa Parks' landmark case, won her own U.S. Supreme Court Case in '*Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*,' which declared racial segregation on interstate travel to be unconstitutional.



Rosa Parks- was the Civil Rights Activist that sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott when she was 42 years old. Her name has remains synonymous with standing up for what you believe in. It is important to remember that before that fateful day on December 1st, 1955, when she refused to give up her seat on a bus, Rosa Parks had led a life dedicated to seeking justice for all people.

James Farmer- was Civil Rights leader that headed the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). He organized the historic Freedom Rides of 1961.

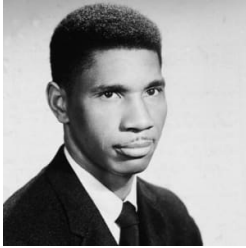


Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 until his death in 1968.

Earl Warren- Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren was a former California governor. Warren led the Court in a series of liberal decisions that transformed the role of the U.S. Supreme Court. Warren was considered a judicial activist, in that he believed the Constitution should be interpreted with the times. Warren spearheaded radical changes in areas of equal protection, education and law enforcement.



# Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play



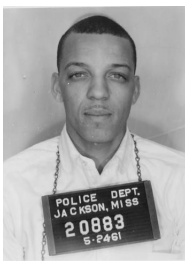
Medgar Evers was a native of Decatur, Mississippi, attending school there until being inducted into the United States Army in 1943 for World War II. Despite fighting for his country as part of the Battle of Normandy, Evers soon found that his skin color gave him no freedom when he and five friends were forced away at gunpoint from voting in a local election. In 1954, he became the first state field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi. As such, he organized voter-registration efforts and economic boycotts, and investigated crimes perpetrated against blacks. In the weeks leading up to his death, Evers found himself the target of a number of threats. His public investigations into the murder of Emmett Till left him vulnerable to attack. A local television station granted Evers time for a short speech, his first in Mississippi, where he outlined the goals of the Jackson movement. Following the speech, threats on Evers' life increased. On June 12th President John F Kennedy made a televised address to the nation in support of Civil Rights. A few hours later, Medgar Evers was assassinated outside of his Mississippi home in Jackson, MS.

Bob Moses- is the soft-spoken civil rights organizer from Harlem who worked in the Jim Crow South. Moses was a central figure in organizing the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, which recruited hundreds of student volunteers from northern colleges to conduct an ambitious black voter registration drive in Mississippi.



Fannie Lou Hamer was an African-American civil rights activist from the MS Delta. Fannie Lou Hamer was the youngest of 20 children. Her parents were sharecroppers and Hamer began working in the fields when she was only 6 years old. She became involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1962, through which she led voting registration drives, relief efforts, and traveled the country giving motivational speeches. In 1964, she co-founded and ran for Congress as a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, drawing national attention to their cause at that year's Democratic Convention.

Daisy Harris Wade, a lifelong Hattiesburg resident best remembered as a loving mother, a faithful Christian and a pillar of the community who fought for social justice and stood up for the oppressed. Mrs. Harris opened up her home to host volunteers during summer.



Dave Dennis was the assistant program director of COFO. He was also CORE's Mississippi project director. As CORE's Mississippi project director his area also included Neshoba County, and when CORE field secretaries Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman were killed, Dennis had planned to give a peaceful and sober eulogy. But from the pulpit he looked into the eyes of Chaney's little brother, Ben, and passionately told the mourners, "Don't bow down anymore. Stand up!"

# Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play



Diane Nash, African-American civil rights leader that was heavily involved in some of the most consequential campaigns of the movement. As a college student, she successfully lead student to integrating lunch counters through sit-ins in Nashville, TN. She also orchestrated the second wave of the Freedom Riders through the Nashville chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It was Diane Nash that helped save the freedom rides by sending volunteers to Jackson, MS to be sent to Parchman Prison.

President John F. Kennedy- Elected president in 1960, Kennedy had campaigned on an idealistic New Frontier platform. Unfortunately, since Kennedy had taken office, the world had seen the negative side of America -- intolerance and oppression. Despite Constitutional assurances to the contrary, African Americans were treated as second class citizens. Under leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., African Americans organized nonviolent protests to gain access to public facilities. They sued in the courts for equal treatment, and used the pulpits and the press to eloquently state the case for full citizenship. They implored their president to take a forceful public stand by issuing a call for comprehensive civil rights legislation. For the first two years of his administration, Kennedy ignored the call. Kennedy pushed civil rights on many fronts behind the scenes. He appointed African Americans to positions within his administration, named Thurgood Marshall to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, and supported voter registration drives. But by not addressing civil rights publicly and comprehensively, Kennedy was forced to address racial incidents on a case by case basis -- often after they had escalated to violence. Kennedy's approach to civil rights was viewed, by civil rights leaders, as noncommittal.



On the evening of June 11, President Kennedy delivered a televised address to the nation. Speaking with conviction, Kennedy announced he would send comprehensive civil rights legislation to Congress. The package would include provisions for access to public facilities, voting rights, and technical and monetary support for school desegregation. "The heart of the question," the president said, "is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and opportunities." The answer from those who opposed civil rights came later that evening, when segregationist Byron de La Beckwith shot and killed Medgar Evers, the NAACP's Mississippi field secretary. Five months later, Kennedy himself was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

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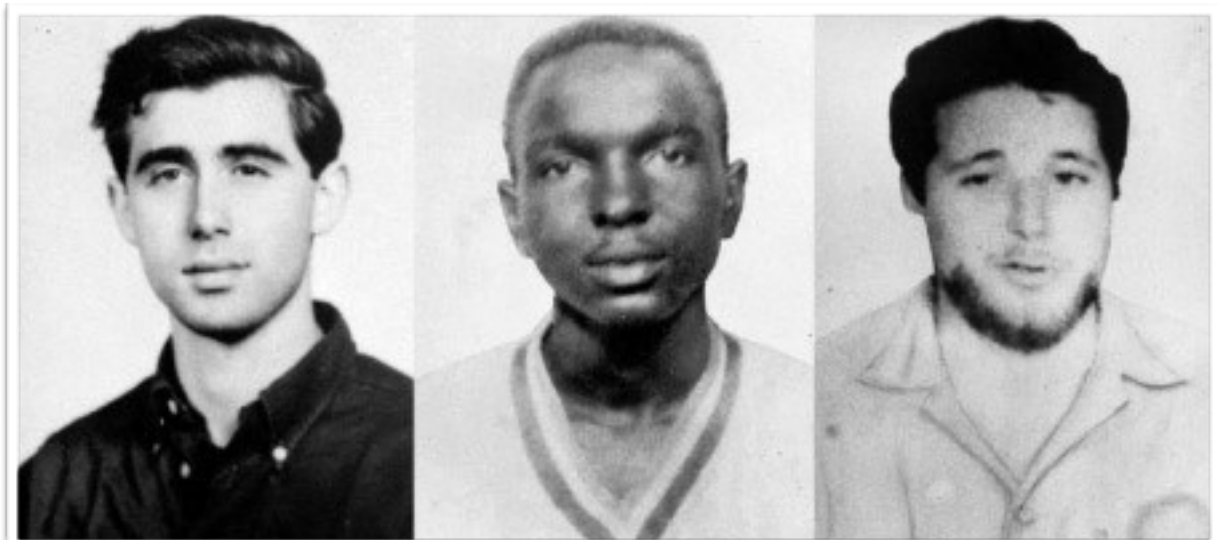
President Lyndon B Johnson- Served as Vice President under JFK. Just five days after John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson went before Congress and spoke to a nation still stunned from the events in Dallas that had shocked the world.



Johnson made it clear he would pursue the slain President's legislative agenda—especially a particular bill that Kennedy had sought but that faced strong and vehement opposition from powerful southern Democrats.

# Civil Rights Activist Featured in the Play

"No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long," Johnson told the lawmakers. LBJ went on to sign the civil rights act of 1964 and the voting rights act of 1965.



Andrew Goodman

James Chaney

Mickey Schwerner

On June 21, 1964, three civil rights workers investigated the burning of a Black church, where a civil rights rally took place days earlier. James Chaney, 21 year-old Black Mississippi college student, and two White New Yorkers from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Andrew Goodman, age 20 and Michael Schwerner, age 24 were arrested and placed in jail for "speeding" by the local police. The men were released after dark into the hands of the Ku Klux Klan.

After local and state authorities failed to locate the men, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy stepped in, along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to take over the case.

It was not until the FBI offered a \$30,000 reward before an anonymous source provided details and information concerning the whereabouts of the civil rights workers. On August 4, 1964, the bodies of three men were found near Old Jolly Farm in Neshoba County, Mississippi.

We owe them all a deep sense of gratitude for the work the sacrifices that they all made to build a better America.



# New Stage Theatre

## Professional Apprentice Company



**CHERRY RENDEL** is a recent graduate from the University of West Florida where she received her B.A. in theatre. She is originally from Orlando, Fla. and is very excited to start learning and creating at New Stage Theatre. Some of her favorite shows she has been a part of include **Our Town**, **Once on this Island**, **The Music Man**, and **A Raisin in the Sun**. She would also like to thank her family and friends for their endless love and support.



**HAYDEN SCHUBERT** is excited to be joining the New Stage Family! He recently graduated from Southern Illinois University with a BFA in musical theatre. Schubert was the resident company manager for McLeod Summer Playhouse from 2016 to 2018. Past Credits include Tarzan in **Tarzan: The Musical** (Grandstreet Theatre), Willard Hewitt in **Footloose: The Musical** (Jenny Wiley Theatre), Melchior Gabor in **Spring Awakening** (Southern Illinois University) and Napthali in **Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat** (McLeod Summer Playhouse). He would like to thank his amazing family for helping him follow his dreams!

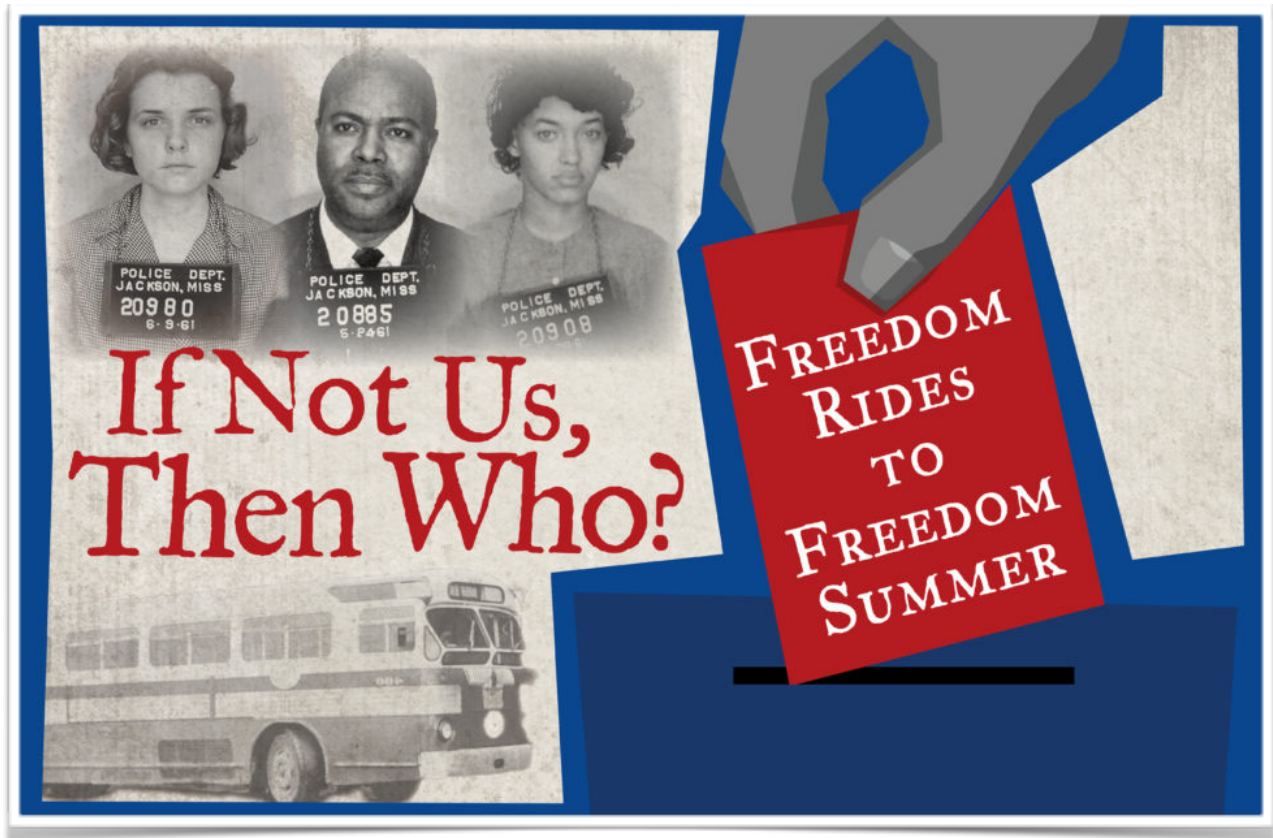


**SARAH COLEMAN** is a recent graduate from Radford University where she received a B.S in theatre performance. She is so excited to get to work with these amazing apprentices and all the staff here at New Stage Theatre. Favorite past performances include: **Heathers: The Musical** (Heather Duke/Dance Captain), **Oklahoma!** (Laurey Williams), **Anything Goes** (Reno Sweeney), and **Crimes of the Heart** (Meg Magrath). She'd like to thank her family for the endless support, Megan Ward, Marley Neville, and Dana Grindstaff for being the bomb, and her dog Jax for supplying endless happiness.

