



**ONE COMMUNITY
MANY VOICES**
SAMUEL PROCTOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

“I NEVER WILL FORGET”

MEMORIES FROM MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER

For seven years, the University of Florida Samuel Proctor Oral History Program traveled to Sunflower County to gather interviews with witnesses to history. These are their stories.



“I NEVER WILL FORGET”

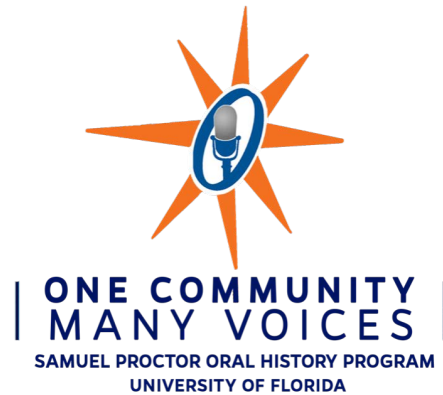
MEMORIES FROM MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER

To those who risked their lives
so that we could all be free.

"Nobody's free until everybody's free." –Fannie Lou Hamer

A Publication of the

SAMUEL PROCTOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM



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A note on the transcripts: All quotes are taken verbatim from transcribed interviews. SPOHP does not correct for grammar or accuracy, but does omit repeated words. Words in brackets are added for clarity. Some quotes are shortened for space, as indicated by an ellipsis. Every excerpt in this booklet is followed by the name of the narrator and the catalog number for their interview. To view the entire interview in the SPOHP archive on the UF George A. Smathers Libraries Digital Collections, visit <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/freedom>.

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• INTRODUCTION •

We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own; that it has deep historic roots in the past of America and in present struggles; it has an organic political perspective, along which it is travelling, to one degree or another, and everything shows that at the present time it is travelling with great speed and vigor.

— C.L.R. James (1948)

The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States

The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta is older than slavery, as epic as the Homeric Classics, and as enduring as the Mississippi River. Black Mississippians have created one of the most remarkable chronicles of resistance in United States history. Hitherto hidden from view to all but the most perceptive outsiders, the struggle was unveiled in the year of Freedom Summer as well as in the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the most important independent political party in American history.

To understand the origins of Freedom Summer it is necessary to go back over a century in time before 1964. There are far too many origin stories to tell in this brief space but here are a few. The role that African American soldiers from Mississippi played in the Civil War was decisive in winning the war and preserving the Union. Union Army soldiers of Lieb's African Brigade saved General Ulysses S. Grant's Vicksburg Campaign on June 7, 1863 by engaging in the longest bayonet engagement of the Civil War at the Battle of Milliken's Bend. In defeating a Confederate force that had the advantage of numbers and better equipment, black soldiers vindicated Abraham Lincoln's emancipation policy as a war measure and struck a fatal blow against the power of antebellum planters in Mississippi. Many of these troops had been slaves in the Delta region only weeks earlier. The record of black Mississippians in the struggle for freedom in the Civil War is a story that needs a fuller accounting. Shortly after the end of the war, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* observed:

The State of Mississippi enjoys the honorable distinction of having furnished more soldiers to the National armies engaged in our late struggle than any other of the Cotton States. To be sure, they were almost all black; but that made no difference in their fighting, while they received few bounties and still fewer promotions, allowances or pensions as officers. Others may have done better; but they did what they could, putting their whole hearts into the work.¹

¹ "Mississippi," *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 6, 1866

Black Union Army victories translated into political and economic advancement during Reconstruction. African Americans supported US Senators Blanche K. Bruce and Hiram Revels as well as John R. Lynch, the first black speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives. At the same time however, gains in politics and black self-assertion were tenuous. Born in 1904, Tarboro, North Carolina physician Dr. Milton Quigless shared with me the ordeal of the Page family. The Pages owned a plantation near Port Gibson, Mississippi that drew the ire of whites jealous of an African American family in possession of 600 acres of land. "One particular Page, his name was Hamp Page. He's a bad man. He says, "Don't fool with me. I ain't going to bother you, but if you fool with me, I'm going to get back at you." And he practiced marksmanship. Threw a dime up; hit it with his pistol. You never see that dime any more. He was that damn good. So one day, when he was in town, Port Gibson, the Page plantation was just about eight or nine miles from Port Gibson. One of them [Pages] had a run in with a white man and the white man slapped him. So he beat the hell out of that white man."² After a heated gun battle, the Pages were driven out of Clairborne Parish and fled to St. Louis.

Like their counterparts across the South, white planters engaged in a wave of terror and legal chicanery to disenfranchise African Americans in order to institute a system of economic peonage and agricultural profits. The Vicksburg Massacre cost 300 African American lives in 1874, and the vaunted "Second Mississippi Plan" served as a model of voter suppression throughout the South and a guarantor of legal segregation for decades.

Black resistance persisted. While U.J.N. Blue of Meridian urged black Mississippians to leave for Africa in 1895 in order to escape white repression, Minnie Cox, the heroic black female postmaster of Indianola stood strong against white terrorists in 1903-1904 before finally ceding her position to save her family. During World War I, African Americans voted with their feet and left the state by the tens of thousands to seek better lives in the North in spite of draconian efforts by planters to force them to stay. "Because Rev. Thomas Collins read colored newspapers when ordered not to," the *Afro-American* newspaper reported in 1919, "[A]nd because he persuaded his congregation not to attend an address by a speaker who was booked to advise colored people to stay in the South, Rev. Thomas Collins, of Yazoo, Mississippi narrowly escaped a severe beating from the Klan....On the way to the whipping post, Rev. Collins escaped and walked fifty miles to Jackson, Mississippi where he took the train for Philadelphia."³

African Americans also organized against the threat of lynching. A "racial clash seems imminent late tonight" the *Montgomery Advertiser* reported on February, 1911 "as a result of a shotgun and pistol battel [sic] earlier in the evening between a posse of white men and a crowd of negroes. The shooting was an attempt on the part of the posse to disperse a gathering of Negroes in a house on the outskirts of Gunniston." An anonymous letter writer warned the editor of the *Belzoni* newspaper in the spring of 1919 that whites would begin to suffer accordingly if they continued to engage in anti-black violence. In Vicksburg that same year, "Officials here have received many threats that the Negroes of this section intend to start riots here to kill white people in retaliation for the lynching and burning of a colored man here recently. Much uneasiness has been caused, the officials apprehend not trouble. No chances have been taken, however, for with big crowds here ,the police force has been doubled, deputies are on duty, no fire arms are being sold, the cross river saloons are closed and the jail has been converted into an arsenal."⁴

² Milton Quigless, Interviewed by Paul Ortiz, From Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South. Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

³ "Minister Flees Mississippi City" *The Afro-American*, April 4, 1919.

⁴ "Race Riot in Mississippi," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 1911.

Thanks to the testimony of African Americans and the scholarship of historians including, Emilye Crosby, John Dittmer, Todd Moye, Charles Payne, Akinyele Umoja, and others, we now know that black Mississippians had been preparing the foundations of Freedom Summer for decades. Black World War II veterans, including Medgar Evers, attempted to vote shortly after the end of the war. Amzie Moore was leading voter registration campaigns in 1957 in Bolivar County. In 1961, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized voter registration schools in McComb. That fall, Burgland High School students organized protests in solidarity with fellow student Brenda Travis, then 15-years-old, who had engaged in an act of resistance against segregation at the local Greyhound Bus Station lunch counter. The road to Freedom Summer was not a straight and easy path; it was more like water on the rock paid for by the blood sweat and tears of countless black Mississippians.

I first traveled to do field work in the Delta in the summer of 1995. Then a graduate student at Duke University, I was a research assistant for the NEH-sponsored "Behind the Veil: African Americans Tell About Life in the Jim Crow South." I was part of a three-member team of graduate oral historians based at Mississippi Valley State University. We conducted most of our oral history interviews with African American elders in Greenwood and in Leflore County. One day driving on Highway 82 I took a wrong turn and somehow ended up in Indianola. I discovered then that no one is ever lost in the Mississippi Delta. I stopped at a gas station to ask for directions. God must have guided me directly to Dorsey White, the owner of the service station. When I explained what I was doing in Mississippi, Mr. White told me that I needed to interview his wife Bernice about the history of the civil rights movement in the region. Mrs. Bernice White told me a series of astonishing stories about the movement in Indianola and a portion of our interview was later published in *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Jim Crow South*.

After I finished interviewing Mrs. White, I was instructed to return to Mr. White's service station for further interview assignments. For the next week and a half, Dorsey White sent me up and down Highway 82 as well as along numerous dirt roads to conduct oral history interviews with black elders. Our method of collaboration was simple: he'd give me a name, the town the person lived in and he would call ahead to a friend in that locale. In his deep and distinctive voice, Mr. White would say: "Just pull into the first service station or store you see and tell them that I sent you." The rest was up to me. This is where I learned how to be a historian.

In later years, I got to know Dr. Stacy White, the daughter of Bernice and Dorsey White. Stacy became a dear friend and colleague and she invited me back to the Delta on several occasions to help document Freedom Summer reunions. As I left the University of California, Santa Cruz, to join the faculty at the University of Florida in 2008 an idea took root in our discussions: why not bring a team of students from the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at UF to the Delta who would be able to conduct many more interviews in Indianola and environs as a team? In the meantime, we received funding in the form of a generous yearly grant from Mr. Bill DeGrove, a far-sighted alumnus of the University of Florida who believes strongly in the importance of teaching younger generations of UF students about the history of the civil rights movement. This funding makes it possible for us to take twelve students each year to the Delta and has been supplemented in recent years by campus units at the University of Florida.

The original goal of our collaboration was to sustain yearly oral history field trips in order to build a publicly-accessible archive of the oral history interviews. We also planned to sponsor a series of public programs in the Delta that would benefit students and give movement veterans and scholars a platform to engage in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ageless question: "Where do we go from here?"

SNCC veteran Margaret Block has enhanced the impact of our research trips as her energy, activism, and ability to open doors for our students has helped us in making history relevant to the present. I met Margaret during the 2008 Freedom Summer reunion in Indianola and interviewed her at Mt. Beulah Baptist Church. Subsequently, Margaret has taken many of our students under her wing, taught us freedom songs, and has challenged us to become community organizers who use the lessons of the movement to change the troubled world we live in today. It is no accident that several of the students who organized the Dream Defenders human rights organization in Florida first spent hours listening to and talking with Margaret about the early years of SNCC in the Delta. Margaret has inspired our students by reading her fearless poetry as well as encouraging the high school students that we have been working with at McComb as well as in the Sunflower County Freedom Project to become poets and freedom singers themselves. It was Margaret who first suggested that our students interview members of the Catfish Workers Union in Indianola (organized by the United Food and Commercial Workers). Union leader Eddie Steele and the members of this incredibly brave group of workers has deepened our understanding of the connections between economic justice and human rights that movement activists emphasized in the 1960s.

Thanks to the guidance of Stacy White, as well as SNCC veterans and the members of the Sunflower County Civil Rights Organization, we have been able to organize seven years of oral history field work trips to the Mississippi Delta now. The itinerary of the trip has expanded as we have made more connections. In recent years, we have worked closely with students at McComb High School's "McComb Legacies" research project, an afterschool program that teaches high school students skills on how to bring history to life through video documentaries and other media formats. Falana McDaniel, the McComb High School Digital Media Technology teacher in 2012-2013 was the recipient of the 2013 Martha Ross Teaching Award granted by the Oral History Association.

We have facilitated five civil rights history public programs at Delta State University featuring a wonderful array of speakers, including SNCC veterans Margaret Block, Lawrence Guyot, Margaret Kibbee, Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, and Bright Winn, scholars Curtis Austin, Emilye Crosby, Hasan Jeffries, and Akinyele Umoja, and activists Rev. Alan Bean, (founder of Friends of Justice in Tulia Texas) Bill Chandler (executive director of the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance), and Rose Turner, an extraordinary union organizer who works with catfish processing workers in the Delta. In addition, UF students return to Gainesville and host public programs to discuss what they've learned. Many students have incorporated their oral histories into senior theses, dissertations, and conference papers. The goal of all of these symposia is use the history of the civil rights movement as a starting point to interrogate the world around us today and to think about what still needs to be changed.

The booklet you have before you is just one of the many products of this deepening collaboration between grassroots organizers in the Mississippi Delta and students of oral history at UF. The majority of the oral history interviews, public programs, and community organizing workshops that we have helped to facilitate are now available at the University of Florida Digital Collections archive at <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/freedom/> and you may view the panels and organization workshops on the SPOHP's You Tube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/SPOHP111>.

The stories that you will read in this book represent generations of struggle. These are excerpts of the 130+ oral histories that we have conducted over the past several years based on themes chosen in collaboration with Dr. Stacy White and the Sunflower County Civil Rights Organization. There are many tragedies and sorrow songs in these pages just as there are triumphs and narratives of people discussing the building of solidarity between people of different cultures,

regions and racial identities. The record of striving for social justice in these pages is unparalleled in US history. However, we believe that in many ways that we have just begun to chronicle this amazing history. There are many more stories to tell, more archives to unearth, and more public discussions and organization workshops that need to take place in order to figure out "Where do we go from here?" UF students are ready to conduct more interviews, and to find new ways using digital technology to make these histories accessible to today's students and tomorrow's newest generation of community organizers. With humility and gratitude—and on behalf of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program I sincerely hope that you enjoy these oral history excerpts and that you will consider joining our growing collaboration!