**JORDAN WILLIAMS** feels especially honored to have the opportunity to participate in this year's apprentice company. A Mass Communications major from Tougaloo College, Jordan was recently awarded Academic Excellence in Acting performance and Advanced Dramatic Writing, and was named a Tougaloo Ambassador. Jordan has played "Al" in the critically acclaimed play **Pill Hill** by Sam Kelley. Most recently, in the spring 2016 season, he played the role of "Cory Maxson" in August Wilson's **Fences**. Jordan has performed stand-up comedy in the Los Angeles area at several social events and comedy clubs, including the Comedy Store, Comedy Union, The J-Spot, and "Way too Funny Wednesday" in Atlanta, Georgia. Jordan ultimately plans to attain a Masters of Fine Arts and become an acting professor. He hopes to help make more people smile as he continues to pursue his career.



## The Freedom Rides of 1961



This portion of the Study Guide will focus on the events leading up to Freedom Summer and the leaders that emerged from the Mississippi.

# Who Were the Freedom Riders?

During the summer and fall of 1961, 436 people rode interstate buses as Freedom Riders. Originally there were just 13, including Frances Bergman, Walter Bergman, Albert Bigelow, Edward Blankenheim, Benjamin Elton Cox, Robert (Gus) G. Griffin, Herman K. Harris, Genevieve Hughes, John Robert Lewis, Jimmy McDonald, Ivor (Jerry) Moore, Mae Frances Moultrie, Joseph Perkins, Charles Person, Isaac (Ike) Reynolds, Henry (Hank) Thomas, James Farmer (the 41-year-old director of the Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE), and James Peck—a CORE member and white veteran of the 1947 CORE/Fellowship of Reconciliation Journey of Reconciliation Freedom Ride. CORE staff recruited volunteer riders through advertisements in student newspapers, a write-up in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) newsletter, and personal networking by CORE members. Each applicant had to send in an application with a recommendation testifying to his or her commitment to civil rights, and volunteers under the age of 21 were required to have parental permission.

Historian Raymond Arsenault describes how the Riders were selected, "Farmer and his staff tried to come up with a reasonably balanced mixture of black and white, young and old, religious and secular, Northern and Southern. The only deliberate imbalance was the lack of women. Although, unlike the Journey of Reconciliation [in 1947], the Freedom Ride would not be limited to men. They were reluctant to expose women, especially black women, to potentially violent confrontations with white supremacists."

He continues, "The eleven Freedom Riders who joined Farmer and Peck in Washington on May 1 represented a wide range of backgrounds and movement experience."

The Freedom riders experienced very little violence on their journey, until they reached Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama. On May 14, the original CORE Riders were met with angry mobs when they arrived in Alabama. In Anniston the mob threw a pipe bomb in the freedom riders bus. Many of the original riders were too injured to go on—they were joined by recruits from the Nashville Student Movement.

The recruits from the Nashville Student Movement were led by Diane Nash, a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and one of the leaders of Nashville's successful sit-in campaign the year before.

As a native of Chicago, she was shocked by the segregation in the South to which she was subjected.



"As a teenager, I think I really started emerging into being a real person, and I was very much aware of it, and I was looking forward in college to really expanding myself, and growing. I was taking those kinds of issues very seriously. And that played quite a part, when I got to Nashville, and why I so keenly resented segregation, and not being allowed to do basic kinds of things like eating at restaurants, in the ten-cent stores . . . I really felt stifled . . . When I actually went south, and actually saw signs that said "white" and "colored" and I actually could not drink out of that water fountain, or go to that ladies' room, I had a real emotional reaction . . . My goodness, I came to college to grow, and expand, and here I am shut in . . . So, my response was: who's trying to change it, change these things . . ."

Unlike Diane Nash, another activist, Joan Mulholland, a 19-year-old student from Duke University, did consider herself a southerner—a white southerner.

"I was born in Washington, DC, and I live in Arlington, Virginia. Down home is Georgia. Most of the relatives I knew were old-line Georgia. My involvement came about from my religious conviction, and the contradiction between life in America and what was being taught in Sunday school. I was at



Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, which was the second city to have sit-ins, and the Presbyterian chaplain there arranged for the students . . . to come over and talk with us about what the sit-ins were about and the philosophical and religious underpinnings. We had to keep pretty quiet because you could be locked out of the buildings, or burned out or any number of things, on campus. At the end, they invited us to join them on sit-ins in the next week or so, and that started a snowball effect. Duke and I became incompatible over this, and I dropped out and was working in Washington, DC."

As she later wrote in a Washington Post op-ed piece, her convictions had, by this time, strengthened:

"Segregation was unfair. It was wrong, morally, religiously. As a Southerner—a white Southerner—I felt that we should do what we could to make the South better and to rid ourselves of this evil."

# Who Were the Freedom Riders?

Freedom Rider Albert Gordon was a high-school history teacher from New York City and a Jewish immigrant whose family had suffered under the Nazis in Europe.

"I was 27 when I came to Jackson, to the Freedom Rides. I was actually born in Belgium and came here when I was seven to the United States. I'm really totally American, more so in even emotional terms, because there's only one country that can make you furious, and that's the United States, because it's my country, and it's very special for me. I still haven't been able to sort it out why some of us feel so profoundly about certain issues, certain issues of morality, of public morality, of ethics, of justice and those notions, and how we differ. Why some of us have been ready to do things, and others not. In my own past, I was born in Europe, and I did see the Nazis, and most of my family was killed by the Nazis during World War II in the concentration camp, because I was Jewish. So those things can explain in part my social conscience, but by no means all together. Certainly they played a role in my connecting . . . social forms of misbehavior in the South to my own historical connection to Europe. When I did see the young people, first in the first sit-ins and the courage that they had to have, and then . . . a couple years later on the bus in Anniston, and Jim Peck being so brutally beaten, I thought I just had to do something, and simply volunteered and proceeded.

Others joined the Freedom Riders for different reasons. John Lewis, the son of Georgia sharecroppers and a theology student in Nashville, was one of the original Riders. Like Diane Nash, Lewis was regarded as one of the leaders of the Nashville Student Movement. On his application, he wrote:

I'm a senior at American Baptist Theological Seminary, and hope to graduate in June. I know that an education is important, and I hope to get one. But at this time, human dignity is the most important thing in my life. That justice and freedom might come to the Deep South.

Another volunteer, 21-year-old Jim Zwerg, learned about segregation and civil rights from his black roommate at Beloit College in Wisconsin and soon went to Nashville as an exchange student, where he became involved in the sit-in movement. Yet another young activist, Judith Frieze Wright, a native of Waban, Massachusetts, and a student at Smith College, remembers a factor that shaped her choice to join the Freedom Riders

"I always longed for some real purpose . . . Life went along and I was longing for a kind of romance . . . excitement . . . Because you could have as much conviction as I did about the rightness of the civil rights movement and go to the NAACP and lick stamps and contribute what you could. Or you could go down South and get yourself in a mess of trouble. And I think the difference is not so much that I had more courage but that I was wanting something, I wanted to do that."





# Who Were the Freedom Riders?

## **Discussion Questions for: Who Were the Freedom Riders**

1. As you study the stories of the Freedom Riders, what stands out? Why do you think they joined the cause?
2. If you were to describe a Freedom Rider, what words would you use?
3. As you read the stories, which one do you relate to most? Why? Is there a cause that you feel particularly strongly about? How would you explain why you care?
4. Why do you think James Farmer wanted to make sure that the Freedom Riders who were selected were a diverse group? How do you think he and other leaders hoped this would influence the Freedom Rides and perceptions of the cause?
5. Diane Nash recalls feeling "stifled" by segregation when she moved to Nashville. Have you ever felt stifled? How did you respond? How did Nash respond?
6. Nash explains that while she knew about segregation, it wasn't until she actually encountered "black only" and "white only" water fountains, and other symbols of segregation, that she had an "emotional" reaction to it. What does she mean? What is the difference between knowing about something and having an emotional reaction to it?
7. How does Joan Mulholland explain why she joined the Freedom Riders? Why do you think she felt like it was particularly important for her, as a white southerner, to join the cause?
8. Albert Gordon wonders what leads people to become involved in certain causes: When I think about my past—my personal past, my family past, my education, all the things that comprise a human being, and I compare myself to other members of my family and closest dear friends, I still haven't been able to sort it out why some of us feel so profoundly about certain issues, certain issues of morality, of public morality, of ethics, of justice and those notions, and how we differ. Why some of us have been ready to do things, and others not. How would you answer his questions?



# Riding the Bus: Race, Custom, & Laws

Segregation was an established practice throughout the country in the mid-twentieth century, one that went widely unquestioned in the South, in particular. In fact, racism and racial segregation were often supported by custom and law. The separate and unequal waiting rooms and other public facilities marked by “colored” and “white” signs were among the highly visible symbols of segregation.

Yet segregation meant more than separation; it was the public face of a system of white supremacy that was upheld through economic exploitation, intimidation, and fear. For blacks, the threat of violence, and even lynching, was real—the 1955 murder of Emmett Till was the most famous of such crimes, but it was not an isolated act. Generations of activists, black and white, looked for ways to challenge the status quo.

By the late 1940s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had begun to see results from its legal strategy of challenging segregation in the courts. Just a year after the end of World War II, the Supreme Court ruled in *Morgan v. Virginia* that segregation on interstate travel was illegal. Irene Morgan was the civil rights activist who, a decade prior to Rosa Parks, won her case which declared racial segregation on interstate transportation to be unconstitutional. In the decision, the court explained that segregation interfered with interstate commerce. “As no state law can reach beyond its own border nor bar transportation of passengers across its boundaries, diverse seating requirements for the races in interstate journeys result. As there is no federal act dealing with the separation of races in interstate transportation, we must decide the validity of this Virginia statute on the challenge that it interferes with commerce, as a matter of balance between the exercise of the local police power and the need for national uniformity in the regulations for interstate travel. It seems clear to us that seating arrangements for the different races in interstate motor travel require a single, uniform rule to promote and protect national travel. Consequently, we hold the Virginia statute in controversy invalid.”

With the law on their side, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activists Bayard Rustin and George Houser organized the Journey of Reconciliation. The Journey of Reconciliation occurred over the course of two weeks in April 1947, during which eight black men and eight white men rode public transportation in Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, testing the implementation of the new Supreme Court ruling. Terminating their campaign due to fear of violence, these Riders’ work remained unfinished.

Thirteen years later, in 1960, the Supreme Court case *Boynton v. Virginia* expanded on the Morgan ruling: this decision made clear that **all facilities associated with interstate travel must also be desegregated**. This was another legal victory, but enforcement of the law was left to local officials—many of whom were openly hostile to any change in the racial order.

Diane Nash, a student at Fisk University in Nashville, remembers: “*Traveling in the segregated South for black people was humiliating. The very fact that . . . there were separate facilities was to say to black people and white people that blacks were so subhuman and so inferior that we could not even use public facilities that white people used.*”

Freedom Rider Charles Person, an 18-year-old student at Morehouse College at the time, notes that riding the buses for blacks was more than humiliating: it was dangerous. “You didn’t know what you were going to encounter,” he explains. “You had night riders. You had . . . hoodlums . . . You could be antagonized at any point in your journey.”

Historian Raymond Arsenault explains that ending segregation would require more than changing laws. It was all encompassing. It was a system that was only as strong, the white Southerners thought, as its weakest link. So you couldn’t allow people even to



# Riding the Bus: Race, Custom, & Laws

sit together on the front of a bus, something that really shouldn't have threatened anyone. But it did. It threatened their sense of . . . wholeness, the sanctity of it, what they saw as an age-old tradition.

This way of life was so ingrained that it was taken for granted. John Seigenthaler—Attorney General Robert Kennedy's point person for the Freedom Rides—explains from experience how difficult it can be to recognize your attitudes as prejudiced when you've never known anything else, "I grew up in the South. A child of good and decent parents. We had [black] women who worked in our household, sometimes surrogate mothers. They were invisible women to me. I can't believe I couldn't see them. I don't know where my head or heart was, I don't know where my parents' heads and hearts were, or my teachers'; I never heard it once from the pulpit. We were blind to the reality of racism and afraid, I guess, of change."

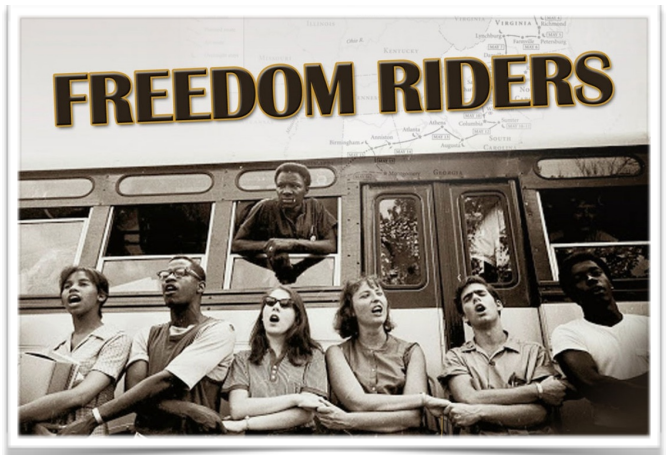
Individual and group attitudes were reinforced by white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the more publicly respected in Mississippi, White Citizens' Councils. Organized in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Citizens' Councils had established their power and control through their connections with politicians, law enforcement, and local merchants. Segregationist tradition was justified by local law, as well. In 1956, lawmakers in Mississippi signed a bill asserting the authority of the State Supremacy Commission in Mississippi affairs. It included this provision:

Section 5. It shall be the duty of the commission to do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi, and her sister states, from encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof; and to resist the usurpation of the rights and powers reserved to this state and our sister states by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof.

Rather than advocating compliance with the two Supreme Court decisions outlawing segregation in interstate travel, many argued that when buses were in a particular state, the bus companies had to abide by that state's laws. Similarly, in Montgomery, Alabama lawmakers tried to supersede federal law with chapter six of the 1952 city code:

Every person operating a bus line in the city shall provide equal but separate accommodations for white people and negroes on his buses, by requiring the employees in charge thereof to assign passengers seats on the vehicles under their charge in such manner as to separate the white people from the negroes, where there are both white and negroes on the same car; provided, however, that negro nurses having in charge white children or sick or infirm white persons, may be assigned seats among white people.

In 1960, James Farmer, then the director of CORE, felt it was time for a second Freedom Ride. Raymond Arsenault explains, "It became clear that the civil rights leaders had to do something desperate, something dramatic to get the Kennedys' attention. The idea behind the Freedom Rides [was to] essentially dare the federal government to do what it was supposed to do and to see if constitutional rights would be protected by the Kennedy administration."



# Riding the Bus: Race, Custom, & Laws

## Discussion Questions for Riding the Bus: Race Custom, and Laws

1. What role did segregation play in maintaining the racial order of the South?
2. What words would you use to describe the state of race relations at the time of the Freedom Rides?
3. How do you account for the silence about race that John Seigenthaler remembers? When young people grow up in a world like the one Seigenthaler describes, how do think they learn about race? About right and wrong? How do you learn about race?
4. Why do you think activists decided to focus their desegregation efforts on interstate buses? Why were buses important? What did they represent?
5. How would you explain why interstate bus travel was still not desegregated after two Supreme Court rulings called for desegregation? Why weren't the Supreme Court rulings enforced?
6. Why do you think James Farmer thought that it was time for a second Freedom Ride in 1960?



# Riding for Change: Nonviolence



One example of nonviolent direct action was the sit-in movement of 1960 at lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Nashville, Tennessee. Students asserted their rights to be served by peacefully occupying lunch counter seats. In this photo taken May 28, 1963, a group of men pour sugar, ketchup and mustard over the heads of demonstrators at a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson, Miss. Seated left to right, John Salter, Joan Trumpauer, and Anna Moody.

The use of nonviolent direct action as a tool to confront racial segregation in the United States began after World War II. Frustrated by the lack of progress in race relations and outraged by the hostility and violence black soldiers faced as they returned from the war, some civil rights leaders felt there was a need to move the struggle for equality from the courtroom to the streets.

Activists A. J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend James Lawson, James Farmer, and others turned to nineteenth-century American writer Henry David Thoreau's ideas about civil disobedience. They were influenced by world events, as well; many were particularly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent struggle for Indian independence. Instead of using weapons or violence, Gandhi pioneered the use of nonviolent tactics, including marches, hunger strikes, and boycotts, to dramatize injustice. Individually and together, Muste, Rustin, King, Lawson, Farmer, and others began to think about how to apply the tools and philosophy of nonviolence to overcome racial discrimination in the United States. King's encounter with Thoreau's ideas, for example, was especially formative: "During my student days I read Henry David Thoreau's essay *On Civil Disobedience* for the first time. Here, in this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and his choice of jail rather than support for a war that would spread slavery's territory into Mexico, I made my first

contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times . . . The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a Freedom Ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice."

Leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—the organization that King founded in 1957—echoed these convictions. The group's mission statement was a call to action: SCLC believes that the American dilemma in race relations can best and most quickly be resolved through the action of thousands of people, committed to the philosophy of nonviolence . . . It is not enough to be intellectually dissatisfied with an evil system, the true nonviolent resister presents his physical body as an instrument to defeat the system. Through nonviolent direct action, the evil system is creatively dramatized in order that the conscience of the community may grapple with the rightness or wrongness of the issue at hand.

During the winter and spring of 1960, student activists did just that. They staged sit-ins at lunch counters, first in Greensboro, North Carolina, and later in Nashville, Tennessee. In Nashville, Reverend James Lawson taught student protesters the theory and tactics of nonviolence. In preparation for the sit-ins, Lawson staged role-plays during which students were subjected to taunting and mild physical abuse to prepare them for what they would face at the lunch counters downtown. As the sit-in movement grew, student demonstrators adopted another Gandhian approach: they would refuse bail in an effort to fill up the jails. The idea

# Riding for Change: Nonviolence

was that after the first round of demonstrators were arrested and sentenced to jail time, they would be replaced by another group of students and then another.

Newly energized activists founded a new, student-led civil rights organization dedicated to nonviolent direct action, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). For many of the students, nonviolence was not simply a tactic. It was a way of life that many of them connected to their religious faith. They believed that their bodies would suffer in order to redeem the country for its sins. In their statement of purpose, SNCC leaders, including James Lawson, eloquently described the spirit of nonviolence.

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian tradition seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society. "Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality. Love is the central motif of nonviolence. Love is the force by which God binds man to himself and man to man. Such love goes to the extreme; it remains loving and forgiving even in the midst of hostility. It matches the capacity of evil to inflict suffering with an even more enduring capacity to absorb evil, all the while persisting in love. By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities."

Like the SNCC's leaders, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) leaders believed that it would take a dramatic confrontation with injustice to awaken the moral conscience of the nation. By the early 1960s, CORE was one of the oldest civil rights organizations in the country. CORE leaders had long believed that nonviolent strategies had the power to highlight the gulf between America's promises of equality and the reality of life under Jim Crow.

Inspired by the sit-ins and boycotts of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Gordon Carey and Tom Gaither—two field secretaries for CORE—conceived of a new tactic while taking a bus from New York to nonviolence workshops in South Carolina. Their plan was designed to draw attention to the widespread and blatant disregard of a recent Supreme Court ruling banning segregated interstate travel.

James Farmer began his political activist work with the pacifist organization Fellowship of Reconciliation. In 1942, Farmer helped to form CORE, the group that pioneered the use of Gandhi's method of nonviolent resistance in the United States and inspired King to adopt that framework. In 1961, Farmer became CORE's director; that same year, he recruited and led members who brought the first Freedom Ride into the Deep South. In the following interview, from the PBS documentary series *Eyes on the Prize*, Farmer explains the rationale behind the Freedom Rides. "Federal law said that there should be no segregation in interstate travel. The Supreme Court had decided that. But still state laws in the Southern states and local ordinances ordered segregation of the races on those buses. So why didn't the federal government enforce its laws? We decided it was because of politics . . . If we were right in assuming that the federal government did not enforce federal law because of its fear of reprisals from the South, then what we had to do was to make it more dangerous politically for the federal government not to enforce federal law. And how would we do that? We decided the way to do it was to have an interracial group ride through the South. This was not civil disobedience, really, because we would be doing merely what the Supreme Court said we had a right to do. The whites in the group would sit in the back of the bus, the blacks would sit in the front of the bus, and all would refuse to move when ordered. At every rest stop, the whites would go into the waiting room for blacks, and the blacks into the waiting room for whites, and they all would seek to use all the facilities, refusing to leave. . . . We felt that we could then count upon the racists of the South to create a crisis, so that the federal government would be compelled to enforce federal laws. That was the rationale for the Freedom Ride . . . We recruited a small group, thirteen persons, carefully selected and screened, because we wanted to be sure that our adversaries could not dig up derogatory information on any individual and use that to smear the movement. Then we had a week of arduous training, to prepare this group . . . for anything. They were white, they were black, they were from college age up to their sixties . . . following the Gandhian program of advising your adversaries or the people in power just what you were going to do, when you were going to do it, and how you were going to do it, so that everything would be open and above board, I sent letters to the President of the United States, President Kennedy; to the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy; the Director of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], Mr. Hoover; the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, which regulated interstate travel; to the President of Greyhound Corporation; and the President of Trailways Corporation. Those were the carriers that we would be using on this bus ride. And I must say we got replies from none of those letters."

# Riding for Change: Nonviolence

## Discussion Questions for Riding for Change: Nonviolence

1. How would you describe the philosophy of nonviolence? What do you think advocates of nonviolence believe about human behavior? What conditions do you think are necessary for a strategy of nonviolent direct action to have an impact?
2. Why do you think SCLC, SNCC, and CORE members felt that adopting the philosophy of nonviolence was the best way to bring about a change in the "American dilemma in race relations"? What other approaches were available?
3. James Farmer describes the political calculations of the Freedom Riders this way: *If we were right in assuming that the federal government did not enforce federal law because of its fear of reprisals from the South, then what we had to do was to make it more dangerous politically for the federal government not to enforce federal law.* How did the activists hope to make it "dangerous" for the government not to enforce federal law?
4. . Thoreau and Gandhi, writers and activists whose ideas inspired the African American freedom struggle in the United States, believed that there are times for civil disobedience—when behaving justly requires people to break the law. Can a democracy survive when people choose which laws to follow and which laws not to follow? How might a believer in the need for civil disobedience answer that question?
5. What do you think James Farmer means when he says that the Freedom Rides were "not civil disobedience, really, because we would be doing merely what the Supreme Court said we had a right to do"? Do you agree with him?