In Solidarity,

Paul Ortiz, May 20, 2014

*Director, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program,
Associate Professor of History, University of Florida*

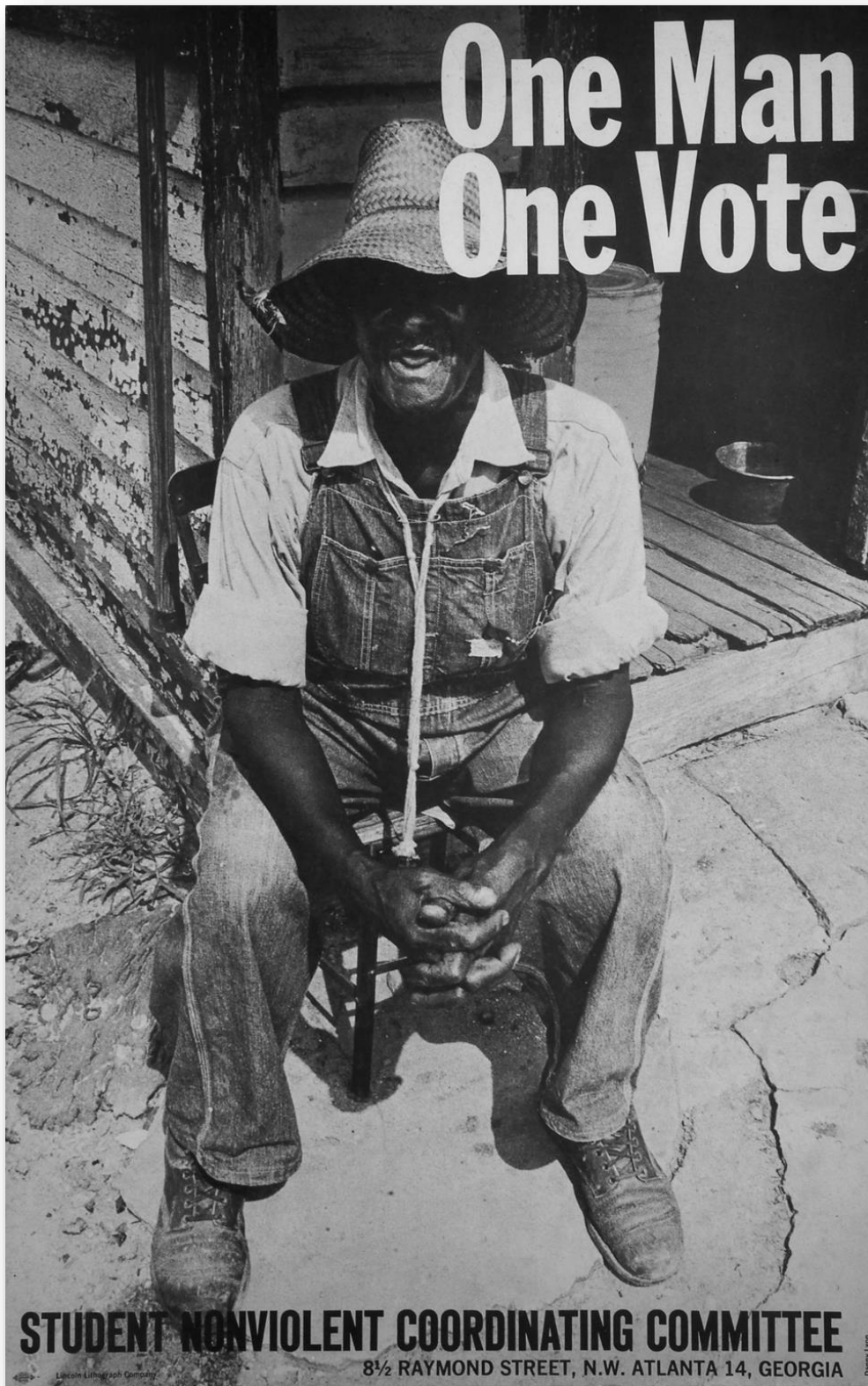


Figure 1. SNCC Poster: One Man, One Vote. *National Museum of American History.*

• 1 •

THE MOST SOUTHERN PLACE ON EARTH

Author David L. Cohn wrote that the Mississippi Delta, "begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on the Catfish Row in Vicksburg."⁵ The fertile Delta was ruled by King Cotton for a century, producing one of the United States' largest exports by the hands of enslaved people. After the Civil War and the end of legal slavery, the plantation economy of the Delta was reconfigured by employers into a system of sharecropping, which often devolved into a form of debt peonage in which impoverished laborers would never make enough profit to elevate themselves from their exploitative labor conditions.

During Reconstruction, African Americans in Mississippi produced the most impressive group of black leaders in the South. These included Hiram R. Revels, the first African American to serve as a U.S. Senator; Blanche K. Bruce, who was the first African American to serve a full term in the Senate, and John R. Lynch, first black speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives. Terrorists fought to crush black political power in order to create a new economic system that would permanently subordinate African Americans. The Vicksburg Massacre in 1874 was initiated by planters who sought to terrorize black plantation workers. Approximately 300 African Americans were murdered around Vicksburg during the white riots.

Nearly a century later, the Delta was also the birthplace of the White Citizens Council, which enforced Jim Crow laws through economic means rather than vigilante violence. Author Charles Payne described the White Citizens Council as, "pursuing the agenda of the Klan with the demeanor of the Rotary Club."⁶ Still, as local people in the Mississippi Delta have reminded us time and time again, for as long as inequality has plagued the Delta, a tradition of activism and resistance persisted as well. Indeed, it was, to again draw from Professor Payne, this "organizing tradition" which convinced the activists of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that Mississippi was ripe for building a social movement for change.

I always saw that things were different growing up, and a lot of places, I couldn't go. A lot of things, I couldn't do, and that always bothered me, to the point where I was working at a store, a grocery store, as a checker, and, for instance, there was a water fountain—two water fountains—and always one of the water fountains would say: one say, colored, and one said, white. I'm wondering, what's the difference in the water? You know? I got a cup

⁵ Cohn, David L. (1948). *Where I Was Born and Raised*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, p. 12.

⁶ Payne, Charles M. (16 March 2007). *I've got the light of freedom: the organizing tradition and the Mississippi freedom struggle*. University of California Press. pp. 34–35.

and got some water out of the fountain that said white, and one of the store managers saw me do it. I was fired because of that. Then I started, in my mind, wanting to change things.

McKinley Mack (52)

I'm thinking, I always ask Mama, white people got a different God than us, don't they? I never did figure that out. I went, what kind of God they got in their church? I thought it was a Jesus for the white folks and a Jesus for the black folks, a God for the white folks, a God for the black people. I went, mmm. I told Mama, I don't want to go to the heaven the white folks going to.

Margaret Block (6C)

I had been working with Medgar Evers, who was the state field secretary for the NAACP in the state, and who had held that job since 1954, just prior to the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Emmett Till murder in Money, Mississippi—all impacted, at that time, the work that Medgar Evers was doing. The reason that black people could not vote in Mississippi, in 1890, the Mississippi legislature took the vote from black people, and they gerrymandered—another word that came up over there—they gerrymandered the districts. They took the solid black Delta and chopped it up into three districts, therefore to dilute the voting strength of blacks. Even at that time, in [19]61 and [19]62, we had black candidates run for office. Of course, they were running more symbolic[ly] than on the possibility of getting elected—because there were very few registered voters in the state overall—but we focused on the Delta because of the significant black population in this mid-Delta.

Charles McLaurin (80)

We lived about two or three blocks from one of the public schools, but we had to walk way across town to the black school. There was playgrounds—at least one—less than a block from our house, which we couldn't go to. So . . . as I said, poverty was rampant, it's just that nobody really thought about poverty that much . . . We were required to have a bed in the kitchen, and two beds and three beds in another room. You know, it was just a horrible, horrible condition. But many people lived that same way, so we just accepted it and thought that was the way things was supposed to be.

Carver Randle (24)

Basically, blacks had to sit in the back of [the movie theater], and whites all around [the front]. I understand the reason that was done . . . I understand at one time the blacks sit on the ground floor and the whites was in the back, but due to throwing popcorn and ice down at the blacks, the managers would have to put the blacks on top, and they didn't have the problem because the blacks wouldn't throw no popcorn and ice down. White folk, white folk didn't mind throwing popcorn [laughter]. So, in this town, that's what you had; the hunted and derisioned had the back of two floors.

Charles Scott (34)



2. A large line of protesters holding signs calling for voting rights and civil rights stand on a sidewalk along a fence. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

I remember my mama telling me that, telling us that, a lot of times she would get ready to send us to school at the all-black school, and then by the time the busses get ready to come, the overseer would come out to the plantation and say, well, your kids can't go to school today; they need to stay home and go to the fields and get that cotton out of the fields. She would say she would go back in the house and she'd cry and cry and cry, and she'd say, this is not right.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

White Citizen's Council was kind of the cleaned-up Klan. In essence, you could be a doctor or a dentist and belong to the White Citizen's Council. The White Citizen's Council were citizens who weren't against black people, they were for the separation of purpose and race, that you have your needs and we have ours. In a sense, it put the patina of ethics to a racist circumstance.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

I grew up with a lot of myth in my life. I was told by Mom, bless her heart—and she did the best that she could, because of circumstances that she didn't know any better—she always would tell us things like, fear the doctor because the doctor was going to shoot you with the needle. Fear the policeman because he was going to lock you up. Fear Santa Claus because he was going to put some ashes in your eyes. And, above all, fear the white man, because he would kill you. In part, that may have been true.

Elmo Proctor (27)

I never felt any different. I've always felt that we all are the same, and it wasn't no problem with me. The only problem I had was when I just knew that somebody didn't like me. And if he didn't like me, we had a problem, and it would hurt my heart for you not to like me, because I love everybody. I always have. It hurt me real hard when somebody didn't like me, because, well, that just causes problems.

Andrew Lee (13)

I was under the impression growing up here, that really was the way of life, because I was taught by my parents that you just had to obey whoever seeing you, or you was in a whole lot of trouble. They had the old concept of saying to black people, as long as you stay in your place, but growing up as a kid, I never did know exactly what was the place. So, my father and my mother told me, well, don't go against none of the segregation laws. Well, I didn't understand that too much, being a kid, because I just really thought if I was an American citizen I could just do like the other kids.

Charles Featherstone (33)

We just, actually, my brothers and I always walked the streets, looking for work, jobs or what you need. Got thirsty, went to go drink out of a water fountain at the service station, and this white guy raised his foot as though he was going to kick me. You know, in my butt. I just looked back, and he [asks]—don't you see those cups up there? I didn't say anything. I was, at that time, especially as a young one, I was a person of few words . . . I was always aware of the differences between the races. I wasn't a hostile-type person unless very much physically threatened, but something like that, I understand it, knew the situation, so I just kind of walked away.

Foster King (20)

My parents were sharecroppers; therefore, we had to go to field, we had to chop the cotton, pick the cotton, and we had then what you call a split session. We would go to school; we'd get out of school in May. We was off in June for chopping cotton. We would go back to school in July and part of August. Then we'd get out again for picking season, and then we'd go back to school after cotton picking season was over. That's the way it was in the middle of the summer, with no air conditioning in none of the buildings.

Charles Scott (34)

I know that, if a young white kid grew up to be sixteen or seventeen years old—and I was about that same age—that we was asked to call that kid mister. And I don't care how old a black guy, that same kid would call him, boy, if he so felt. And I thought that was wrong. I guess from that time, I start to think about, there got to be a better way, there got to be something that can be done to make things a little bit more on a equal basis so far as human relations was concerned.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

We were in the grocery store. We had made it in line up to a point, getting ready to check out. Line was pretty long. Some white people came along and just broke to the front of the line and they just told us to back off. We didn't understand why we had to move when we was already at the front of the line. But then, our mother would tell us, well, look, don't y'all say anything about it. Just do what you're asked to and let that be done. Well, we began to question that.

Wardell Walton (106)



3. Printed in the SNCC brochure entitled, 'Mississippi: Subversion of the Right to Vote.' *Jerry Tecklin Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.*

You had to pick and then they would weigh the cotton. I think you didn't get very much; what was it, three dollars a sack or a dollar and fifty cents? You didn't get very much for whatever you did. A whole sack of cotton, you could imagine that you get three dollars? Or a dollar and fifty? I can't remember exactly how much it was, but you didn't get paid very much for picking a sack of cotton. You know, you would work, and then that sack, they would weigh it; it'd probably be something like, what? Two hundred and twenty-five pounds or three hundred pounds for a sack of cotton?

Emma Golden (42)

They're always, in the South, they're going to have a track dividing blacks and whites. Okay? Certain times of the day, or certain times, like, say, before nightfall, your parents would be kind of looking for you to be home and tell you, well, you can't be over there that side of town certain time of night. So, you honored that and respected that.

Darrell Moore (38)

[My parents] were talking about how it's a damn shame that we pay taxes, too, but the poorer black kids—they used to call us the colored kids—say, the poor little colored kids,

they spent sixteen dollars a year for each pupil in the black schools, but the little white kids got sixty-six dollars per pupil.

Margaret Block (6B)

There was, back then, they looked at the color of your skin; if you were light. You know, the high yellow kids, they were treated different than if you were, say, chocolate or real black. Mm-hm. It was very unfair. Let me see if I can cite some incident. Well, they did a lot of things; like, people would call you, and call, yell to you names, and a whole lot of different things.

Emma Golden (42)

To me, it was real devastating, because the economy in Mississippi, and especially in small towns . . . depended upon the cotton, you know? So, people picked cotton, they had money. If they had money, they could buy things. So, the economy would flourish, because people—thousands of people—were going to the cotton fields every day, and very few white people went to the fields. I saw white people in the fields, but this was probably a group of people that lived on a plantation, that was the straw boss's people and that was probably his cotton. But, when cotton was king, we were slaves.

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)

But I always had an arrogance about me, that I felt I should have been able to get something that you was telling me I couldn't get. I can recall one incident in City Hall. It had a fountain, it said, white fountain and colored fountain. So, I went in, I told the fellow, I'm going to see how this white water tastes. Well, I dranked out of the fountain, it was just the same water. I got out of there right quick [laughter]. But I did. I'd test the water. I want to see, was it different? It was the same thing.

Charles Scott (34)

• 2 •

POVERTY AND THE PLANTATION

In 1964, the plantation economy in the Mississippi Delta was an engine of tremendous profits for planters and grinding poverty for workers. In contrast to Delta planters who drew millions of dollars each year from the federal government in the form of agricultural subsidies, most black workers struggled to make ends meet. Lawrence Guyot, founding chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party noted that, "The Delta was the continuation of a feudal system that was a continuation of the aftermath of slavery."⁷

Most African Americans worked on a plantation, harvesting cotton or soybeans. This stood in contrast to the more elevated regions of Mississippi, known as "the hills," where agriculture was minimal and African Americans found other means of employment. The economy of the hills created more opportunities for economic advancement for blacks, whereas the Delta plantation system kept wealth extremely stratified. The practice of sharecropping, as well as tenant-farming, locked many families in an endless cycle of debt and exploitation. Black Mississippians recall an impoverished upbringing, but more vivid are the memories of community support that was richer than the Delta soil. By the end of Reconstruction, black communities engaged in robust practices of mutual aid and collective support through institutions such as churches, fraternal lodges, businesses and informal working class organizations. These institutions would subsequently provide critical spaces for SNCC to meet and for movement-building to occur in the 1960s.

My parents, like, I think my mother [had an] eighth grade education, and my father like a fifth grade education. But, to me, they are some of the smartest people I ever knew because they had—I don't know, there was just something about them. We were actually poor. Now, I didn't really know it, and I say poor—we weren't really poor, because poor is not having money, you know. We never had any money, anything, but we did own our own house. That was a big thing, starting off in like when I was born, 1950, you know. And just to be able to survive that time, my parents and being involved in civil rights, I'm very, very proud of that.

John Tubbs (10)

⁷ "When Students Ignited A Change In Racial Politics," by Debbie Elliot, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125908995>

Well, they didn't have very much to share other than the very basic necessities, such as food and things like that. They didn't have any money, nobody had money. But there was a charitable spirit. When someone in one family would die, everybody rallied behind them. When someone was sick, there was a wealth of people to sit with that person, day in and day out.

Carver Randle (24)



4. A man wearing overalls sits on a porch. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

Yeah, well, I was just a normal, poor black child from a large family. But we had love . . . I didn't really think about how poor, because I compensated for it in some fashion . . . But I think the thing that got us through it all was our mother had love for us. But they always instilled, tried to instill—always feel that you're as good as the next person, you can do whatever you want to do. My mother's term was always, look like you're going somewhere if you're not. That means that you dress accordingly and you had your clothes look tidy and those kind of things. So she wanted you to make sure that you go to school, get your education. You don't have to take a backseat to anybody; if you do, you suffer the consequences.

Willie Spurlock (3)

We all didn't have much, but we really didn't know that we didn't have much. Like some folks says that you were poor, but we never considered ourselves poor, because I guess everybody was in the same boat. But, growing up in Belzoni . . . as a child, we had some enjoyable times. Even going to the cotton fields to chop cotton and to pick cotton. There was some unbearable situations there but, then too, some enjoyable situations because of the fact that everybody went to the fields. And so, you had good times out there, because you intermingled with one another. Now, the downside of it is that you had to work pretty hard in the fields, and you endured a lot of things out there in the fields that you normally would not have endured otherwise.

Wardell Walton (106)

So, people basically chopped cotton, which—in plantation days might be all you did, was that kind of work—they might get maybe eight, twelve days a summer, of work. So, fundamentally, they're living on—people, I remember families with big gardens, three hundred dollar incomes for the whole year. I don't know how people got by. I remember her grandmother paid eight dollars a month for her place and the insurance man came by every year, every month, to get her eight dollars.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

I grew up in a rural community, what we call out in the country. No electricity at all, only fuel rod lamps. That was our light. We enjoyed the country. We had made crops, picked cotton, and bigger crops. I grew up as a child, I went to school to a one-room school, in a one-room schoolhouse. I had to walk three miles there, three miles back.

Delsie Davis (15)

I just didn't realize how little a lot of people had. You're just trying to figure out what to eat, and eating the same thing every day: pinto beans, I mean, that was a meal for a lot of people. Glad to get that. The other thing that kind of shocked me was—and is still a factor, actually—is the poor health of people: children not knowing what a dentist was . . . people in their forties taking eight kinds of medicine to stay alive. I'd never—the incidence of high blood pressure, heart problems, such like that, and so many people had these things. Because I was used to being around adults who didn't have to take any medicine except when they got sick. For people to chronically have to stay on medicine all the time, I hadn't seen that before.

Margaret Kibbee (16A)

It was a community then, because everybody looked out for everybody, and adults looked out for the children in the neighborhood. Well, I guess all of the children. Like, if I would do something, before I got home—and we didn't even have telephones, I don't know how my mama knew it—but before we got home, she knew that . . . and they just looked out for us. We had our own theater, our own little clubs that we could go to, that we had just for teenagers. We could go in there and buy songs and dance, but of course, me being Miss

Margaret Block—we would go to the Chinese store to buy some wine [laughter]. Buy us two cigarettes for a nickel.

Margaret Block (6D)

Across the ages, across the classes, across the color, gender, you know, a lot of times the big kids would help the little kids. Of course, that's what they do here. I mean, people—I was talking with Juanita, who I'm staying with now, and she was saying, oh, she had babies when she was fourteen and fifteen, and her mother raised her children till they were, like, five, because she was too young. And she didn't want to have a lot more because she was taking care of her older sister's kids and it was always like that. It was hard to know, if you were in somebody's home—I mean, when it's time to eat, all the kids there were fed.

Linda Seese (23)

There were a number of houses that had limited on-site plumbing, or none. I almost never lived in a house with an air-conditioner. You've got a fan. Sometimes I lived in a house where you shared a bathroom with six other families. It was, like, a place with rooms and everything like that. And I was always having to move because the landlord put pressure on the people with whom I stayed. But that was the other part of working with SNCC . . . That you lived with the families and you lived and worked among the people with whom you were working. You didn't stay in a hotel or special housing, come out and deal with the people.

Marbaret Kibbee (16B)

And we saw, both my wife and I, became acutely aware of the difference between what poverty I had seen as a youngster—growing up in Connecticut and then, you know, other parts of the country where I had lived and sometimes worked and gone to college—and Mississippi poverty. I had never been south except—further south from Baltimore, with the exception of that one trip to Atlanta in late 1960 for just a weekend. And there were a couple of children who had clearly died of malnutrition or something related to that, little—they weren't children, they were infants, newborns. Not quite newborns. And I do remember our taking a collection to arrange to have them a proper, modest funeral, which I think the local undertaker provided for a small fee.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

I remember going to the welfare department and trying to receive some support for me and the child, and they said, they wouldn't give me a quarter because they wanted to teach my sisters not to have a child. That there was cotton in the fields that needed to be scrapped—so this was, like, December, I think, somewhere around December, and the cotton needed to be scrapped off the ground and shook the dirt and mud off, and you can do that, because I won't give you any money.

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)

I enjoyed those years better; I enjoyed eating [the food we grew], when I look back on it, because money wasn't plentiful at the time, but we did not go hungry. People sewed—most of my school clothes was sewed. You know, you hear people talking about quilting now. Mama and a few other neighborhood women who get together and have a quilt committee, and that's how I made my money, because to make that quilt you got to have some cotton. I used to pick the edges of the cotton rows to get them cotton for their quilts, and there would be one for heavy quilts in the winter time.

Leon Minniefield (32)

At that time—Mount Beulah's on Church Street—and at that time, back then, it was real popular with the cafes and everything. It was kind of exciting, getting up, going to Sunday school in the morning as a little girl, but seeing all the other people coming out of the cafes, as they called them. People would always say, say a prayer for me, you know, when my mom or great-grandmom would be taking us to church. Some of them would be—I didn't know they was drunk back then, but, as I got older I knew why they were staggering [laughter]. But they would always holler, say a prayer for me, so as I was growing up, I realized that prayer is really for anybody and everybody, and it doesn't mean because you are out there drinking that you don't believe in God and you don't believe in prayer.

Gelda Chandler (45)



5. A man and a woman pick cotton by hand. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

The girls basically did the housework inside. They cleaned and did the washing and the boys did the work on the outside. We had to feed cows, milk cows, feed hogs, feed the mules and cut wood. And the boys did this type thing. My entire family went to the field too. Cotton was our major crop that was grown. And the entire family chopped cotton, and picked cotton. And my mama would leave the field about an hour early and go cook dinner. And then we'd all go eat dinner and we'd all go back to the field. And then the girls would wash the dishes and the boys would get in the wood, and milk the cows and feed the stock.

Earnest Brown (77)

By hands on old rubber, we had to wash for all eight of us, me and my sister. Then we had to wring the clothes out and boil them, put them on the line then take them off, and at that time, they had the little iron and you put it on the heater and let it get hot, then you ironed the clothes. So you can imagine that was rough. I talked to a lot of [kids] and I tell them, you got all the advantage in the world to get all kind of education. You got the school buses in front of your doors. You got computers. You got typewriters. You got everything. And we didn't have anything.

Mary Shepherd (79)

My grandmother would not let us go to the field. We wanted to go because all the kids were going. Everybody was in the cotton fields. My grandmother said, you can stay and wash hair and help me pick up this hair and stuff, but I don't want you all to go to the cotton field because you're just as important to us as the white kids are. Stay up and clean up around this house . . . We never went to the field and people don't believe it. Most of the kids, the ones that were sharecroppers, would naturally have to go. One year in 1955, I was fifteen, we had one year of what was called a split session. School was out in May, and then we went back; through June and July they were chopping cotton. August and September, they were picking cotton, there was no school. We went back in October. We had four months out.

Lilly Lavallais (47)

At that time all the teachers came basically from the hills. Most of the hill children got a better education, in my opinion, than the Delta children because they didn't do as much farming in the hills and didn't have to stay out of school and help gather those crops like the children in the Delta. And it seems as if those persons in the hills had more values on education because most of the people in the hills own their own land, than the blacks in the Delta.

Earnest Brown (77)

The first year we bought textbooks, and of course we bought the Uncle Remus stories—and you knew who Uncle Remus was, the big black guy with big overalls on so you knew that it was important to you—and my grandparents would always say to me, I remember this very vividly, with an education you can do anything you want to do. Now they had no idea what

I might do, but they'd remind me of that over and over again. When Maya and I got married some twenty-five years later, twenty years later or so, whatever the time was, they gave her all of my report cards that had been saved. Now the ink had faded away from it but that was just how important education was to them.

William Ware (54)

And when we ride to school, we didn't have no heat in the school. The principal had to get some wood and make a fire. Then before we could get started, we had to sit there shivering until the heater got warm before we could start class. When they'd get the school warm, then a group would be here and a group would be over here and a teacher over here with them. We had two teachers and we had the principal. And that was it.

Mary Shepherd (79)

We had a man who would come through the community and his name was Mr. King and he would provide ice for us. We would get a block of ice, 25 pounds or 50 pounds and. . . he would either bring it in the house with his tongs or they would have these ice strings to tie on them and we could pick it up ourselves. If we didn't have a refrigerator, sometimes we could put it in a croker sack with sawdust or some way to keep it. We would set our Jell-O in the icebox on top of the ice. Those were interesting days.

Anita Jefferson (76)



6. Two homes along a dirt road with a small child on the front porch of the nearest house. 1964.

Wisconsin Historical Society.

People had never tasted any Velveeta cheese until—I mean, [Dick Gregory] sent [donations] down here, it was good food. I remember one day, we had taken some food out to some old people that lived somewhere out in the country, almost out to Skene. They were sitting up there, just sitting around so hungry. When Lois and I got out of that car with all of that food, the old man started crying. He said he was so hungry, they didn't know what they was going to do.

Margaret Block (6B)

We had outside toilets at the time and we had outside water. You know, we had a garden. My mother would sometimes have livestock. Sometimes she might have a cow or sometimes she might have a pig back there or something like that, that she'd buy from somebody in the rural area and bring it to town and keep it in there, raise him up, and then slaughter him the following year, in the winter of the year, you know. But we worked around the house, and I mowed lawns around there in town with a push lawn mower, did little odd things like that; picked blackberries. I'd go in the woods and pick blackberries and plums and bring them back to town and sell them and things like that. But it was a hardscrabble life, because that was really in the Depression. Times were really hard then. If all you know is that people around you, everybody's in the same shape, you don't ever know you're poor. All that's relative.

Nathan Bocclair (55)

I hated the garden, but now I miss it, because now I realize why we did the okra and tomatoes and squash . . . we had summer greens, and we had winter greens and collard greens, but now I realize why my grandfather always did a garden. You know? Because it did save you money, and a lot of money. I miss it now. My grandfather's been dead probably thirteen years, and the first, maybe the last five years, is when I really realize what it meant to really have a garden. I see why people still plant gardens and have gardens, because I know what we used to do. But I used to always say, when I get grown and get on my own, and I ain't never going to have a garden. I'm not going to plant. But I miss it, because those kind of things can get expensive.

Gelda Chandler (45)

Okay, well, as a consequence of my work here as a horticulturalist teaching vegetable production, fruit production, beautification of homes and that type thing— Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer was getting big time grant money from various sources, Rockefeller Foundation, so forth and so on. And she had a manager of the farmers' estate and, as a consequence of her being involved in her work, they bought some property, she bought some property, to grow certain things that I was capable of teaching how to grow and give this to the poor. They could just go out in the field and get okra and beans and peas and so forth on their own. She gave them that opportunity.

James Davis (56)

Although with us owning our own land, our uncle had a thing that we would always ask him, why you don't sell it? We planted a whole acre, peas and beans, then he had a truck patch. He'd set out sweet potatoes, plant greens and all that, peanuts and stuff. So when harvest time come, we'd ask my uncle, why are you giving all this away? We worked hard. He says, it's better to give than to receive. God has blessed us to have our own land and there are others less fortunate than we are. So give it to them, let them have something to eat.