### Some face Parchman—<sup>12-77</sup> 6-14-61 Arrested riders now stand at 110

JACKSON, Miss., June 14—<sup>12-77</sup>  
The number of "freedom riders" stood at 110 today while plans were laid to move those still in jail here to the state penitentiary. Since May 24—three weeks ago—today—110 have been convicted here of breach of peace charges, 24 have been released on bond, four have paid fines, and 24 are free on bond.

HE SAID HE told no one he was from Mississippi, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) gave him \$20 to get from Chicago to Nashville, Tenn., and \$15 to get from Nashville to Jackson. "They are making fools of some Negroes," he said. He said one of the white women freedom riders told him on the bus trip she had been to Cuba and

# The World Is Watching: The Media and the Freedom Rides

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, reporting on civil rights was considered uncomfortable, controversial, and even hazardous to the reputation of the reporter and the newspaper. Black newspapers were nearly the only media outlets to cover race issues. Northern national newspapers typically covered only major events, often with little backstory. However, as civil rights activists provided dramatic images of injustice, the coverage began to change. By the time of the Freedom Rides in 1961, such events as the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, and the integration of Little Rock Central High School in 1957 had forced national media outlets to cover the events of the civil rights movement as important news stories.

The Freedom Riders, seeing this increasing media coverage of the civil rights movement, planned their campaign so that national media would amplify the effect and reach of their actions. With this understanding, the Freedom Riders aimed to gain as much press coverage as possible to show the reality of the segregated South to the entire nation and to the world.

CORE'S Freedom Ride was the first major bus trip to challenge racial segregation since the Journey of Reconciliation, 14 years earlier. That pioneer project, taking place less than a year after the first Supreme Court decision (in the Irene Morgan case) outlawing segregation in interstate travel, was also sponsored by CORE.

Lasting two weeks and covering four states in the upper South, the Journey of Reconciliation involved 23 Negro and white participants. In the 26 Greyhound and Trailway buses which the group rode, not a single act of hostility occurred. In only one instance was violence threatened by a gang of idle cab drivers at the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, bus station. On buses where the drivers ignored the Negroes occupying front seats, the passengers also ignored them. On buses where the drivers asked Negroes to move to the rear and met with refusal, there was discussion among the passengers but no threatened outbreak. There were 12 arrests during the trip and a number of threatened arrests. Three men served 30-day sentences on a North Carolina road gang because of a technicality involving their interstate status at one of the stops. The rest of the cases were either dropped or won on appeal. Neither bus drivers nor police demonstrated hostility in making arrests. This was largely due to the nonviolent attitude maintained by members of the group refusing to move into segregated sections.

The Freedom Ride of 1961 differed from its predecessor in three important respects. First, it penetrated beyond the Upper South into the Deep South. Second, it challenged segregation not only aboard buses but in terminal resting facilities, waiting rooms, rest stops, etc. Third, participants who were arrested remained in jail rather than accept release on bail or payment of fines. Replacement teams would be available to continue the journey in case of arrest of the original Riders. The main purpose of the Freedom Ride, like the Journey 14 years ago, was to make bus desegregation a reality instead of merely an approved legal doctrine. By demonstrating that a group can ride buses in a desegregated manner even in the Deep South, CORE hoped to encourage other people to do likewise.

At first, the Freedom Rides were not heavily covered in the national press. At the press conference called by CORE for the start of the campaign, only reporters from the Washington Post and the Washington Evening Star attended. Only media outlets under black leadership, such as Jet, Ebony, and the Baltimore Afro-American, actually sent reporters on the buses. It took the violence in Birmingham and Anniston, Alabama, on Mother's Day (May 14), 1961, for the Freedom Rides to become national news. Howard Smith, a journalist and host for CBS, broadcast live radio updates from his hotel room throughout the afternoon about the riot at the Birmingham Greyhound station. "The riots have not been spontaneous outbursts of anger," he revealed on air, "but carefully planned and susceptible to having been easily prevented or stopped had there been a wish to do so." According to historian Raymond Arsenault, Smith's remarkable broadcast opened the floodgates of public reaction. By early Sunday evening, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of Americans were aware of the violence that had descended upon Alabama only a few hours before.

At this point few listeners had heard of CORE, and fewer still were familiar with the term "Freedom Rider." But this would change within a matter of minutes.

The next day, Monday, May 15, photographs of the burning "Freedom Bus" in Anniston were reprinted in newspapers across the country. This Washington Post editorial from May 16, titled "Darkest Alabama," captures the outrage that many felt after confronting images of the violence: Alabama calls itself, presumably with pride, the "Heart of Dixie"—which must mean that it cherishes the traditions of the old South, chivalry, hospitality, kindness. But some of its citizens showed precious little understanding of



# The World Is Watching: The Media and the Freedom Rides

those traditions on Sunday when they burned and stoned two buses, one in Birmingham and the other just outside of Anniston.

The buses carried mixed loads of white and Negro passengers, the "Freedom Riders" engaged in no disorderly conduct and did nothing to provoke violence—save to exercise a constitutional right. The police dispersed the crowds after one of the buses had been destroyed by fire and after several of the passengers had been injured. But no arrests were made.

Why does this happen in Alabama? The buses had come into the state from Georgia where nothing had occurred. But Alabama had a Governor who encouraged contempt for the Constitution of the United States and who preached incendiary racist nonsense. The plain fact is that Americans could not be assured in Alabama of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. They were quite justified, therefore, in looking to the United States Department of Justice for the protection of their rights as American citizens.

Not all the press was supportive of the Freedom Riders; some media coverage suggested that the Riders, although nonviolent, were encouraging violence. Media outlets that sympathized with the segregationists worked to discredit the Riders by aligning them with communists and, by extension, the Soviet Union and Cuba. This was a solid campaign designed to draw attention away from the injudicious actions of the white southerners by continuing to blame Northern 'insurgents' for the violence of May 1961, by questioning the background of the 'outsiders' who had fomented that violence, and by inferring that the Freedom Riders were in some way linked to a wider foe of America's international Cold War struggle.

As some domestic press tried to tie the Freedom Rides to communism, media outlets in communist countries reported stories of violence against the Freedom Riders to paint a negative picture of the United States. Indeed, this was the realization of President Kennedy's fear. At the time—in the midst of the Cold War—the United States and the Soviet Union were in a constant battle to persuade other countries to choose between communism and capitalism.

The impact of press involvement and media coverage was pivotal. While images of racist violence were not new, "somehow the beating of Freedom Riders was

different." Raymond Arsenault explains: "Nothing, it seems, had prepared Americans for the image of the burning bus outside of Anniston, or of the broken bodies in Birmingham. Even those who had little sympathy for the Freedom Riders could not avoid the disturbing power of the photographs and the accounts of assaults. Citizens of all persuasions found themselves pondering the implications of the violence and dealing with the realization that a group of American citizens had knowingly risked their lives to assert the right to sit together on a bus."

Veteran journalist Moses Newson put it this way: "I think when the TV started bringing some of that evil spirit inside [American living rooms] . . . people actually had different reactions. Some of them were actually ashamed of what was going on and they wanted to get in and help try to bring about change."



# The World Is Watching:

## The Media and the Freedom Rides

### Discussion Questions for The World Is Watching: The Media and the Freedom Rides

1. What role did nonviolent activists hope the media would play in the freedom movement? To what extent do you think they were successful in using the media spotlight during the Freedom Rides? How did nonviolent protesters believe people would respond to images of the Freedom Rides?
2. If you were to describe a Freedom Rider, what words would you use?
3. Create an identity chart for one of the Freedom Riders. Identity charts include words that individuals use to describe themselves as well as labels that others might give them. What qualities do the Riders share? What differences do you find most striking? Now create an identity chart for yourself and compare it to the charts you made for the Freedom Riders.
4. As you read the stories, which one do you relate to most? Why? Is there a cause that you feel particularly strongly about? How would you explain why you care?
5. Why do you think James Farmer wanted to make sure that the Freedom Riders who were selected were a diverse group? How do you think he and other leaders hoped this would influence the Freedom Rides and perceptions of the cause?
6. Diane Nash recalls feeling “stifled” by segregation when she moved to Nashville. Have you ever felt stifled? How did you respond? How did Nash respond?
7. Nash explains that while she knew about segregation, it wasn’t until she actually encountered “black only” and “white only” water fountains, and other symbols of segregation, that she had an “emotional” reaction to it. What does she mean? What is the difference between knowing about something and having an emotional reaction to it?
8. How does Joan Mulholland explain why she joined the Freedom Riders? Why do you think she felt like it was particularly important for her, as a white southerner, to join the cause? As you study the stories of the Freedom Riders, what stands out? Why do you think they joined the cause?
9. Albert Gordon wonders what leads people to become involved in certain causes: When I think about my past—my personal past, my family past, my education, all the things that comprise a human being, and I compare myself to other members of my family and closest dear friends, I still haven’t been able to sort it out why some of us feel so profoundly about certain issues, certain issues of morality, of public morality, of ethics, of justice and those notions, and how we differ. Why some of us have been ready to do things, and others not. How would you answer his questions

# Democracy In Action: Making Choices

Like the leaders of other nonviolent direct action campaigns, the activists involved in the Freedom Rides made choices that forced others to respond, spurring bystanders into action either in support of the Riders or in opposition to their goals. Those decisions, big and small, together shaped not just the Freedom Rides but the way people in the United States and the world thought about race, civil rights, and human dignity. Freedom Rider Jim Zwerg joined the Freedom Riders against his parents' wishes. "I called my mother and I explained to her what I was going to be doing. My mother's comment was that this would kill my father—and he had a heart condition—and she basically hung up on me. That was very hard because these were the two people who taught me to love and when I was trying to live love, they didn't understand. Now that I'm a parent and a grandparent I can understand where they were coming from a bit more. I wrote them a letter to be mailed if I died..."

There were others who feared that the Riders' plans were too risky, including National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leader Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall. When the Riders met with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in Atlanta, Georgia, he warned them of the danger that lay ahead. These predictions of violence were quickly realized. On May 14, in two separate attacks, Freedom Riders in Birmingham and Anniston, Alabama, were set upon by violent mobs. Trained in the philosophy of nonviolence, the Riders sustained blow after blow without fighting back, while journalists did what they could to document the assault. Why would law-abiding citizens participate in an explosion of hate-filled rage? H. Brandt Ayers, publisher of the Anniston Star, explains that the social and legal changes in racial attitudes brought about by the civil rights movement challenged long-held feelings many had about race, custom, and culture. "It was a very disconcerting period. It was as if one civilization was coming unhinged and was free-floating and taking on water. That was that feeling. I'm being asked to live in a different way, I'm asked to have different attitudes, I'm asked to behave differently. And as I'm being made to do all of these things, there are people who come on the TV in my own living room and tell me that I'm a redneck, and I'm a racist, and I'm all of these things—and by God, I'd like to . . . I'd just like to punch some of those—them damn agitators right in the face! I gotta hate somebody."