Mary Shepherd (79)



Figure 7. Earl Newman: SNCC (father and child). *Oakland Museum of California*

• 3 •

DESIGNING A FREEDOM SUMMER

Medgar Evers was one of many World War II veterans from Mississippi who returned to the state at the end of the war and attempted to vote—unsuccessfully. “All we wanted to be was ordinary citizens. We fought during the war for America, Mississippi included. Now, after the Germans and Japanese hadn’t killed us, it look as though the white Mississippians would...”⁸ Less than twenty years later, Bob Moses stood before a Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) press conference to announce the launch of Freedom Summer. The campaign mobilized hundreds of activists and college students to travel to Mississippi and challenge long-standing inequalities for disenfranchised African Americans. It is important to note however, that many of the foundational civil rights activists in Mississippi—organizers such as Charles McLaurin, Lawrence Guyot, and James Chaney—were native Mississippians.

Several campaigns prefaced the launch of Freedom Summer, including the “Freedom Vote,” organized to demonstrate the eagerness of African Americans to vote in Mississippi, and voter registration drives in McComb, Mississippi that were driven out by Klan violence. SNCC organizers appealed to local leaders throughout Mississippi to train and strategize with Freedom Summer volunteers. Their plan was to restore representation to the black majority in the state through voter registration drives, and to supplement the inadequate public education of the Delta with the alternative curriculum of the Freedom Schools. During this period in the Delta’s history, less than seven percent of eligible black adults were registered to vote, and the average school year for Mississippi’s black students was less than 100 days.⁹ These Freedom Summer projects were met with violent retaliation from white supremacists, and cautious determination from the African American community.

Like I keep telling people, the movement just did not start with Freedom Summer in [19]64. We were winding stuff up in [19]64. We had organized, you know. We had more help in [19]64, but we were always active, we were always activists, like SNCC and SCLC and CORE. We were already here at the time they decided to have the [19]64 Freedom Summer.

Margaret Block (6A)

⁸ Wynn, Neil A. *The African American Experience During World War II*. 2011. p. 88.

⁹ "[Freedom Summer](http://www.core-online.org/History/freedom_summer.htm)". CORE. 2006. http://www.core-online.org/History/freedom_summer.htm

My real first awareness—and I can't think of the year it happened—was when this little [fourteen]-year-old kid came down from the North, Emmet Till. And there are rumors—and I don't have anything to substantiate the rumors, whether the rumors were true—that this young kid did a wolf whistle or something, and whites of Mississippi killed that little kid. Like, what in the world can a little kid do by whistling at a white woman or a person, period? The little kid may have not known anymore about what he was doing than I would have known at that age.

Elmo Proctor (27)

Then in the [19]60s, in [19]59 when people began to ride buses into the South—the Greyhound buses—and the beatings and other things, I wanted to come then and I didn't have the nerve to come to the South. There's other ways to put that, but that's the truth of it. I would have gone with someone but I wouldn't go by myself. I remember talking to a friend . . . who was African American. He said, are you crazy [laughter]? Meaning, why in the world would I leave my family to go down there? And I realized that it's not a journey you make with someone, it's a journey you make by yourself.

Dennis Flannigan (8)



8. Three people work on a community construction project. All three support a beam while the man in the foreground hammers a nail into it. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

[I] went to the training, the second training, in Oxford. At which, the beginning of the training, Rita Schwerner got up and said her husband and two other men were missing and presumed dead. So we had to all think about what we were doing. I felt like I had to come

for myself. I originally went to Ruleville. There were a lot of people that went to Ruleville, probably because of Mrs. Hamer. Well, there wasn't—nobody was living in Indianola at that point. I mean, of the outside agitators.

Linda Seese (23)

I was involved in little marches, little things we did in the Bay area. So, I was, as a teenager in high school, I was looking forward to either going in the Peace Corps or going in the civil rights movement, and I decided the civil rights movement was more appropriate because that was sort of my job. I mean, that was my duty. This was my country, that was where I could make my contribution. I owed it to straighten things out. I thought I could be of more influence, serve more of a purpose in Mississippi. I wanted to go in [19]64; I was just getting out of high school, then. But I didn't have the money. It wasn't anything else that kept me from going, so I had to save my money, and I did. So, in [19]65, I came. My mother gave me *Three Lives for Mississippi*, hoping I'd change my mind, but I didn't, so I came.

Margaret Kibbee (16)

Dr. Martin Luther King's record in Mississippi is impeccable. He was frightened to death of Mississippi. Andy Young wrote Bob Moses a letter saying, look, we really don't want King to come to Mississippi, but, if he comes, make sure there are a lot of tall people . . . we asked him to come to support the Freedom Election. He comes down, he flies into five cities, he gives speeches, and he supports it. We ask him to support the summer project. He comes into Mississippi, moves across the state, and he vigorously supports it.

Lawrence Guyot (78-A)

I suppose when I was in Seattle, Washington, I had planned to go to the Peace Corps, but I was selected out because I was asking too many questions about Vietnam and about class structure in the United States. They said you'll have servants in Ethiopia as teachers, teachers have servants. I said nuh-uh, I'm not going to have any servants. I don't believe in having servants. My mother grew up in an orphanage and she was a servant and I won't have servants. I was arrogant, twenty-three, twenty-four year old, and so they selected me out. They said maybe it's the way you wear your hair. I had big hair and I played guitar and I walked around barefoot, it was 1962. So I started to question America at that time. I was living in Seattle so I joined Seattle CORE and we were doing sit-ins and demonstrations just like this for the same reasons, so I was active in Seattle. Then I read in a paper called the *National Guardian*—no longer exists—about a call for white volunteers, northern volunteers to come down.

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)

A year later, another speaker came, and they were college students from the North who had been down, and they said, now it's going to happen. We are looking for a Freedom Summer. And they explained it. I thought that that would be a right thing to do, because there was a huge wrong going on in America, and I volunteered. I became a volunteer sometime in the early spring, packed up, and went. If we jump decades later, no, I would

not want my children to do that. You know? But we had no concept of the extent of the danger, of the intensity of what we were getting into, and there really was no way anyone could say, now, I want to sit down and I want to let you know what this is. No. No one could explain that to you. You can't explain war in the trenches, you couldn't explain the intensity of Mississippi at that time.

Bright Winn (3)

That's why we became activists, because of Emmett Till. You can talk to Dorie Ladner or Joyce Ladner or my, well, you can't talk to Sam. I don't know about Hollis [Watkins] but Wazir Peacock. Emmett Till was the reason we couldn't wait to get big enough to join a movement. He said that he was the fire, he started the fire. That's what they did when they killed Emmett Till.

Margaret Block (6)

If you remember the murders of Schwerner and Chaney and Goodman, those happened in the first week of the Freedom Summer, and those people had trained the week before. The week that they disappeared, I was in training, as well as all of the people, pretty much, who came to the Ruleville-Indianola area.

Dennis Flannigan (8)



9. A young man at a nighttime rally in support of the MFDP. Behind him people carry signs with portraits of James Earl Chaney and Andrew Goodman, two of the three civil rights volunteers who were murdered in summer of 1964.

Wisconsin Historical Society.

I had a psychiatric interview with a psychiatrist in Mount Sinai hospital in San Francisco. They decided I was just crazy enough to come to Mississippi and not worry anybody else. They asked me a lot of questions about, could I take orders and directions from someone that had less education? They wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to try to come down there to tell everybody what to do, that I could take directions.

Margaret Kibbee (16)

When we signed up, SNCC sent us a list of books to read. *Souls of the Black Folk* by W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Like Me* . . . to be read. I took the bus to Oxford, Ohio from San Francisco and I read some of them. In Oxford, Ohio, the training—the hands-on training—was being out on the quad and having to assume the fetal position as people beat you; you know, how to protect yourself. Then, while someone is being beaten, to throw your body on that person's body to protect them, so that was hands-on training. The rest of the training was, we had speakers—Bayard Rustin, a noted fellow in that day who had been active for years in the North and the South, and he talked to us about his experiences and his philosophy. I remember a lawyer, a Southern lawyer, talked to us, and he said, now, let's talk about law and order. You may be within the law, but you are against the order

Bright Winn (3)

So I tell people I didn't get an education by going to college. I got an education working in the movement and coming in contact with people like Hollis and John Lewis and my brother [Sam Block] and Amzie Moore and Diane Nash and Septima Clark. All of these people had a big influence on me. Although I've always been a free thinker, as my momma called me. But it got me in trouble, too [laughter].

Margaret Block (6A)

I remember one night, Medgar Evers was in town and I didn't know nothing about no Medgar Evers . . . That night, Dr. Howell had one of his cars parked at his daddy's house on Roosevelt Street, he had one at his own house out there on Old Inverness Road . . . Well, I saw this kind of tall fellow—I guess he seemed tall to me because I was so short myself—and he got in the backseat of the car. He was laying down in the seat. So I asked Dr. Howell, why is this man here? You told me to take him down to your daddy's house so he can switch cars, and use the car there now, but why is he laying down on the seat? He said, you don't know who that is? I said, no. He said, that Medgar Evers. He said, we're trying to get him back out of town to Jackson, see. So I want you to drive him from my house down to Roosevelt Street and we can change cars there, and I can drive him to Gadsden.

Charles Featherstone (33)

Septima [Clark] was amazing. If you know about Ella Baker, then she's kind of an Ella Baker, because she was in South Carolina, in the Carolinas, Sea Islands and all of that, and it was her idea to have citizenship schools. That was her idea, and nobody ever talks about Septima Clark, Miss Clark. But I think I'm just very blessed to have known women like her

and Ella Baker and Dorothy Cotton. It's a blessing for me to have known these people, and for Miss Clark and Miss Baker to be one of my mentors is incredible.

Margaret Block (6A)

The reason I came to this part, to the Delta, was in that training, Charles McLaurin—who had not been there for the first week—came and spoke about cars passing him and shooting at him and really terrifying and dangerous things up here. And the beatings that he'd had, and Fannie Lou Hamer spoke of her beatings, and the deadly seriousness of Mississippi.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

I mean, you'll have to excuse me, but there was a lot of sexism in this movement, and . . . and it was strange, because the leaders of the local movement were women. There weren't many men because of economic, social factors that made all the men go move to the North. You know? There were young men, like Otis and Cephus and McKinley Mack, but very few actual men living in the community, in the [19]20s and [19]30s, [19]40s.

Linda Seese (23)

I think people have a basic need for community and love and tenderness and stuff like that, there's always this conflict between opposing forces. I think that the movement came out of a wholesale disgust from the old ways of thinking and doing things, the Eisenhower era; frivolous consumerism, bouffant hairdos, just bullshit. . . I've got to tell you that women in the movement—if there were no women, there would never have been a movement. Never, never, never. You get what I'm saying? Never. Women are so under represented and under respected, I don't care what movement you're talking about. The American Indian movement, Wounded Knee. The United Farm Workers in California, I worked with them . . . Every movement I've ever had the honor of working with, women have played huge roles and no credit, virtually no credit.

Allen Cooper (1)

But my grandmother, I remember always sitting on the stool in the kitchen doing hair and cooking. When the Freedom Riders came in [19]59, no, [19]60, because I left in 1961, I was always sending her money because she was always saying, I'm going to make some sweetbread. I'm going to fry some pies. I'm going to make some soup or something for them, but don't ever tell anybody about it, because I don't want them to do the same thing they did to Irene's house—Irene Magruder's house was burned; you probably know about that.

Lilly Lavallais (47)

But, you know, but it's just, I think I missed – I didn't miss that college, that whole experience being on campus and hanging out and partying all night and pledging, you know, being in they sororities and stuff. Some of my friends now be sitting around talking about, oh,

what did you pledge Margaret? I tell them all the time I pledged SNCC. They don't know what I'm talking about, they're Deltas and AKAs, and I tell them I pledged SNCC, okay.

Margaret Block (6A)

So I joined the civil rights movement here, joined Charles McLaurin and a lot of other people here, and we started doing a lot of protesting and stuff. That's where I really started to work, you know, because I saw a positive thing happening. That's when we decided that voter registration was a thing to change, that the word, vote, means more than people think it means. I went to jail for that: ain't no telling how many times. I was all over Sunflower County, getting people to register to vote and stuff, and even went up to a little town north of here called Doddsville, not knowing that little town was owned by one of our senators, Senator Eastland. That, up there, I went to jail for that. Then we would go to restaurants; couldn't never go in and sit down and eat food, you always had to go to the back door. I went to jail for that. So, then it got to where, on the weekends, to make sure I wouldn't be in protesting places, they would come and pick me up and take me to jail anyway, whether I did anything or not.

McKinley Mack (52)



10. A role-playing activity during a Freedom Summer training session. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

But it was young people and they seemed not to – they seemed to have been not afraid, and we were risk-takers. That's what we were, and I saw that SNCC was, we were risk-takers. We would do stuff and people, Dr. King would be goin', you know, just look at you, because we were not afraid to challenge nobody or to do nothing.