Not all whites in Anniston agreed with the actions of the mob, however. While one local family let the Riders use their phone to call for medical attention, Janie Forsyth McKinney, then just 12 years old, reached out in the midst of the violent frenzy to help the Freedom Riders. As she brought water to activists who were choking from inhaling smoke, McKinney was harassed by Klansmen who were menacing the Riders as they wished. McKinney describes the scene:

I lived with my family five miles out of Anniston on the Birmingham highway. I was twelve years old at the time. My dad had a grocery store beside the house and the name of it was Forsyth and Son Grocery. [That Sunday,] there was a commotion outside so I walked to the front of the store to see if I could tell what was going on. The bus driver came out and he went out to look at the tires and when he realized how flat and hopeless they were he just walked away from the bus and just left all the passengers to fend for themselves. He just walked away . . . It was horrible . . . it was like a scene from hell. It was—it was the worst suffering I'd ever heard. Yeah, I heard, "Water, please get me water, oh God I need water." I walked right out into the middle of the crowd. I picked me out one person. I washed her face. I held her, I gave her water to drink, and soon as I thought she was gonna be OK I got up and picked out somebody else."



# Democracy In Action: Making Choices

McKinney's courageous actions had personal repercussions. She explains: "Helping the Freedom Riders really caused me to be on the fringes of my culture and society from then on."

After the violence in Birmingham, the first round of CORE Riders had to fly to New Orleans, with a Kennedy administration escort, and abandon their efforts. Upon hearing the news, activists from Nashville refused to let the Freedom Rides end. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—a group that grew out of the lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville—and the Nashville Student Movement vowed to finish what CORE had begun. In his book *Freedom Riders*, Raymond Arsenault describes how they got involved:

While the rest of the nation breathed a collective sigh of relief that the Freedom Ride was over, the young activists of the Nashville Movement cried out for continued sacrifice and commitment. Indeed, Nashville's student activists were already talking about mobilizing reinforcements for the Freedom Ride on Sunday afternoon, a full day before the CORE Riders retreated to New Orleans . . . when the first reports of the Anniston bombing came on the radio. . . . Lewis, Nash, and Lafayette rounded up the rest of the committee and rushed to the First Baptist Church for an emergency meeting . . .

From the outset, Nash, Lewis, and several others argued that the civil rights community could not afford to let the Freedom Ride fail. The nonviolent movement had reached a critical juncture, they insisted, a moment of decision that in all likelihood would affect the pace of change for years to come . . . The violence in Alabama had forced the movement to face a soul-testing challenge: did those who professed to believe in nonviolent struggle have the courage and commitment to risk their lives for the cause of simple justice? The original Freedom Riders had done so willingly and without self-pity, Lewis assured his friends. Could the members of the Nashville Movement be satisfied with anything less from themselves?

When no one in the room disagreed with the logic of this rhetorical question, the die was cast: The Nashville Movement would do whatever was necessary to sustain the Freedom Ride.

Though the members of CORE were not able to make it to New Orleans by bus, they still protested and rallied on the anniversary of the Brown decision. Despite the mass violence they endured, the Freedom Riders from CORE persevered, joining with other civil rights activists to continue their nonviolent protest.

One of the most important choices made by the Freedom Riders had been made in advance. Understanding that they would face arrest and prosecution for their actions, nearly all the Riders agreed that they would serve time in jail instead of paying bail. When the Riders arrived in Jackson, Mississippi, they were arrested for breach of the peace—and, as planned, they refused bail. Robert Kennedy, worried for the Freedom Riders' safety in a Mississippi jail and hoping for an end to the crisis, called King to see if he would try to convince the Freedom Riders to take a different approach. Arsenault notes that "the conversation testified to the wide ideological gap between nonviolent activists and federal officials—even those who had considerable sympathy for the cause of civil rights." In his book on the subject, Arsenault reproduces the conversation:

Freedom Riders traveling through Mississippi were arrested for disturbing the peace. Riders were sentenced to 60 days at the notorious Parchman prison. The experience at Parchman only served to reinforce bonds between the Riders. Arsenault explains:

Eventually there were over 430 Freedom Riders, 300 of whom ended up in Parchman. At Parchman they began to see the movement in a new way. They became not just individual groups of Freedom Riders, but they had a shared experience. And they were from different parts of the country, they were different races, different religions, some cases of different political philosophies, and it all got blended together. They became more committed.

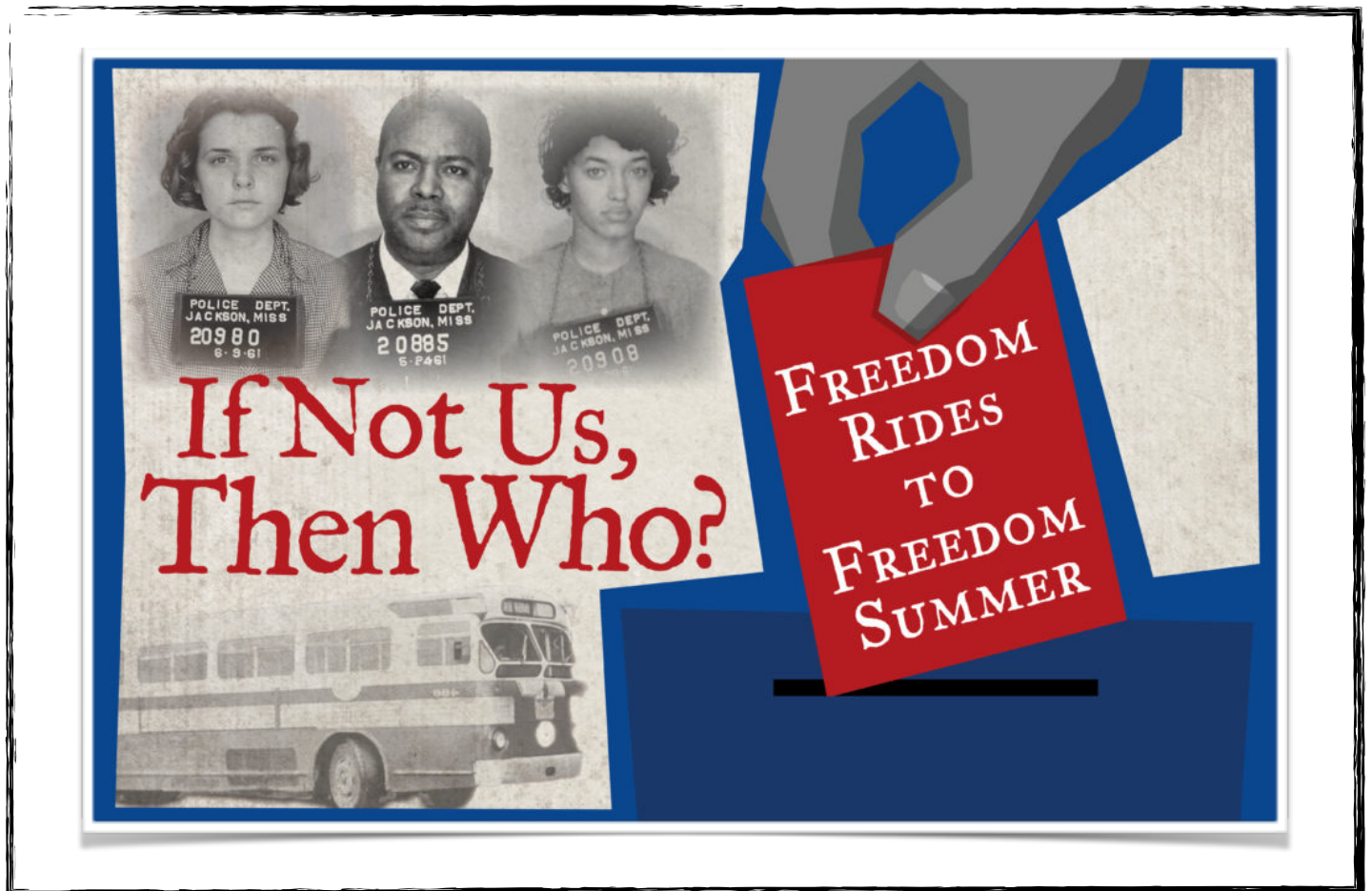


# Democracy In Action: Making Choices

## Discussion Questions for Democracy In Action: Making Questions

1. What do you think were some of the most important choices made by the Freedom Riders and others involved in the activism that led to the Freedom Rides? How did those choices shape the outcome of the trip?
2. Understanding the potential danger, the original organizers of the Freedom Rides made sure to get parental permission from younger participants. How do you think the Freedom Riders explained their desire to participate to their parents? If you were the parent of a Freedom Rider, how would you decide whether or not to let your child participate? What factors do you think these parents considered?
3. Despite warnings both from family members and other civil rights supporters, the Freedom Riders decided to go ahead with their journey. How do you explain their decision to carry out their plans despite the very real danger?
4. How would you explain why the otherwise law-abiding citizens participated in the violence against, or felt rage toward, the activists? When does prejudice lead to violence? What other factors do you think shaped the way some people responded to the Riders?
5. After the violence in Alabama, the riders were helped by a 12 year old girl named Janie Forsyth McKinney. What can we learn from her story? Why do you think she was able, at 12 years old, to reach out to help the Freedom Riders, while so many of her neighbors either watched or actively participated in the riot?
6. Even after sustaining serious injuries, many of the CORE Riders demonstrated in support of equal rights on the anniversary of the Brown decision. Why do you think it was so important for many of them to be seen standing up for their cause despite being unable to continue the Freedom Rides? What impact do you think images of the bandaged Riders might have had on people who saw their demonstration?
7. Why do you think Diane Nash and John Lewis felt it was so important to continue the Freedom Rides after the riots in Birmingham and Anniston? Do you agree with their position? What did the first group of CORE Riders accomplish? What do you think the second group of Riders accomplished?
8. What factors influenced Governor Ross Barnett's decision about how the Freedom Riders would be treated in Mississippi? Why was going to Parchman a game changer for the Freedom Riders? Why do you think people continued to come to Mississippi after they knew they would be sent to prison?
9. How would you explain the different perspectives of the Freedom Riders, The White House and The Governor of Mississippi?

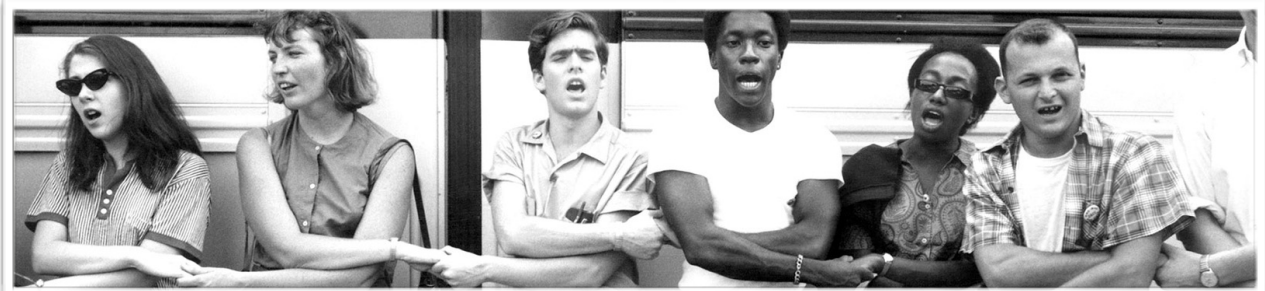
## The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer of 1964



This portion of the Study Guide will focus on the events leading up to Freedom Summer and the leaders that emerged from the Mississippi.

# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer

Freedom Summer, also known as the the Mississippi Summer Project, was a 1964 voter registration drive sponsored by civil rights organizations including the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Aimed at increasing black voter registration in Mississippi, the Freedom Summer workers included local Mississippians and more than 1,000 out-of-state, predominately white volunteers.

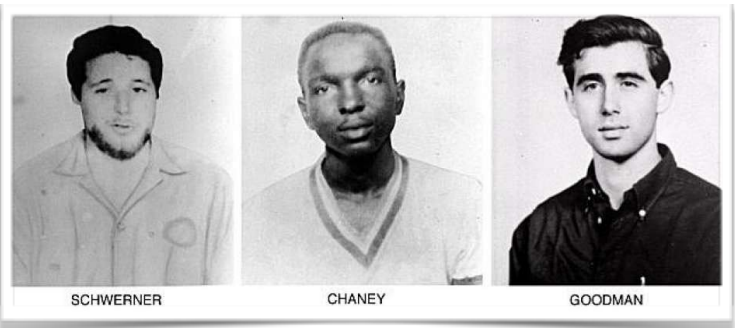


Freedom Summer was designed to draw the nation's attention to the violent oppression experienced by Mississippi blacks who attempted to exercise their constitutional rights, and to develop a grassroots freedom movement that could be sustained after student activists left Mississippi.