Margaret Block (6A)

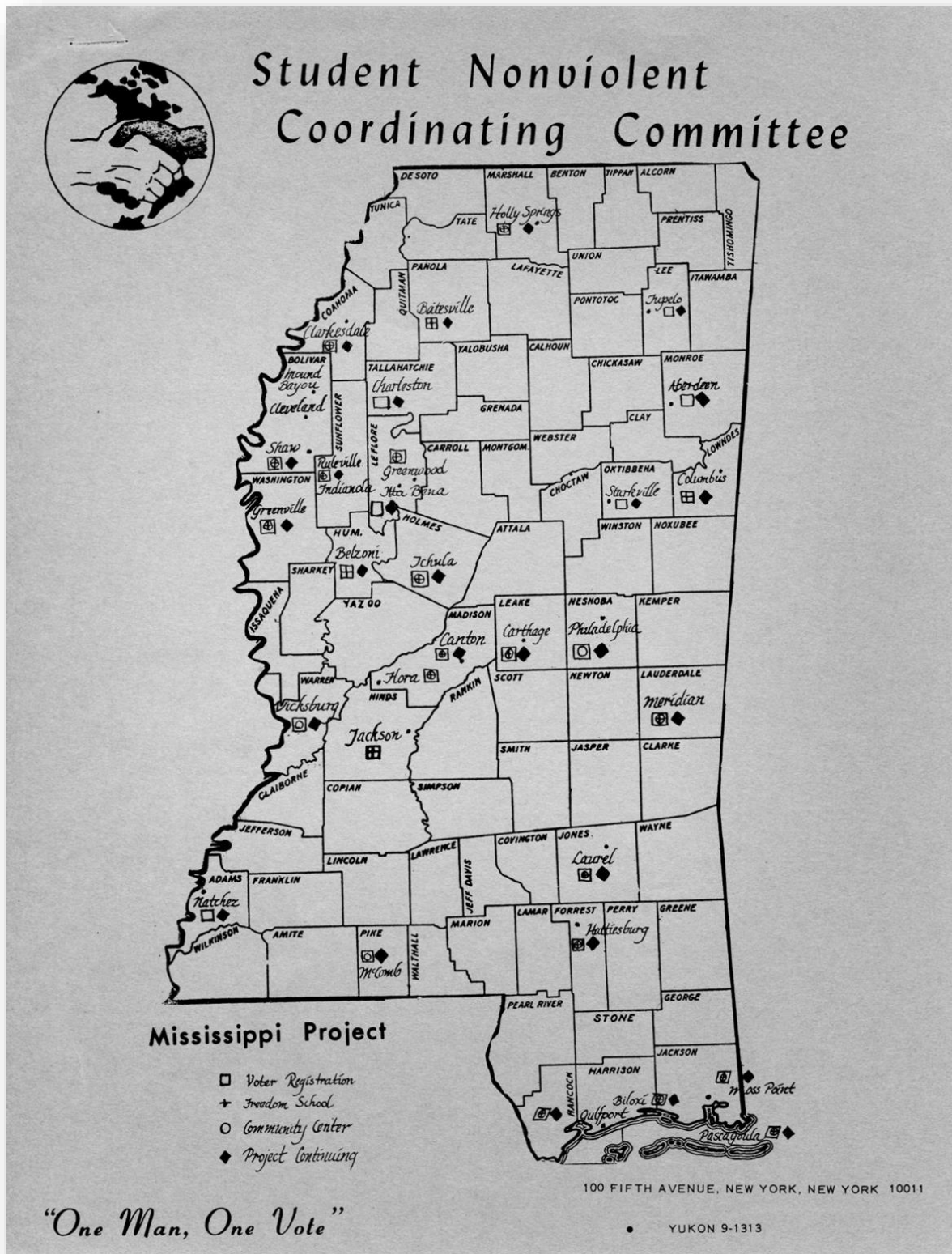


Figure 11. Freedom Summer offices, 1964. Collection: Susan Gladstone papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.

• 4 •

THE SUNFLOWER COUNTY MOVEMENT

Sunflower County is celebrated as the birthplace of blues icons B.B. King and Charlie Patton, but it is also the seat of the White Citizens Council, founded by Robert B. Patterson of Indianola in 1952 to enforce segregation and inequality through economic coercion. Fortunately, Sunflower County was also the home of community organizers like Bernice White, Cora Fleming, Alice Giles, and, most famously, Fannie Lou Hamer, a middle-aged sharecropper whose work encompassed the goals of Freedom Summer, and whose actions led her to be fired from the plantation where her family lived and worked for nearly two decades. Hamer became a powerful organizer for the civil rights movement in Sunflower County, and a leader in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Women like Ms. Hamer and Ms. Irene Magruder were some of the first people in Sunflower County to embrace Freedom Summer volunteers like Margaret Kibbee, Bright Winn, & Alan Cooper and provide a safe place for them to sleep, and to carry out the "necessarily slow and patient work," of voter registration.¹⁰

SNCC was about empowering local leaders . . . we didn't create E.W. Steptoe or Hartman Turnbow or Fannie Lou Hamer. We discovered them, enhanced their skills, put them in contact with one another, and started operations that they could grow in. That's why we build a foundation of—some people go in to organize people. We go in to organize with people, to empower with people. To get people to understand that the greatest asset we had in this state was the people themselves; their churches, their religious institutions, their social institutions: the Elks, the Masons . . . and that's what we did.

Lawrence Guyot (78-A)

Well, in our case, Mrs. Magruder was the first to let us in, yes. Single woman, elderly. She let people in. Oscar Giles and Mrs. Giles, together, let people in. It probably, if I can ring my memory, was more often a woman head of household that first let us in. There may be a sociological reason for that, and I am not a sociologist, but there may be, in that, the black men of this area were always at threat of being lynched. You know? Women were not at threat of being lynched, that was not the tradition. So if a black woman stood up and said

¹⁰ An expression used by Bob Moses, quoted in Hogan, Wesley C. 2007. *Many minds, one heart: SNCC's dream for a new America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. P. 387.

something, well, she could lose her job, she could lose her home—Mrs. Magruder's home was burned—but she wasn't dead.

Bright Winn (3A)

I think how quickly we were welcomed. We came to church for a meeting and we were found. That, if you think about it, this is Mississippi, where you've been subjugated enough to—a man across the street, an older man when I was leaving, came over and cried, and he said he remembered when he'd been fixing his Model T which had a flat tire, and white people drove by and just hit him as he was just—swerved out of the way to hit him. That was the Mississippi of fear and violence and hate. We arrived, and in a sense, with almost a blink of the eye . . . even more compelled by this, I think about it now, people reached out.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

I remember when we first started the NAACP, when we would wear wide straw hats and I really didn't know too much about it. I wore a straw hat because a lot of people was wearing them and I wore them because they was wearing them, and that's what the Freedom Riders wore. I got bottles threw later in the country, and where I was walking up the road, I got bottles thrown at me. You know? Stuff like that. Had people screaming out, hollering names, and stuff like that.

Andrew Lee (13)



12. Two men wearing suits stand in front of a crowd of people. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

My father and mostly my mother was very, very active in the civil rights movement. During the summers that the Freedom Riders came to Indianola, they actually stayed—some of

them actually stayed at our house. So, that gave me an opportunity to meet some people that were from other places than Mississippi. At the time, the only place I had gone outside the state of Mississippi was Louisiana, so I met some people from different parts of the United States; youngsters, college age. That really made an impression on me because I was able to talk to them and, basically, understand what goes on in their world.

John Tubbs (10)

I got a cup of water out of the fountain said, whites. And I was fired for getting water out of a white fountain. And, on my way home, feeling discouraged because it was, at that time, it was like you were less than human, to me. I was walking home, and I met a very good friend of mine, name of Charles Scattergood. And Charlie Scattergood told me, he said, brother, say, where are you going? I said, I'm going home. I just got fired off a job. He said, what? I said, for drinking out of the wrong water fountain. He said, well, you come home with me [laughter]. We went down to the Freedom School, which was a Baptist school, and he sat down and he talked to me, and that day, I decided to become a member of SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

McKinley Mack (52)

And this particular county was—every place and everyone contributed, but Sunflower County was the seat of the Citizen's Council, the White Citizen's Council was started right in this town. The whole area was ripe, white, rife with Klan. This was Senator Eastland's home county. This was an extremely important and pivotal place. Plus, it was the home of Fannie Lou Hamer, who was nothing more than a humble, honest, hard-working, black plantation worker who had it. Had it. She would have told you, there was nothing special about her, but she sure was special.

Bright Winn (3A)

Well, they were moving sharecroppers off the plantations. They would wait, 'cause, you know, sharecroppers would work and never get no money. At the end of the year, they owed the boss man, and after they made all of these cotton crops. So Amzie and Dr. Howard and Medgar Evers started going late at night, like 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and moving these families out. Dr. Howard even built some little houses for them to move in, in Mound Bayou, when they got them.

Margaret Block (6D)

When the civil rights people came, Lord, I remember it was the [19]60s. By then, they would tell us, y'all get in there and lay down, because some of the people came to our house one night. Man, you talk about somebody who's scared, because I thought they was going to burn our house down, they had just burned Miss Irene's house and Ms. Giles and them's store on Church Street. Man, I thought, man, those folks up in there fixing to get the white folks out of this house, you know [laughter]. We were scared, because that was in [19]64, [19]65, when the movement started.

Betty Campbell (14)

Well, we basically focused on organizing the young people, because the older people, at that time, they really didn't want to get involved. They were afraid of their livelihood; they were afraid of their jobs. They were afraid of being whipped or beaten. So, we really focused up on trying to organize young people to begin to be more actively involved in the civil rights movement during that time. So, we had individuals from other states to come in and they would teach us how to protect ourselves, how to respond to certain situations, and also, in terms of how to get other people involved and doing the things that we needed to do to try to secure some of the rights that we were fighting for, right.

Wardell Walton (106)



13. Two women stand on the porch of a home. Three men, probably Freedom Summer volunteers, are talking to them. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

They would have these marches through Jackson, around the streets of Jackson during the noon hour, most of the day. I was so amazed about how orderly they were and how orderly they had to be, because we would have marches in San Francisco that used to take over Market Street; go do what you want to do, and everybody's making a lot of noise. Traffic is blocked off for your convenience. At this one, you had to stop for everything. You didn't look sideways. You marched two-by-two; you stopped for every red light and stayed on the sidewalk.

Margaret Kibbee (16)

If you are proud people, sometimes, you're looked at as a person that's offensive. A person that rocks the boat, so to speak, sort of trouble in the water. It's not easy, sometimes, living in fear. Offending the wrong person could cost your life, so to speak. But, as a young teenager, now, going to school in the early [19]60s when Freedom Riders came into the

Delta and voter registration and all that began to take place, there were a lot of protests in the cities and stuff like that. I, being a young teenager, I got interested seeing people come into town. I felt, at the time, you're a teenager, that something wasn't right.

Foster King (20)

That way, guys in the dormitory—the athletic dormitory—say, hey, man, what kind of town is Indianola? They just bombed a school last night. They just burned a church. They did this. And I just kept hearing about that, and I was very disturbed about it, but at that time, I didn't see a role that I could play or wanted to play to address that. I kind of felt like there were a handful of people here who were going to deal with that, as well as the people who had come from the outside; the North, the West, the East, to work with the local people. So, I never saw myself as being involved in that. My main concentration was to get an education, get a job, and try to get myself out of poverty. So, I would come home on weekends and sometimes through the week, and there would be people picketing and marching around the courthouse, the library, and different places. I would just watch it. Never got involved. And it was some time later that I realized that I had finished school here and was in my senior year at Mississippi Valley State and was not able to go to the public library.

Carver Randle (24)

Women here in the civil rights movement in Mississippi—and I don't think it was necessarily true all over, but it was true here: women would carry on such an important role and had such leadership positions in the civil rights movement in Mississippi; Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Gray, Mrs. Devine, they were very important. But you had women throughout in the movement who were important. I was talking to Lenny and Eunice Jenkins, and I remember how important they were and active they were. Wendy Jenkins and I did a lot of canvassing for many hours together, getting people registered to vote, trying to do things. So, women just always played an important part. They made decisions.

Margaret Kibbee (16A)

We had a Sunflower County mimeographed brochure, pamphlet of, maybe, eight and a half by eleven, ten, twelve pages, double-spaced which consisted, primarily, of research that had been done by SNCC's—what can I say? Exceptional research director at the time, Jack Minnis, who dug up a great deal of information about who really owned the large plantations here in Sunflower County and, also, what little industry existed. And, not unlike other parts of the South, it exposed the kind of colonial relationship between the Southern economy and the larger national economy and even international, if you will. While Senator James Eastland was a large, one of the largest landowners, in the county, the largest landowner was an English company. They owned, I think—I think I do remember the figure, thirty-eight thousand acres which were, I think, mostly in cotton.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

Our menfolks was much more fearful than our ladies. And . . . I've gone places where there would be four or five men and twenty-five or thirty ladies talking about the same thing. But the men, as a whole, was either very young, and I don't say, necessarily, didn't mind being hurt—I don't think anyone wants to get hurt. But there was an urge and a necessity thing going on, whereabouts these things needed to be done. There were other people and of other races that was coming in to help, to try and alleviate this problem that we was having here in Mississippi. Some of these people were being killed. And I says to myself, if other people think enough of my freedom to have some of the things which the constitution guarantees us to have in the state of Mississippi—if they're willing to come here and sacrifice their family life, risk their lives and being killed—and some were—that the least I could do was lend a helping hand and be supportive.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

So I think I got a phone call, I got a phone call from Jim Dann at the jail, and he said, go down to the Freedom School, everything's wide open, they arrested us down there and the car's there and the key's there. So I got ready to go and I walked, and it was the longest walk of my life. In my memory, it just seemed like miles, and I remember because . . . I had already been told that, every time a car comes you have to turn around and look and see, and if there's a white person in the car you get way off the road because you could expect that they would try to run you down. Every time a car came, I was terrified. Every time I heard a dog bark, I was terrified. And I walked and I walked and I finally got to the Giles grocery store, and I felt like I was being embraced in a family, because then they called other people and we all went down to the Freedom School together. But that walk, in my memory, for thirty years, was the longest walk of my life. When I came back here in 1994, I realized that the walk was about four blocks. And in my memory, it was such a significant event and such a terrifying event that it had stretched itself out.

Karen Jo Koonan (30)

One day, they came, some white citizens came to the post office and the postmaster told Amzie to leave out the back door. Amzie went out the front door with his apron on and his broom in his hand, and told them, he's Amzie Moore, and what they want? He's not going anywhere. You know, he just told them, I'm not going anywhere.