When SNCC leader Robert Moses launched a voter registration drive in Mississippi in 1961, he confronted a system that regularly used segregation laws and fear tactics to disenfranchise black citizens. In 1962, he became director of the Council of Federated Organizations, a coalition of organizations led by SNCC that coordinated the efforts of civil rights groups within the state. Capitalizing on the successful use of white student volunteers in Mississippi during a 1963 mock election called the "Freedom Vote," Moses proposed that northern white student volunteers take part in a large number of simultaneous local campaigns in Mississippi during the summer of 1964.

On 14 June 1964 the first group of summer volunteers began training at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Of the approximately 1,000 volunteers, the majority were white northern college students from middle and upper class backgrounds. The training sessions were intended to prepare volunteers to register black voters, teach literacy and social studies at Freedom Schools, and promote the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's (MFDP) challenge to the all-white Democratic delegation at that summer's Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Just one week after the first group of volunteers arrived in Oxford, three civil rights workers that left the training early were reported missing. James Chaney, a black Mississippian, and two white northerners, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, disappeared while visiting Philadelphia, Mississippi, to investigate the burning of a church. The church that was burned had agreed to be a host site for a Freedom School in the coming week. The abduction of the three civil rights workers intensified the new activists' fears, but Freedom Summer staff and volunteers moved ahead with the campaign.



# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer

Voter registration was the cornerstone of the summer project. Although approximately 17,000 black residents of Mississippi attempted to register to vote in the summer of 1964, only 1,600 of the completed applications were accepted by local registrars. Highlighting the need for federal voting rights legislation, these efforts created political momentum for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In an effort to address Mississippi's separate and unequal public education system, the summer project established 41 Freedom Schools attended by more than 3,000 young black students throughout the state. In addition to math, reading, and other traditional courses, students were also taught black history, the philosophy of the civil rights movement, and leadership skills that provided them with the intellectual and practical tools to carry on the struggle after the summer volunteers departed.

At Bob Moses' invitation Dr. Martin Luther King visited Greenwood, Mississippi, to show the support of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for the summer project and to encourage black Mississippians to vote despite acts of violence and intimidation. Less than three weeks after King's visit, the murdered bodies of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were found. King characterized their brutal deaths as "an attack on the human brotherhood taught by all the great religions of mankind" Freedom Summer activists also worked to make the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) a viable alternative to Mississippi's "Jim Crow" Democratic convention delegation. King publicly supported the MFDP, telling the 1964 convention's credentials committee, "If you value your party, if you value your nation, if you value democratic government you have no alternative but to recognize, with full voice and vote, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party" While the MFDP was initially unsuccessful, some of its members were seated at the 1968 convention.

For nearly a century, segregation had prevented most African-Americans in Mississippi from voting or holding public office. Segregated housing, schools, workplaces, and public accommodations denied black Mississippians access to political or economic power. The events of Freedom Summer continued the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement and helped spur Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.





# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer

## Discussion Questions for The Mississippi Project: Freedom Summer

1. Freedom Summer was part of the larger Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. What were the main issues the Civil Rights Movement addressed?
2. Why do you think activists decided to focus on registering voters during Freedom Summer? Why were many Americans not registered to vote at the time?
3. Mississippi was called the "last frontier" of the Civil Rights Movement. Why? Why do you think it was chosen as the focus of Freedom Summer?
4. One of the aims of the Civil Rights Movement was to overturn the Jim Crow system in the South. What was Jim Crow? Was segregation legal? Discuss.
5. Civil Rights workers tried to help African Americans in the South register to vote. What were some of the obstacles African Americans faced when trying to register?
6. . Were you surprised by the violence the Civil Rights Movement provoked? Why do you think the KKK and others reacted so violently? Discuss.
- 7.. Discuss the legacy of Freedom Summer. What impact did it make on American society overall?
8. There are many eligible citizens in the United States that do not participate in the voting process. Why do you think people choose not to engage? What argument would you make for or against voting?



# The Story of SNCC:

## The Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee



On February 1, 1960, Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina launched sit-ins challenging segregation in restaurants and other public accommodations. Similar “direct action” lit by this spark in Greensboro spread like wildfire across the south. SNCC was founded just two and a half months later – on Easter weekend – at an April meeting of sit-in leaders on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. Ella Baker was the gathering’s organizer. She had immediately recognized the potential of this new student activism and persuaded Martin Luther King, Jr. to provide \$800 to bring them together at her alma mater. The sit-in movement was “bigger than a hamburger,” she told the students addressing them at the Shaw conference. And in an article published a month later, she wrote of the young activists, “[They] are seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination – not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life.”

Within the year, a few students left their college campuses to commit to full-time movement work. Although SNCC was still primarily engaged in protests aimed at desegregating lunch counters and restaurants, Ella Baker maintained a conversation about grassroots organizing, especially with Robert “Bob” Moses, a Harlem, New York native who in the summer of 1960 had come to Atlanta as an Southern Christian Leadership volunteer. She and Jane Stenbridge sent Moses on a journey through the Deep South to recruit students to participate in a SNCC conference being planned for October 1960, in Atlanta. Ella Baker provided Moses and Stenbridge with a list of her contacts, and Jane Stenbridge wrote letters of introduction to them.



One of the southern leaders she sent Moses to was Amzie Moore, president of the Cleveland, Mississippi NAACP branch and vice president of Mississippi’s state NAACP. Moore, a tough World War II veteran, had worked with Medgar Evers and other Black activists to form the Regional Conference of Negro Leadership (RCNL). In 1951, the RCNL held a conference that drew over 10,000 Black residents to a conference in all-Black Mound Bayou, Mississippi that focused on voter registration and police brutality. Though he admired the sit-ins, Moore did not want them in Cleveland. He wanted a voter registration campaign and introduced Moses to that idea. “Amzie,” remembers Moses, “was the only one I met on that trip giving the student sit-in movement careful attention, aware of all that student energy and trying to figure out how to use it.” Moses promised Moore that he would return to Mississippi the following year and work with him.

Amzie Moore attended SNCC’s October 1960 meeting and put voter registration on the table. The response was lukewarm. SNCC’s priority remained direct action. “Jail Without Bail,” and how to spread the sit-in movement dominated discussion. “Only mass action is strong enough to force all of America to assume responsibility and . . . nonviolent direct action alone is strong enough to enable all of America to understand the responsibilities she must assume,” the invitation to the October conference had stated

# The Story of SNCC

## The Student Non Violent Coordinating

After his election the following month, President John Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, soon made it clear that they were hostile to direct action, and began pressing the student activists of SNCC and CORE to abandon such protests and turn to voter registration. The two brothers thought that the white southern response to such an effort would be less violent and thus less dramatic and embarrassing to the United States than demonstrations. SNCC was suspicious of their overtures. The Kennedy administration seemed indifferent to enforcing existing civil rights law and far too willing to compromise with southern bigots. Many in SNCC thought that the Kennedys were trying to co-opt them and that organizing for voter registration was selling out. They wondered what such an effort meant for the radical, systemic change in the country that they were increasingly coming to believe was necessary. Others, however, saw voter registration as an important step toward the acquisition of real power for meaningful change.



Ella Baker stepped into this debate and helped the young SNCC organizers to reach a consensus decision that prevented a split within the group. SNCC would establish both a direct action wing and a voter registration wing. She knew that the distinction was largely meaningless. In the Deep South, voter registration was direct action. As SNCC field secretary Reggie Robinson later put it: "If you went into Mississippi and talked about voter registration they're going to hit you on the side of the head and that's as direct as you can get."

This debate begins the process whereby SNCC, which began as a protest organization conducting and coordinating sit-ins and Freedom Rides, slowly evolved into an organization of organizers - "field secretaries" - embedding themselves in rural communities across the Black Belt where they gave special emphasis to voter registration.

The influence of the Black vote particularly applied to the Black Belt, where Black people made up 60-80% of the population. As Amzie Moore told Bob Moses in their early meetings, if Black people in the Black Belt were allowed to vote, they could elect officials at every level who could represent their concerns.

The convergence of young SNCC organizers with politically-experienced adults like Ella Baker, and especially with veterans like Amzie Moore and other strong local leaders the age of their parents and grandparents, was crucial to the foundation on which SNCC stood and began developing its work. These adults gave access to networks they had built and been part of for years: not just NAACP branches, but also social organizations like the Prince Hall Masons, Elks, and church groups. They taught SNCC organizers how to move and stay alive in the dangerous environs of the rural Black Belt South.

Much of the work was simply demonstrating that violence could not drive them away. Indeed, SNCC's young organizers brought something rare into the local communities they entered. "They hadn't been conditioned by people who blew their mind about . . . you can't do this, you can't do that," recalled Amzie Moore who was 49-years-old when he first encountered Bob Moses and SNCC. "They didn't think they were under slavery . . . You'd go to the courthouse with 'em - an 18-year or 20-year-old youngster, got on a pair of tight-legged blue jeans and a blue shirt - that was something boy, and he's walking out there in front, and putting him in jail wasn't nothing . . . This was an outstanding example of determined leadership in young people. I had never seen it before."

# The Story of SNCC

## The Student Non-Violent Coordinating

### **Discussion Questions for The Story of SNCC: The Student Non-violent Coordination Committee**

1. SNCC was an organization primarily made up of young activist. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of age when it comes to activism?
2. SNCC invited volunteers to join them for Freedom Summer in Mississippi. Why do you think activists who did not live in Mississippi volunteered?
3. A core value of SNCC was to empower local people to take the lead in Mississippi. Although they invited volunteers to come in, they were housed, feed and organized by people in the communities they were serving. Why do you think it was so important for SNCC to empower local leadership?
4. In the beginning, President John Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy encouraged activists of SNCC and CORE to abandon their protests and voter registration drives. Why were they opposed to this approach? What do you think helped them to have a change of heart towards the Civil Rights Movement?
5. What Role can young activist play in America today?



# Democracy In Action: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)

A major roadblock to gaining voting rights in Mississippi and indeed, across the South, were the state Democratic Parties. "Dixiecrats" as southern Democrats were known, dominated state governments. A web of law, intimidation, official and unofficial force, and violence terrorizing Blacks seeking voting rights, kept Black people from voting. For all practical purposes, in Mississippi and across the South, the Democratic Party was "whites only."

COFO's voter registration projects helped to expose Black disenfranchisement, yet the organization's efforts were ineffective in generating new Black voters in politically meaningful numbers. Much the same was true in other areas of the South where efforts aimed at expanding Black voter registration and political participation were unfolding. So, in Mississippi, COFO began discussing the ways and means of challenging the legitimacy of the state's Democratic Party at the national level. As a first step, COFO workers organized a "freedom registration" and "freedom vote" in the fall of 1963. This was to prove that Blacks would register and vote if they could do so at unthreatening polling places; that apathy was not the problem, but violence, reprisal, and fear was.

In April 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was founded. Open to all without regard to race, it was a parallel political party designed to simultaneously encourage Black political participation while challenging the validity of Mississippi's lily-white Democratic Party.

The MFDP decided to challenge the seating of the so-called "regular" state party at the national party's convention being planned for August in Atlantic City, New Jersey. With the help of hundreds of young volunteers who came to Mississippi in the Freedom Summer of 1964, the MFDP slowly built up its membership and organized parallel precinct, county, and regional meetings. This culminated in a state convention to select delegates for the Atlantic City convention. The 68-person MFDP delegation included a wide variety of homegrown activists known for their determination and militancy in the face of harsh racial oppression. They included E.W. Steptoe, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Annie Devine, Hartman Turnbow and Hazel Palmer, among others. Using ideas developed during the local, county, and regional meetings, the MFDP crafted a political platform.