Margaret Block (37A)

Then, when the Freedom Summer stuff started happening, I remember Mama and Daddy calling us in and saying, look, this stuff's going on; we don't think it's going to be a problem, but y'all just stay out of the way. Be nice. We don't like what they're doing, but be nice, and if something happens, just get out of the way, which is what we did. You know, we talked politics; we'd hear great-grandma and them talking about politics, cussing the Kennedys and Johnsons and all that. It wasn't like I grew up in a liberal environment; things just affected me different, I guess.

David Rushing (41)

[My brother Sam] said, violence begets violence, and if you could show the world that we were nonviolent and just trying to get human rights, then we would have the whole country on our side, rather than just these people down here. That's why, when he went to Greenwood and he decided to go national, he called it national, CBS. He called them and showed them how he was nonviolent, but yet still they were attacking them over there, like when they shot Jimmy Travis in the head over there.

Margaret Block (39)

And being seventeen and doing this type of work here in this town, that was a no-no. But I had to take that chance, you know? I was willing to accept anything come at me, because I was about change. If you don't take a stand for something better, they're going to remain the same. Once I did that, and then, like I was telling you, the guys that were visiting here from other states and stuff, we all got together—black and white kids, you know. We all got together, and that was it. Now we are where we are now, because of that. It was an experience for me, education for me, because being a sharecropper—farmer's child, I never was in the public that much. But, in high school, I was working, I would go and work at the store for school money, you know, stuff like that. Once that happened, now I say, I got to take a different route. It happened, you know.

McKinley Mack (52)



14. A woman in the foreground writes on a pad while a young woman looks on from a doorway. 1964.
Wisconsin Historical Society.

So, they called us in there one by one. What was that, fifty-some of us? Fifty-two or something that of us. When they called me in, they were always talking about outside agitators. When I got in there, Lord knows, they thought I was an outside agitator. I asked them, why do you think I'm an outside agitator? You know, I think to myself, they don't think we've got sense enough to do anything? You know. I see that your address is Chicago, Illinois, on my cumulative record. I said, if you would have looked on it, you would have

saw that was my mother's address. You would have seen that I graduated from H.M. Nailor Elementary School and Eastside High School, here in Cleveland, Mississippi. They couldn't say anything.

Jennifer Buckner (68)

I don't know if you can revitalize a movement that was that great, but you got, like I said, today you got to start living out loud. You can't be afraid to go to jail, because if we had been afraid to go to jail, I don't think we would have been successful, and you can't be afraid to get beat up or anything else. I was, I had me a knife with me, I was going to cut somebody up.

Margaret Block (6D)

I think we had to, those of us who stayed long enough—those who got frustrated with it left, and those of us who said, wait a second, there's something here I can learn. Because we began to respect the people we were working with so deeply. We were so dependent on them for our safety, for our lives, for our food, for the reason for our existence. I think there was also a spiritual content to that, the mass meetings and the church services, all of us who were white and had not been raised in the black Baptist church. There's a depth of knowledge here that we don't know anything about, we've never been taught anything about.

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)

• 5 •

MASS MEETINGS AND FREEDOM SONGS

Freedom Summer volunteers would spread the word about their cause by organizing mass meetings in churches and community centers. In Sunflower County, Williams Chapel Church in Ruleville hosted mass meetings despite the severe danger that resulted from these gatherings. During the summer of 1964, 37 churches were bombed by white terrorists as a result of their affiliation with the civil rights movement.¹¹ Freedom Songs were a powerful tool that drew reluctant local people to these meetings. Organizers like Hollis Watkins and Margaret Block would alter a few words in a traditional church hymn to make it relevant to the civil rights struggle, and the resulting harmony served as a critical bonding opportunity for a community under siege.

One of the reasons that music was so important was because music in the movement, as we saw it, could be used as a tool for bringing people together, of introducing yourselves to people and getting close to people, motivating people and inspiring people.

Hollis Watkins (5)

The music was the glue that kept the civil rights movement together. And it was the best organizing tool that we had, because we would be singing those songs at a meeting and people would pass by and hear us singing and say, oh, you guys going to sing that song next week, again?

Margaret Block (6A)

We talked a lot about what was the purpose of the march, and why were they marching, and why were they singing these Freedom Songs. We sung a lot of Freedom Songs in our house at that time, also, while the movement was going on. I also remember one night, when Mama was going to a mass meeting, she took me and Dr. King was there, and he spoke at a church in Cleveland, Mississippi. I'll never forget that night that he really spoke, it just inspired me so much to see him talking about people fighting for their rights and doing it in nonviolent ways and let justice roll down to everybody.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

¹¹ McAdam, Doug (1988). *Freedom Summer*. Oxford University Press.

Brother Christian, who is a member here—or was—his wife is still one of my historians of the church. She keeps me posted on the history. She's the one that helped us get the plaque put out front. She taught history and was a big part of that movement. She talked about how well-guarded [Martin Luther] King was the day he came and how the corner was blocked off; they were watching who came in and who went out. But St. Paul is a church where we're trying to live the history, also tell it, so the next generation will know the things that have come down. Very few of our young people are aware that the church and the parsons was shot up in [19]67, bombed in [19]68.

Tanya Evans (59)

There was a big thrust to organize people for a huge . . . a large demonstration to attempt to register to vote at the time the Congress was going to open in January of 1965. We put a lot of effort into that, mostly through talking to people and going house to house, but even more importantly trying—having mass meetings, what were called mass meetings every week in the Freedom School. During one of those mass meetings, there was some kind of Molotov cocktail that was dropped from a crop duster right outside the school. That was the first attempt to the bomb the school, but that just left a small crater. I don't think it was more than . . . maybe four or five feet wide. It was big enough, because it was dropped and there was an explosion and all, and people were shaken up. We were quite shaken.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

Believe it or not, I don't have a favorite [Freedom Song] because to me, to me, the songs are tools that I use to reach people that I'm trying to reach. So for different kind of people, you use different kinds of songs. It's just like if you're getting ready to do some carpentry work, you know, you want some hammers, some nails, you want some levels. You're not coming out with the axe and a hoe.

Hollis Watkins (5)



15. A man stands with his arm raised at a mass meeting. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society.*

Reverend Storey was the pastor of this church and of the one in Ruleville that Ms. Hamer belonged to, Williams Chapel. So, we would meet here and have our Tuesday nights' meeting here. Then we'd go to Williams Chapel in Ruleville and meet on Thursday nights. That's how we did, we had to go back and forth, because this was the only church that would allow us to have a meeting in there. They were afraid that they was going to get the church bombed. They did burn the church down, burned it in Ruleville.

Margaret Block (37A)

I mean, I remember going to mass meetings with Jesse Jackson here in little old Indianola, and it was so tense, so tense. The children of the older power structure kind of knew that something had to give. You know? They're not liberals, but they're a different breed, and so it was this internal struggle among a lot of the older families here.

David Rushing (41)

The church, like we're in right now, is like a refuge. It was the only public place we could meet. So the church buildings became really important as a place to meet and talk and sing. We sang to keep the fear from taking over our whole being. We sang when we were scared, we sang when we were happy, we sang when we were sad. It was really powerful.

Allen Cooper (1)

I paid strict attention to how people joined in and participated, you know, in the singing. In other words, I'm looking at how this is really a bonding piece in the church. When people would sing songs that people were familiar with, 99 to 100 percent of everybody in the church would be singing. There's not a lot of things you can get 100 percent participation from, so to me, that's an indication that this is a very powerful instrument here as a part of this process. Also, when I looked at how the church service took place, there was some singing going on before anybody began to talk. To me, that is saying to me that this is an attention-getter. This is a bonding force that is taking place. This is getting people ready and prepared to receive a message coming from someone. I'm saying if this can work and has tremendous effect in the church, then I can use that same approach in working with people in the community as a part of our mass meetings.

Hollis Watkins (5)

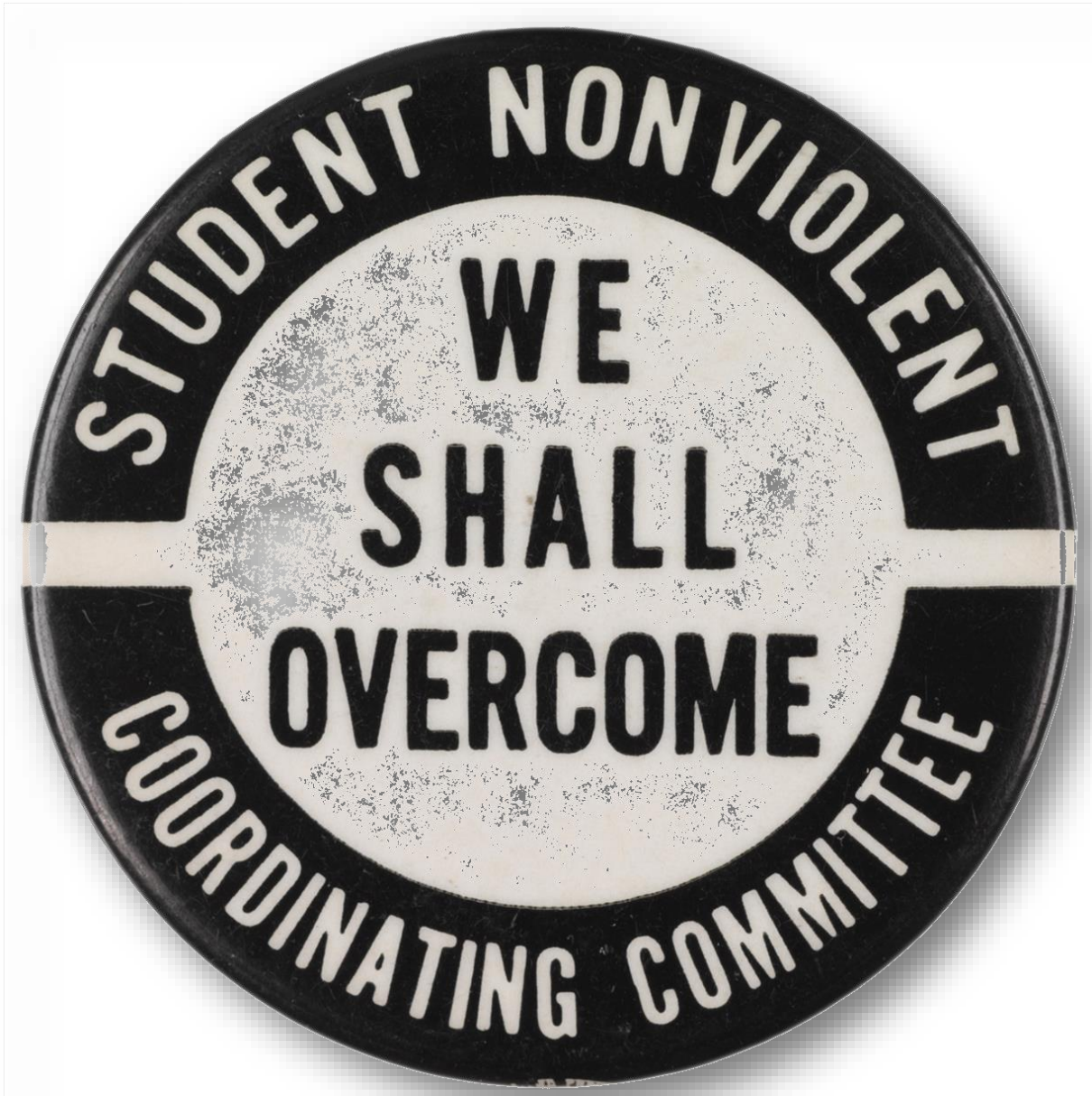


Figure 16. SNCC Button. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

• 6 •

ONE MAN, ONE VOTE

By 1964, civil rights activists were campaigning for political and economic empowerment. After the end of Reconstruction, southern states suppressed the African American vote through mass murder, constitutional amendments, and poll taxes. When these policies were scaled back, citizenship tests, all-white primaries, and acts of violent intimidation would disenfranchise black voters. For African Americans, the simple act of going to the courthouse to register was met with harassment, economic retaliation, and violent attacks. In 1962, only 6.7% of eligible black voters had registered to vote.¹² Freedom Summer volunteers mobilized to encourage local blacks to register to vote and train them to overcome the many obstacles that registrars set before them. The volunteers would also provide an escort to the courthouse to protect people from retaliation. Volunteers often remarked that for every ten people that attempted to register, it was a victory if just one person was successful.

It was—I think it was in the thirties, I think, when [Medgar Evers] come here. No, it was in the fifties. Anyway, he broke it down, him. Cause, you know, they wouldn't like us to vote nothin' and we couldn't vote and receive no votes, but he come here and talk . . . to the Church out there, in town, and all of us went out there, and some of them liked it and some of them didn't like it but we went anyhow. And so he had all us to vote. And so that's when I got a chance to start the voting. Now it ain't no problem.

Florine Carter (74)

Jim Dann, I think, came along one evening, and he was trying to go around interviewing people to get them come register to vote, and as he was doing it, people were pulling their shade down and locking their doors. And so I felt shame about this. So, I seen Jim, and I talked to him; I take him home, he talked to my parents. And my parents fixed a meal for him, because seeing that he hadn't eaten. These people down during the summer, some of them were living off ten dollars, twenty dollars a week. And sometimes, that money didn't come through, ten, twenty—somebody would send them a little stipend, you want to call it. So, that's where I got involved from there, after talking to Jim and getting him fed and talking to my parents, and I got involved from there.