The delegation was hopeful traveling to Atlantic City, and during their first days there, many delegates expressed sympathy for the plight of black Mississippians. Mrs. Hamer's powerful testimony in which she vividly described her life behind the closed doors of Mississippi society brought some to tears: "Is this America, the land of the free and home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?"

But ruthless counter-action by President Lyndon Johnson, seeking a peaceful, non-controversial convention and fearful of a Dixiecrat walkout, battered MFDP supporters. Threats were made against supporters in line for federal appointments, and United Automobile Workers leader, Walter Reuther, threatened to withhold money from Martin Luther King's SCLC.

Finally, a compromise was announced by then-Minneapolis Attorney General Walter Mondale: two seats for the MFDP and full seating of the so-called regulars. No discussion had been held with the MFDP about this "compromise." The MFDP delegates rejected it after a parade of civil rights leaders and other liberals urged acceptance at an intense meeting. "We didn't come all this way for no two seats since all of us is tired," said Mrs. Hamer.

For all of this, the MFDP campaigned for the Johnson-Humphrey ticket in the fall, and their efforts at the Atlantic City convention forced reforms in the national Democratic Party that expanded the participation of women and minorities going forward.

# Democracy In Action: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)

## Discussion Questions for The Mississippi Freedom Democratic

1. A democracy is a government lead by the people. A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections. Why did Mississippians, after years of state sponsored terrorism, take the leadership in challenging the national political party structure? Why fight for the vote?
2. What would it take for there to be legitimate democracy in the United States?
3. Was the MFDP effort a success? Why or why not?
4. What is a compromise? Do you think they should have taken the two seats offered at the convention? Why or Why not?
5. Politics in the United States is dominated by two major political parties. What are the major differences between the two? What are the similarities?



# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Schools



As planning for the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project got underway, a large question hanging over discussions was how best to utilize hundreds of incoming inexperienced volunteers. SNCC's Charlie Cobb thought, "let's use their education," and in December 1963, proposed an education program—Freedom Schools—for young Black Mississippians, who suffered in an educational environment that was "geared to squash intellectual curiosity and different thinking." Such a program would empower young people "to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions" and "to find alternative and ultimately new directions for action."

Education had always played an integral role in SNCC's community organizing work in Mississippi. Working closely with Annell Ponder from SCLC, SNCC field secretaries taught voter education classes to prepare Black adults for the state's literacy test that accompanied any attempt to vote made by black citizens. Bob Moses had begun a voter registration school on E.W. Steptoe's farm in Amite County. June Johnson remembers that Stokely Carmichael developed classes for her and her peers in Greenwood. "And not just in history, he had people helping us with our maths." SNCC workers were always concerned with the ways that public education hurt Black students and searched for ways to do something about it.

In the spring of 1964, SNCC created the Freedom School curriculum, which was rooted in the lives of young Black Mississippians. It had been designed by a committee of educators from around the country. Broken up into two parts—the "Citizenship Curriculum" and the "Guide to Negro History"—the curriculum was designed to help students examine their personal experiences with racial discrimination and understand their broader context in Mississippi's closed society.

For Black Mississippians, the schools were the first time they had been encouraged to think and act politically, and to explore their creative impulses. Freedom School students read books and poetry by Black authors and listened to stories of Black resistance in past times.

# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Schools

Their experience at the Freedom Schools paved the way for many young Black Mississippians to join the Movement. For Jacquelyn Reed Cockfield, of the Meridian Freedom School, the “experience awakened an abiding desire in me to become knowledgeable of the entire civil rights movement.” She went on to work with the NAACP and the Urban League. For many students, the summer was a life-changing event.

Freedom School students were also inspired to join the Movement and have their voices heard. Many schools created and distributed their own newspapers that covered the events of the summer, including the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Students turned the Clarksdale Freedom School into an operating pressroom, recalled one of the teachers. “The place looked just like a newspaper office with people running in and out, with typewriters going, and newsprint everywhere ... [the students] did most of the work and made most of the decisions.”

Towards the end of the summer, delegates from all 41 Freedom Schools traveled to Meridian for the final statewide convention. “The young people took over. They became the administrators,” recalled Staughton Lynd, a Spelman College history professor who was coordinator of the freedom school program. Participants drafted their own political platform for the MFDP. The platform covered everything from segregated public accommodations and housing to the educational and economic opportunities for young Black people. At the end of the convention, the delegation laid down the foundation for the Mississippi Student Union (MSU) to continue coordinated action against segregated schools and public accommodations.

Many Freedom Schools were charged with energy and emotion as Black youth expressed themselves freely for the first time in a school setting. Students were inspired by the poetry of Langston Hughes and other Black poets and wrote poems about their own racialized experiences in Mississippi. After her Freedom School in McComb was blown up by a white terrorist attack, Joyce Brown expressed anger and determination in a poem entitled “House of Liberty”:

...I shan't let fear, my monstrous foe,

Conquer my soul with threat and woe,

Here I have come and here I shall stay,

And no amount of fear my determination can sway...

The poem became the standard for the Movement in McComb. The local Black community found a new space for the Freedom School, which became one of the strongest in the state.

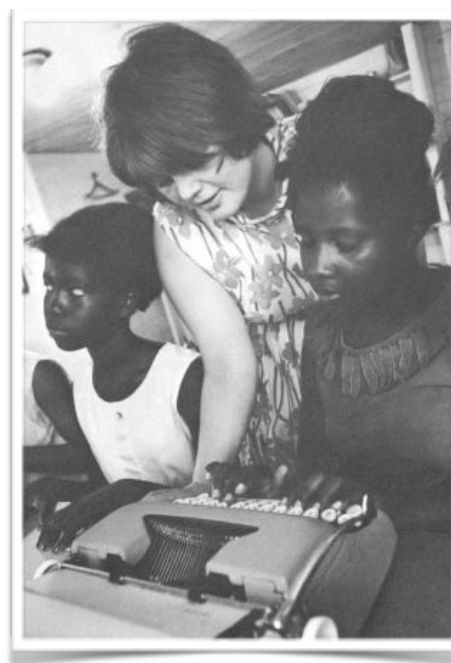




# The Mississippi Project: Freedom Schools

## Discussion Questions for The Mississippi Freedom Schools

1. What role did the Freedom Schools play in Freedom Summer?
2. Why was there such a need for education in the African American communities in Mississippi?
3. How was the curriculum at the Freedom Schools different from the curriculum taught in the public school system?
4. Why is it important to teach African American history to all students in the United States?
5. Do you think that our modern school system puts enough emphasis on African American history and the history of other oppressed and minority communities in the United States?
6. Do you think students in school today value education? Why or Why not?



# Connecting History: Slavery to The Civil Rights Movement

## A Beginning

Slavery was practiced throughout the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and African slaves helped build the new nation into an economic powerhouse through the production of lucrative crops such as tobacco and cotton. By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion and the abolition movement provoked a great debate over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the Civil War. **Though the Union victory freed the nation's four million slaves, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history, from the Reconstruction era to the civil rights movement that emerged a century after emancipation.**

## When Did Slavery End?

On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued a preliminary emancipation proclamation, and on January 1, 1863, he made it official that "slaves within any State, or designated part of a State...in rebellion,...shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." By freeing some 3 million black slaves in the rebel states, the Emancipation Proclamation deprived the Confederacy of the bulk of its labor forces and put international public opinion strongly on the Union side.

Though the Emancipation Proclamation didn't officially end all slavery in America—that would happen with the passage of the 13th Amendment after the Civil War's end in 1865—some 186,000 black soldiers would join the Union Army, and about 38,000 lost their lives.



## The Legacy of Slavery

The 13th Amendment, adopted on December 18, 1865, officially abolished slavery, but freed blacks' status in the post-war South remained precarious, and significant challenges awaited during the Reconstruction period.

**Former slaves received the rights of citizenship and the "equal protection" of the Constitution in the 14th Amendment and the right to vote in the 15th Amendment, but these provisions of Constitution were often ignored or violated.** It was difficult for former slaves to gain a foothold in the post-war economy thanks to restrictive black codes and regressive contractual arrangements such as sharecropping. Despite seeing an unprecedented degree of black participation in American political life, Reconstruction was ultimately frustrating for African Americans, and the rebirth of white supremacy—including the rise of racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)—had triumphed in the South by 1877.

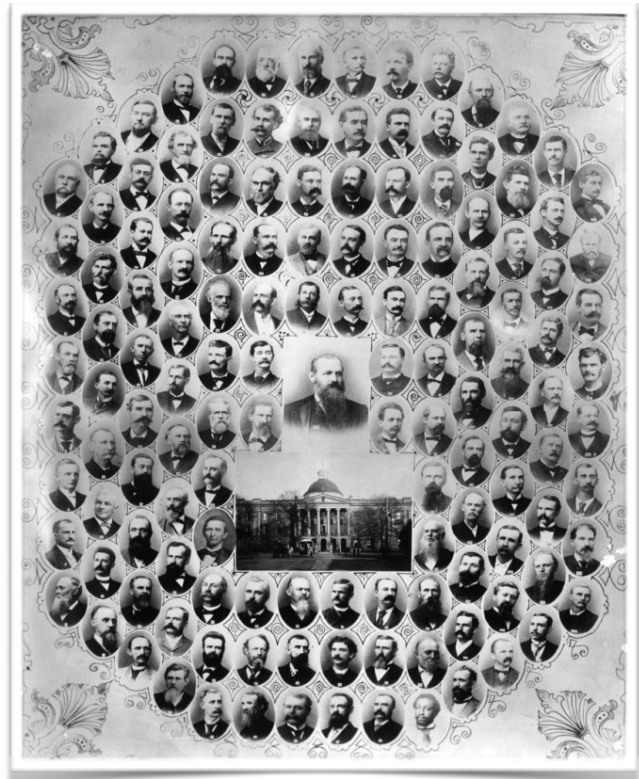
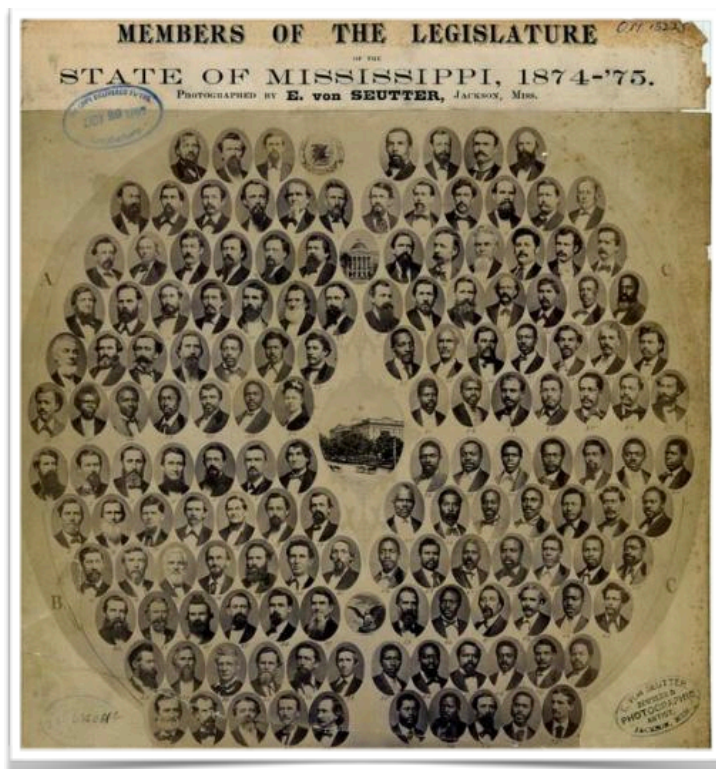
**Almost a century later, resistance to the lingering racism and discrimination in America that began during the slavery era would lead to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which would achieve the greatest political and social gains for blacks since Reconstruction.**

## Unpacking Mississippi History

In order to fully understand the long history of civil rights in the Mississippi we must have a better understanding of life in America after the civil war. To the world, Mississippi was the center of cotton production during the first half of the 19th century. The state was swept along by the global economic force created by its cotton production. Mississippi's social and economic histories in early statehood were driven by cotton and slave labor, and the two became intertwined in America. Cotton was a labor-intensive business, and the large number of workers required to grow and harvest cotton came from slave labor until the end of the American Civil War. Cotton was dependent on slavery and slavery was, to a large extent, dependent on cotton. From the time of its gaining statehood in 1817 to 1860, Mississippi became the most dynamic and largest cotton-producing state in America. The population and cotton production statistics tell a simple, but significant story. The growth of Mississippi's population before its admission to statehood and afterwards is distinctly correlated to the rise of cotton production. The white population grew from 5,179 in 1800 to 353,901 in 1860; the slave population correspondingly expanded from 3,489 to 436,631. Cotton production in Mississippi exploded from nothing in 1800 to 535.1 million pounds in 1859. Cotton gave the South power. Cotton dictated the South's huge role in a global economy that included Europe, New York, other New England states, and the American west. This economic growth exacted a severe and tragic human price through slavery and the prejudicial treatment of free blacks. Mississippi was, therefore, both a captive of the cotton world and a major player in the 19th century global economy.