Otis Brown (4)

¹² "Freedom Summer". CORE. 2006. http://www.core-online.org/History/freedom_summer.htm

We weren't allowed to vote, you know. I seen the lady today who came, her name was Margaret [Kibbee]. Margaret, she's a lawyer in Greenville now. She was a white lady, and two black mens came to my house, told us that we could register to vote. I said, well, we're not allowed. She said, you can now. So they start marching in this town. They marched and picketed on every corner, but I didn't go because I had small children. I didn't want them to be killed or hurt or nothing, and I didn't go. They burned down the store, burned the store, and burned down a lot of buildings. They burned down a lot of stuff here in this town. This town has grown. But it's different now.

Delsie Davis (15)

It was very satisfying. But, it was like we registered one person successfully, and we didn't register ten successfully, and we are eons from doing it. So, yes, it was individually satisfying, but we were going for the big, so . . . and, many times we would take ten people to register and ten would fail. So, that was discouraging all of the time. You know, and to convince people to go and register; to walk around this town and say hi, and visit them, and get a glass of water from them, and sit in their living room and try to convince them to go to register. They were scared, they were scared to death. They would just say, no. I can't go. I would leave my job, they'll bomb my home. So it was a very discouraging time.

Bright Winn (3A)

We actually had policemen and things around the courthouse, halfway intimidating people for trying to get to vote. And, at that particular time, we had to interpret parts of the Mississippi constitution rather than interpret the United States constitution as to what was right or wrong and certain amendments, articles and things of that particular constitution. We did take Mississippi history when I was in seventh grade, but we never really got up into the Mississippi constitution, not like we did the United States constitution, because . . . the United States constitution takes primacy, basically, over any state constitution. It outweighs a state's constitution.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

I went to Mr. Isaac's house, knocked on the door and went in. I never will forget what he told me. He told me I should be at home studying, getting my lessons, rather than out doing voter registration, because I didn't know who was registered and who was not. Well, hell, I had enough sense to know then. A bunch of them ain't, because there ain't but five registered anyway. So, again, I got a good chance of being in somebody's house who's not registered, you know what I mean?

Lee Roy Carter (39)

Yeah, there were people who were very elated when they took the test in the past. You know? That they were able to do that. There were people who went and couldn't pass. You know, the test was a subjective test, and the constitution of Mississippi—which you had to interpret—you could take a one-liner, or you could take a paragraph. The three of us, being college-educated, there are some paragraphs we wouldn't be able to interpret as law. You

know how that is. It was up to the registrar's to which amendment he would give out. So, of course, he would give the most complex of amendments to the people, and so many people wouldn't pass. As I was telling the students today, the federal government came down and took some registrars to court, you know, to examine this whole thing. One registrar, the federal fellow was questioning him on the stand, and he said to him, this is a copy of the constitution. Amendment Four, what does it say? The registrar said, I can't read [laughter]. And he was the one that was assigning and determining as to whether you had passed the test or not. You know? So it was totally absurd.

Bright Winn (3A)



17. A group of people fill out papers. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

[Otis Brown] was the project director when I came here. And as a project director, he was probably one of the most honest, sincere, and hardworking project directors we ever had. Now he makes jokes about not working now. Has a big mouth, too. I told him one time that if he could live his life compacted into a few months, he'd probably take a deal and do that. But anyway, he did work really hard all the time. And he was the one that we got our assignments from and did what we were supposed to do. Most of our work involved voter registration and we had our blocks marked. We had, like, a clipboard, and you'd walk around and you'd go around, and you had a list of everybody who lived on that street, and you checked who had tried to register to vote, and who did. Now the Voting Act was not recognized in Indianola in 1965 when I got there. So you would take six people up to the courthouse and you'd be lucky if one or two got registered

Margaret Kibbee (16A)

I talked to people about the fact that, hey, we take oaths and things when we go down to the local board to register and vote, and we go to the Service. If we should happen to be

killed in the Service, we are veterans like everybody else. And that, in order to have our voices heard, we were going to have to become like the other group that had these opportunities. And, without these opportunities, that we would never be able to make any kind of moves so far as bettering our condition.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

Well, one of the things that we did was to go door-to-door and talk to people about registering to vote. Sometimes, we'd get very positive responses, and sometimes we didn't get very positive responses because people had not voted. So, voting at that particular time was not something that they felt free to engage in, so we had to really convince people that it was their right to vote and that they could register to vote.

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)

Most of what we were doing was voter registration. We actually had it pretty well-organized. We had clipboards with all your, really, a list of everybody on the block. There were even notes on how people would react to you, and whether or not they were registered. I remember one lady, I got to know her later on, they said, will not register, but will give you a piece of watermelon.

Margaret Kibbee (16A)

The most proud thing is, I did—there was a lady in a little town south of here, Inverness. I went to pick her up and brought her to register to vote. This lady was ninety-nine years old. You know? And bringing her for the first time, and this lady was just scared to death. She was leaning on me for that support. We went on and I went on and we got her registered to vote, because she couldn't read and write. All she did at the time was mark the x. That was really gratifying, to see a person that age still . . . saw the things that should have been changed. She understood that the only way you could change anything was by that little word, *vote*.

McKinley Mack (52)

So she told the white folks, said, look here, now. If he hadn't got no sense to vote, he hadn't got no sense to teach. So, she had all of her teachers registered. She made them register all of us. So they said, well, she got up here; at that time, a woman could do a lot more than a man could do, to tell you the truth of the matter. But, anyway, she had all of us register to vote. That was one of the best things she'd ever done, simply because of this reason: when they came there that night, in that big room I was talking about, it was at a church right there in front of my house. It's even now a church, because they built a new school across town over there. So, now it's a church there. So, they had to march there that night; Martin Luther King, man, he turned the place out there. Stokely was there.

Nathan Bocclair (55)

I said, I'm going to get in it. I got in it and joined it up, went to register to vote. At that particular time, they tried to halfway trick you. They would ask you questions like, what do

the amendment of the Mississippi constitution, pay this and all that, said about . . . what you do in order to vote. Truthfully speaking, wasn't none of that even in the Mississippi constitution. At any rate, I end up passing that exam, and I told them—well, I done read the whole Mississippi constitution, that part wasn't in there. So, what you want me to put? They kind of laughed. And, after getting that done, it was work from then on.

Elmo Proctor (27B)

The sheriff is behind us, they don't know what the fuck to do, all these black people in cars going down to the courthouse. It was hotter than shit, it must have been ninety-nine degrees with humidity, it was dripping wet. I had the matriarch of a community in the backseat of my Volkswagen. Ninety-nine years old, walked her into the courthouse. She knew she wasn't going to get registered. She knew, because they were rejecting everybody, but we just kept on and kept on. She knew it, she knew how important it was to do the act. She couldn't even write, couldn't read, but she went down there because she knew it was important to do that for her people. Things like that were really powerful.

Allen Cooper (1)



18. Two African American men wait outside voting booths. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

I want to say, back on the positive of it, back in [19]65, the black part of town did not really count no more than it was convenience for the white part of town. For instance, services were limited. You literally could go down a street, and when you got to the black side of town, you knew it before you saw anybody on the street. It was maintained at a minimum. If an animal died on the street, it rotted. Nobody picked it up. You know, services were

limited. At least after you started getting black elected officials, you had somebody to whom you could go to. It made the white elected officials a little more responsive, also, because all of the sudden, you count. So that everybody, whether you had black or white officials, at least you had a voice or a say, and you wielded some power that way. So, you did matter, and they had to account to you. Once you got the vote, it laid the foundation for different court cases, like we had the equalization of municipal services lawsuits and the redistricting lawsuits and all of these things, which wouldn't have been possible without registered voters.

Margaret Kibbee (80)

We took the position early in SNCC, in Greenwood, that it was totally unfair to not educate people and then say, because they're not educated, you can't register to vote. We consciously brought illiterates down [to the courthouse]. Freedom Smith couldn't read a lick, but every time we went down there, he went down there. And they told him, they said, now, Mr. Smith, now, you know you can't read and write. He said, I know that. Said, but I know how to vote.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

• 7 •

THE FIGHT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

In 1964, most children in the Delta did not have an opportunity to graduate from high school because the schools that were available to them did not offer all twelve years of curriculum. The school year was interrupted for most children by the agricultural calendar, and students would leave school to harvest cotton and soybeans. The Freedom Summer project launched a network of several dozen community hubs called "Freedom Schools" to supplement local public education with an enriching, progressive curriculum.

The Freedom School model was a revolutionary experiment in education designed to promote mutual learning between teacher and student—a concept almost unheard of in American education. These schools utilized a critical pedagogy that made education a reciprocal, democratic activity. Freedom Schools focused on literacy, math, African American history, citizenship, and civil rights, offering courses for children and adults. However, their curriculum remained flexible to meet the needs of each unique community. Freedom Schools were also the organizing base for many demonstrations, such as picketing the all-white library in Indianola, or planning the integration of Sunflower County schools. The movement's demand for equal education eventually led the federal government to initiate the Head Start program from which millions of children throughout America have benefited.

Gentry was a complete high school, but before Gentry you had so-called Indianola Colored High, or Carver Elementary; the name was Carver Elementary. I think they went to tenth grade or eleventh grade, and in order for blacks to complete high school, they had to either go to Piney Wood—some fellow had an institute, I understand, up in Drew; Drew Institute, where they lived on dormitories and things and they'd go here to finish high school—but there wasn't no high school in Indianola for blacks to finish, not at that time.

Charles Scott (34)

Well, we got out of school in May, and we stayed out June and July chopping cotton. We went back to school in July and August and we got out for September and October, then, to pick cotton. So we were in school the hottest time of the year in Mississippi in July, August. We had no cold water fountains. We had no air conditioning, of course. No fans. The food in cafeteria was sub-standard, very horrible. We didn't have tables and chairs to eat at in the cafeteria; we had the little desks, like you have in school, with the little circular

thing that you write on. That's what we ate on. Like I say, the library was bad. We had no facilities in the laboratory. I mean, the whole—we were just protesting to improve the whole situation for everybody.

Carver Randle (24)

I missed the classroom, because I had been a teacher before. I was older than most of the young people who came down, I was twenty-eight when I came down. I was already teaching three or four years. So the white power structure would not let me teach—there weren't any integrated schools and they wouldn't let me teach in either of the black or the white schools, so I left. That's when I went up to New York City and got involved with Teachers Against Racism. I think everything in my life led me to that or got in the way of that; one or the other.

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)

I remember particularly liking the evening classes we had with the adults, and that would be literacy and talking about voting, too, and you've probably heard about the twenty-one questions to vote thing. So we'd work with that. I was just fascinated by the old people who would come in who, you know, probably they weren't as old as me now, but had a really hard life on the physical plane, working in the cotton fields and not necessarily eating well and not having been to school maybe much at all. Mrs. Weeks, who I lived with, was thirty-six—so she wasn't that old—but she had been able to be in school through fourth grade, so after I left, when I wrote her, I printed and I used short sentences and not big words because that's the level of reading that she was at and she wasn't even old. Her mother had been illiterate, and she taught herself to read and write. But there'd be the old people, they'd come in and, their poor hands, they could barely hold a pen because they were picking cotton. I think it must be just hell—and probably arthritis from all the white flour. Just to learn to write their name.

Linda Seese (23)

We did build towards what was a very large demonstration in January, I think we had at least—I don't know, you'd have to ask others if memory is sound on this, but I think probably more than, maybe about a hundred and fifty people. Actually, hundred and twenty-five, a hundred and fifty at one point or another, came, marched around the courthouse. Charles McLaurin was shouting words of encouragement through a bullhorn to us, and it came off without incident. I think there were lots of incidents around in other parts of the state, and on that day, with those demonstrations.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

It was in [19]65, they started boycotting the library because they wouldn't let blacks in. I never thought about it. You know, I mean, what's wrong with folks coming in and reading in the library? They had a couple of incidents. In one of them, one of the Freedom Project workers got beat up by some local thugs right here in front of the library. That really caught

my attention and made me start thinking about things. Plus, I read a lot, kind of let things sink in and got sort of freed myself some of the old ways of thinking.

David Rushing (41)

We learned how to teach; our jobs was hard, because we had to teach people how to read and write, older people. Well, you could understand that. That's why I don't understand why people don't read today and don't write. I'm going, I don't know what we did wrong. Maybe we should have kept the momentum of the movement going, but people were placated.

Margaret Block (39)



19. A group of young people on a sidewalk protesting with signs. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

And another thing that stood out was, when I was about ninth grade—or maybe tenth—being arrested in a protest. Being arrested in that protest, we observed some of our friends got beaten down. When they got beaten down, we decided to try to go in and intervene. We went across the street to intervene, guns were pointed at us and told us, you know, that we were going to get shot or killed. So, we retreated back, and later, that same afternoon, the sheriff came along and arrested us, and me in particular. Put me in the car and put a .38 to my head and told me, nigger, if you breathe, I'm going to blow your g-d brains out. Went to jail, and so that stood out in my life, and it still stands strong in my memory, as well.

Wardell Walton (106)

Then, one day, we decided to picket the white library because there was no black library. We got forty people, two or three of us and forty people. We went up and we picketed. We—freedom now, and made noise. I remember, I'd been—this was after Christmas—because I had attended midnight mass at the Episcopal Church. I'm Episcopalian, and of course, it's an all-white church, but I wanted to go to mine. I met the priest. He happened to be there as we're picketing, and he wasn't very Christian about it, you know [laughter]. He said, you shouldn't be doing this, you know. I just probably said some smart, would Jesus be doing this? And he huffed on away. But we stayed there long enough. Three in the afternoon, they just arrested all of us, marched us right into the jail and put us in a council room, an auditorium room in the police department, and left us there. They didn't fingerprint us, they didn't say a thing, they just kept us there under arrest until five o'clock when the library closed. Then, at five o'clock, they let us all out. Well, it was closed, so we went home. We picketed that place many times.

Bright Winn (3A)

That was the most important thing, other than this library incident, which was—Charles Scattergood was his name. He got beat up pretty badly, and some of the people who did the beating up were people I respected until I saw what they did to him. I just said, I can't believe this happened. They beat up a man for trying to let kids come in the library and check out books.