# Connecting History: Slavery to The Civil Rights Movement

In 1860 King Cotton was the biggest money maker for the State of Mississippi. In 1861 to 1865 Civil War in America centered around states rights to own slaves and maintain their way of life. 1863 Lincoln frees the slaves. 1869-1888- Blacks in Mississippi are granted rights as American Citizens. Blacks had a voice in local and state politics. see the pictures below. Count the number of Black Politicians in the legislature in 1874-75 on the left. Now compare that to the 1890 Constitutional Convention Members that instituted poll taxes and literacy tests, the new [constitution](#) kept most African Americans and many poor whites from voting.



In the picture on the right there is only one black member of the Mississippi Legislature, Isiah T. Montgomery. In 1887 Mound Bayou was founded by Isaiah T. Montgomery, and his cousin Benjamin T. Green former slaves of Jefferson Davis. Mound Bayou, in the Mississippi Delta: a city with a vision that was revolutionary for its time. From the start, it was designed to be a self-reliant, autonomous, all-black community. For decades, Mound Bayou thrived and prospered, becoming famous for empowering its black citizens. The town also became known as a haven from the dehumanizing racism of the Jim Crow South. The community was fully equipped with black lawyers, doctors, mid-wives, black smith, business owners. Proving that when given the opportunity, blacks could thrive, self governed and self sufficient. In 1867 the number of black voters out numbered the white voters. Finally, in 1890, a new constitution was written in Mississippi to remove the voice of blacks from politics. Isiah T. Montgomery was present because no white men lived in Mound Bayou. James K. Vardaman was a member of the [Mississippi House of Representatives](#) from 1890 to 1896. In 1890 Vardaman famously said, " Mississippi's constitutional convention of 1890 was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the (negro) from politics; not the ignorant and vicious'.... but the (negro)."

The Civil Rights activities of the 1960's were fighting the politics established in 1890. Without the voter suppression of 1890 there may not have been a need for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.



# Connecting History: Slavery to The Civil Rights Movement

## Discussion Questions for Connecting History: Slavery to Civil Rights Movement

In 1967, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Martin Luther King spoke with NBC News' anchor Sander Vanocur. The following quote is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. explaining the unique experience of being black in America.

"White America must see that no other ethnic group has been a slave on American soil. That is one thing that other immigrant groups haven't had to face. The other thing is that the color became a stigma. American Society made negroes color a stigma. America freed the slaves in 1863 through the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, but gave the slaves no land or nothing in reality to get started on. At the same time, America was giving away millions of acres of land in the west and the midwest. Which meant there was a willingness to give the white peasants from Europe an economic base. And yet it refused to give its black peasants from Africa, who came here involuntarily, in chains and had worked free for 244 years any kind of economic base. And so emancipation for the negro was really freedom to hunger. It was freedom to the winds and rains of the heaven. It was freedom without food to eat or land to cultivate and therefore it was freedom and famine at the same time. And when white Americans tell the negro to lift himself by his own bootstraps, they don't look over the legacy of slavery and segregation. Now, I believe we ought to do all we can and seek to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps, but it's a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps. And many negroes by the thousands and millions have been left bootless as a result of all of these years of oppression and as a result of a society that deliberately made his color a stigma and something worthless and degrading." MLK

1. Do you believe that the implications of slavery still have effects on American society today? Why or why not?
2. How do we as a society begin to move forward?





## CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

1865-70: After the Civil War, Reconstruction Amendments (13th, 14th, and 15th) are ratified, outlawing slavery, granting equal protection under the law, and extending suffrage to African American men

1866: Ku Klux Klan is founded

1877: The first of many of the "Jim Crow" segregation laws are established.

1890: New Mississippi Constitution Removes blacks from political politics.

1896: In Plessy v. Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctions segregated, or "separate but equal," public facilities.

1954: In Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, the Supreme Court rules unanimously against school segregation

1955: Emmet Till, 14 years old, is lynched for allegedly flirting with a white woman; his murder is one of nearly 3,500 recorded lynchings of African Americans between 1882 and 1968

1961: The interracial Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) begins to organize Freedom Rides throughout the South to desegregate interstate bus travel.

1963: June 11th- President Kennedy delivers televised speech proposing Civil Rights Bill

1993: June 12th- Medgar Evers, Civil Rights leader from MS is assassinated.

1963: August 28th- Dr. King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington

1963: Sept. 15th- KKK terrorists bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham murdering four black girls and injuring 22 others

1963- Nov. 22nd- President Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, TX.

1964: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), CORE and the NAACP organize "Freedom Summer"

1964: President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act

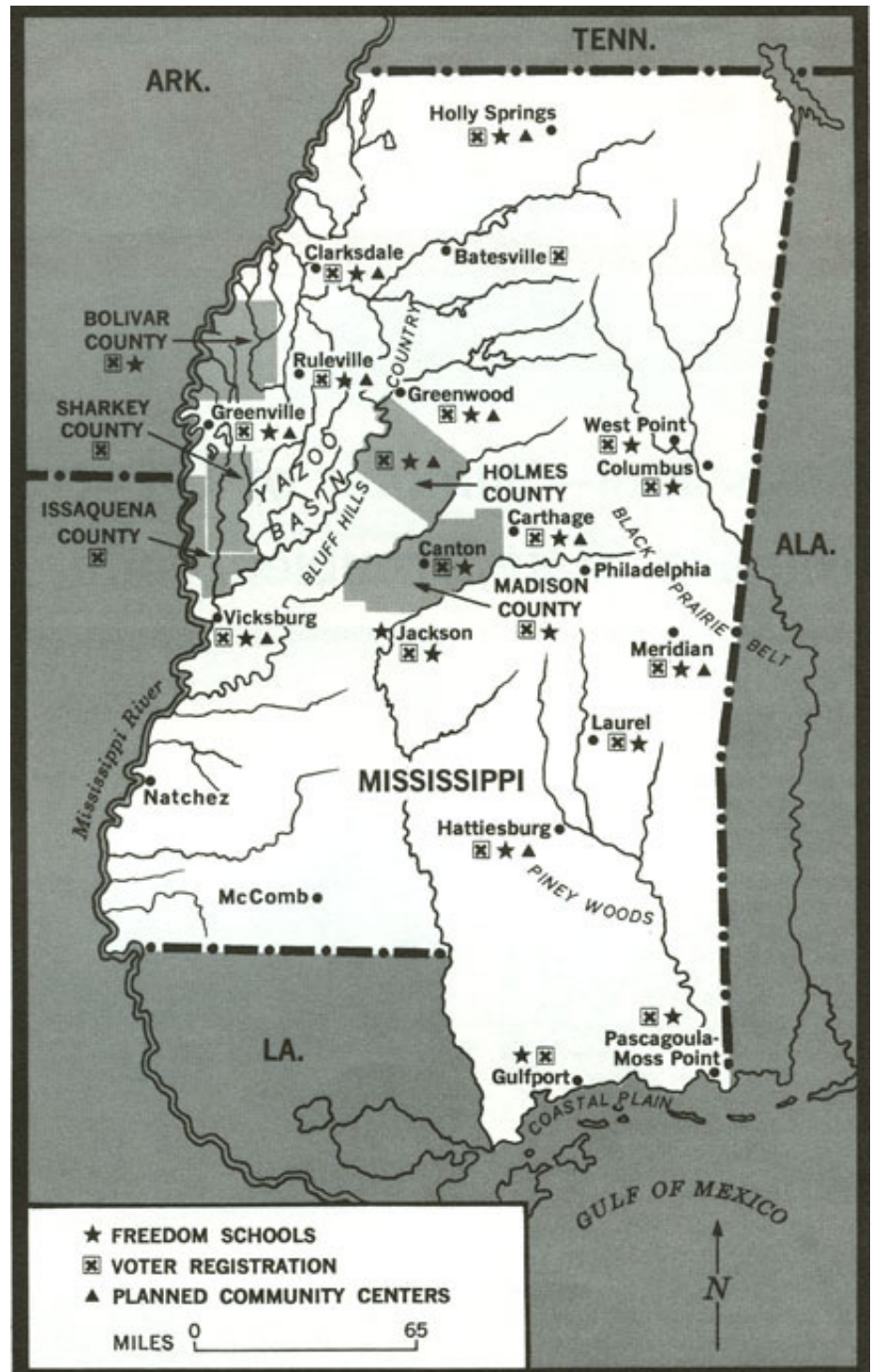
1965: Voting Rights Act is passed in wake of Selma to Montgomery march

1968: Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated

1971: 26th Amendment ratified, extending the vote to adults over 18 years old.

2008: Barack Obama elected as nation's first African American president

## A 1964 Map of Freedom Schools, Community Centers and Voter Registration



# Teacher Evaluation

# Teacher Evaluation

Name\_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Grade\_\_\_\_\_

1. What was your overall reaction to the production?
2. How do you feel about the production values of the performance? (costumes, set, performances, etc?)
3. How Did your students react to the production?
4. Please comment on the educational value of the program.
5. What was your overall reaction to the question answer session?
6. What other plays would you like your students to see?

2. How do you feel about the production values of the performance? (costumes, set, performances, etc?)

3. How Did your students react to the production?

4. Please comment on the educational value of the program.

5. What was your overall reaction to the question answer session?

6. What other plays would you like your students to see?

If Not Us,  
Then Who?

# Student Evaluation

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was your overall reaction to the production?
2. What was your reaction to the production values of the play (costumes, scenery, acting, etc.)?
3. What was your favorite part of the play?
4. Did you learn anything from this production? If so, what?
5. How can the stories of America's past influence our lives today?
6. What other stories would you like to see?



A recent recipient of the Governor's Award, New Stage Theatre's Education Department has a strong reputation for presenting quality performances and has been touring successfully to elementary, middle and high schools for decades. These tours travel throughout the state, from Clarksdale to Gulfport. Each year New Stage Theatre delights, entertains, and educates up to 80 schools and reaches more than 20,000 students throughout Mississippi. Teachers love the value of arts integration and the engagement of students; often noting that without our tours many students would never see a live production.

### Resources

Mississippi Department of Archives and History: MUSEUM OF MISSISSIPPI HISTORY, MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, SNCC Digital Gateway, Facing History and Ourselves , PBS: The American Experience, College Reads @ COFO, The Wisconsin Historical Society, History .com, [biograpgy.com](http://biograpgy.com), Letters from Freedom Summer, Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice (Pivotal Moments in American History) by Raymond Arsenault, Letters from Mississippi: Reports from Civil Rights Volunteers & Poetry of the 1964 Freedom Summer by [Elizabeth Martinez \(Editor\)](#), Julian Bond (Introduction),