David Rushing (41)

The very basic thing of, especially with the kids and the teenagers, I mean, we got cadres out of the teenagers from the Freedom Schools. They were ready to go, picket the library, integrate the schools, that happened a little bit after the heyday, down here, of the Freedom School. To do the voter registration classes; yeah, to teach the kids to help the kids to be proud of who they were, to change their self-esteem or to get good self-esteem.

Linda Seese (23)

I used to view the Freedom School as a second school. When I went to the high school, then I would come home, drop my books off, and I'd be over there religiously, assisting people with how to read so when they go get ready to vote, and those kind of things. . . . And I enjoyed it, because I felt that I was helping somebody, and I've always been one that wanted to help, you know, people.

Willie Spurlock (3)

But in the entire community, what benefit in academics was there with that three month period of time? I wouldn't even try to measure it, except it was a point, it was a rallying point for those young people, to become aware that black was beautiful; that they in fact had a sense of being; that they, too, were important, and that they could get involved and make a change. That's what I think the importance was. So Freedom School, just freedom point of rallying.

Bright Winn (11D)

We had an old church here that was a Freedom School, and it got bombed by an airplane. The plane came over, a two engine airplane, and tried to burn it. There was some kind of explosive and it burned the outside, not the building, but it burned the grass. Then they came back with Molotov cocktails in the ground and burned it down. It was really well equipped, thousands of volumes of books and a lot of classes being held there.

Allen Cooper (1)

Like Zellie is a primary example. . . writing her poetry, and Georgia telling her it was good, and her thinking, well, it can't be good, because I'm a black girl. But, after enough reinforcement, she could run with it. And Roosevelt Weeks was a son of the woman I lived with, he was fourteen, and he was an amazing painter. I don't think he'd ever had—you know, it could have just been a box of watercolors that you get for a buck. I don't think he'd ever had paints before, and he didn't—I tried to keep him in supplies in years after, while we maintained contact. It was talent. Just needed to tap it and it would come out, if you give it a . . . so I think it was, for the long run, too, to see that—which we've seen. To see that the younger generation could change how they looked at themselves and, therefore, what their community was like.

Linda Seese (23)

So I taught African dance, and I think for the children who took the class, it really countered their notion of what Africa was all about, from what they had gotten from television—which was, you know, undignified, uneducated savages. That's what they had believed that Africa was about. When I taught dance, I taught about the dignity and the strength and the power of the cultures in Africa, in West Africa. I taught dances from Ghana and Nigeria. So, Africa—what I was trying to do was to change that concept of Africa and Africans at the same time as letting them have a lot of fun, because it is a lot of fun, and find a way to express themselves physically. And, you know, they kept coming.

Karen Jo Koonan (30)

I'll just repeat it, teaching people to read and write, helping people to get on Social Security, welfare. Some people's old enough to be drawing Social Security and they were told they couldn't draw Social Security. It was education, voter registration, and other stuff. Most people think just going around just integrating places and all this. It was trying to inform people of rights and the things that they're entitled to, and to try and to help people learn to read and learn basic law.

Otis Brown (4)

I know we got the building, it had belonged to the Baptists, and it had been—at one point—the colored school. And like a big one-room school, I think. So, we had a bunch of books that we brought down from the North and donations and I'm pretty sure we had tapes and, well, records. We probably had a record player, you know? 78s. We had a whole African history section and black history. That was one of the most important, I think, was the black history. I mean, it was new to me, but I'm not black and I'm not a kid. I mean, I

wasn't a kid then. It was just—it had to be mind-boggling. If these kids had ever heard of anybody famous, it would have been George Washington Carver and the peanut, so there was a whole world for them that opened up, of accomplishments in their race and what . . . Reconstruction and just . . . I mean, the schools here were beyond pitiful. They were criminal, really, and they got the books—the cast-out textbooks from the white schools. They had, routinely, forty, fifty, sixty in a classroom with one teacher. The teachers would not, at that point, touch the movement with a ten-foot pole.

Linda Seese (23)

The structure was not what most teachers who came down from the North expected the structure to be, and some, probably myself at first—there was an uncertainty—as there always is in teaching, but there was a special uncertainty here because we thought we knew what school was, and what teaching was, and we thought we knew what learning was. I had a master's degree, high-powered education: Smith and Yale. No wonder I was so arrogant. Came down, and I started listening to local people and it took me two years to learn what I needed to learn. The Freedom Schools, as we conducted them, were different depending on the constituency, depending on who showed up, depending on who was there, in every place across the whole state.

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)

And we continued doing things in the Freedom School, having classes with the kids. And the young people, in particular, wanted to do a lot more. I think only a matter of a few days after I arrived, a number of people, including Otis and—Otis Brown—and McKinley Mack wanted to go down and integrate the local movie theater. That resulted in my—a number of us getting arrested, including myself, and I spent the next three days shaking in my boots in the white cell in the local jail.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

She had made up her mind; this is my opportunity to get my kids in a good school, to keep them in school during all nine months, because at the black schools you had split sessions where the kids only went to school for six months out of a year. They were out of the school to go to the cotton field, either to pick cotton or chop cotton, and the white kids always went to school nine months out of the year. So, she was saying, this is my chance to get my kids in a school where education—where they can get a good education, and this is something that I've looked forward to all my life and thought about all my life, and now this is my opportunity and I'm not going to let anybody take that away from me.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

Well, I was aware of the prejudice that was there, but I had faced it head-on, but not in a situation of actually attending school at an all-white school; that was a different experience for me altogether. Not only visiting a school, all-white school, but being the only black male at that school . . . And, as I got comfortable—because this is a pretty scary experience, you know—but as I got comfortable in the class and started to listen more at the lessons, there

were times when I would actually raise my hand and I was never called upon. It was just like, you do not exist. You are not here.

John Tubbs (10)

So that's what we did, in the name of getting an education and getting out of the cotton fields and also lifting ourselves out of poverty. [My mother] kept saying that she was going to break the cycle of poverty for her family, and she was determined that she was going to do that, and the way to do it was through education. So, that's why we chose to go to one of the all-white schools.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)



20. Groups of students attend class during Freedom Summer as they sit outside in the shade. Likely at the Freedom School, Priest Creek Baptist Church. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

Everybody knew each other because we all went to Gentry High School, so we basically knew everybody, everybody knew each other. We all knew—some of them we knew a little bit better than others, you know. Like Zellie Rainey, I knew her real well because she was a distant relative. She and her mother, Mrs. Rainey, and my mother were very close friends and they were active into the civil rights organizations, so I knew her really well.

John Tubbs (10)

One of the reasons was to prove to them, and myself, that I was capable and that I could make grades, and that I could make the best grades in the class. So, I always studied really hard so that I could make good grades—not for their benefit, but for my benefit, to know that I could actually do that; I could actually take all this pressure and all this stuff around me and still make good grades.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

Many things and thoughts have gone through my mind since that time, and my mother told me they just saw opportunity for their children to do something different from what the other children was doing. Like I said, they realized the danger of it, but they did not pressure us to go. After they had talked to us about the situation and we made our own decision to go with what they had already arranged with the school system. I thank them for that today. It really enhanced my life.

Leon Minniefield (32)

They would actually tell us not to be afraid, to try to blend in, try to be a participant in the class. What they basically told us: what we do here today is what's going to affect tomorrow. Basically, at the time, that really didn't mean that much to me, because it's like being in the heat of battle. You know? It's kind of hard to remember what you're there for when everybody is picking on you or whatever, you know.

John Tubbs (10)



21. A girl at a demonstration holding a sign that reads: 'We are tired of being ruled by racists.' Behind her, other people carry signs as they walk along a fence. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

When we went to school, it was a different experience from what I expected. I expected it to be a more friendly atmosphere than it was; it was a hostile environment. It was like no one wanted to get next to you, that you were a stranger, you were somewhere you're not supposed to be. It was, you know, there were a lot of name-calling, nigger this and go back to your own school. Very hostile environment. And no one would talk to you or even get close to you, so that was the kind of environment that we walked into on a daily basis. Then, when we would come home in the evenings sometime, we realized that—I didn't realize that Mama was afraid as she was for us, because she later told us that she would go to bed as soon as we left for school and she would just pray all day long. She lay in the bed, she

couldn't move, it's like she was paralyzed, just worried about her kids and saying, Lord, take care of my kids. And she says she didn't say any fancy words, just, Lord take care of my kids. Then, when we would come on the bus, she would come out to the bus, she said, and she would count us one-by-one to make sure we all got off the bus. That was a signal that she thought that they may do something to one of us, may not come home one day.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

When you are the only black student in a classroom, when there's only six other peoples at the school that is like you, surely there's a lot of things that go through your mind. Do you fit in? Am I right for here? So it's not . . . problems, but it's something that you constantly have to think about, how you going to be treated; social changes. I guess I wouldn't call it peer pressure, but I guess the most things we thought about, I thought about, was fitting in.

Leon Minniefield (32)

They did let us out by classes, so if I went to the cafeteria, I didn't get to go with one of my sisters or brothers, I had to stand in the line with all of the white kids. Then, when I went to sit, no matter where I sit, everybody at that table would jump up or everybody in that aisle would jump up. So, having to go into a cafeteria every day and get your plate and get your lunch and go sit and see everybody jump up, it's just something—it's not something good to see.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

I was threatened sometimes about having my house bombed and, mind, we stayed out in the country. So we didn't have police protection, we didn't have all this type of thing. So, actually, uncles had to sit guards and watch. Our family members took watch, because we didn't know what these people was going to do. We're talking literally, we told the police, and say everything, and every once in a while a police wasn't going to show up because it's out of their jurisdiction.

Leon Minniefield (32)

At Eastside, they had discipline. But, what I would say, the politics wasn't right, and even during the time, I recognized it when I was going to school over there. For example, when King died, we demanded the march downtown. They told us we couldn't; we did it, anyway. I was one of the ones, you know, organizing it, the march downtown, you know, when King got killed. At the same time, like for the annual, I had a big natural afro—of course—and, when it got ready to take pictures, they want me to cut all my hair off. You know? But the policies of the school were set by the board, and if you look in the old annuals, then you will see who was running the schools. Uh-huh: all white, yeah, during that time.

Isaac Shorter (35)

We'd be back and forth between Indianola and Sunflower because, with Indianola, once the Freedom School burned and the other workers left, it was like me, Otis, and Cephus

were doing everything. So, we had some times here and some in Sunflower, so we were trying to get a meeting place—we were really trying to get a place for the Freedom School, and it just looked that it had been burned earlier that year before I got here. They were very remarkable at just blocking us at every end. So, it looked as if we were going to be able to build it in Sunflower before we could build it here, so we did that and we moved to Sunflower and built a community center there. We did a lot of things from there; we had the first quarter order elections, that looked like we had a chance to elect a black mayor. We were very hard hit, lost by a very narrow margin. But we did a lot of political stuff in Sunflower. We stayed in Sunflower until—right to close around [19]69, and then moved back to Indianola.

Margaret Kibbee (16A)



22. Teachers at the Freedom School convention during Freedom Summer. The woman in the center is Liz Fusco, one of the coordinators of the Freedom School project. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

So, we applied for that money and had our first Head Start in Leland. The next year, we knew how to get started early, and we got involved here in Sunflower County. We ran the program and when they found out that we was going to do without them, they came in and formed a cap organization which was umbrella to encompass all of the federal programs, and we had a dual program for about three years. They were able to overpower us and finagle around, get the Head Start totally under their control. Well, see, at that time, it wasn't the type program that the local government wanted to come to Sunflower County, because in order to utilize federal money you had to totally integrate, like the libraries, health department, doctors' office. You had to have just one waiting room where everybody go in. But, see, during that time, it was illegal to have an integrated setting, which mean that all of the doctors' offices had two waiting rooms: had colored on one side, white on

the other side, you know . . . But, in order to have federal money, you couldn't use facilities like that; everybody had to use the same, you know. Colored men and white men have to use the same bathrooms, and ladies the same way. This is the reason that they didn't want Head Start in Sunflower County, because it was going to cause too much integration, too much . . . what did they call it? At that time, mingling that race, and they was trying to keep everybody separate.

Dorsey White (50A)

And when, suddenly, there were these jobs available through what's his name's program? Well, it was the CDGM, Child Development Group of Mississippi, which began in the summer of [19]65, suddenly they had control of the sum of money and jobs for local people and they made those decisions.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

Well, Head Start gave a lot of people some type of relief from having to try and stay home all the time with the kids. And by Head Start moving in and taking some of that pressure off, you had a few more women that was able to actually go out and help support the family. It was basically costing little or nothing for this to happen. So, economically, Head Start played a major role in helping a lot of people and the working parents economically, so they could get out and help do some of the things that was necessary in order to have a fairly decent life. And, by that same token, it not only gave them an avenue to try and help support the family, but it basically put that young child out there in somewhat of a learning environment at the same time, enabling these young people to get a little bit earlier start in life than a lot of us had the chances to take. By doing that, a lot of the young people became better students.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

Some changed before left here, because what happened is they brought the Head Start program, and that's the first weak part of the civil rights movement. They offered all the veterans jobs. And most of them took the jobs . . . So in a sense, the leaders of the movement was drained away. They got their money and they ran. And now we're left there fighting them back, a few of us. But I say, the way the system started draining off towards the Head Start program and other things—and different programs came along. Because people do need money. I ain't faulting them 'cause they left. They need to take care of their family, they need income. So, the Head Start was a good Trojan Horse, the way I see it.

Otis Brown (4)

We had here in Indianola a pretty little organization of the FDP block system, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. It was a very good system where they had block captains and the block meetings every week, and then, eventually, you'd come together, sort of like a city-wide meeting. Then there'd be a county-wide meeting, and then there'd be a district-wide meeting, so you were getting ready for caucus politics. But the little block meetings did very well. There were two blocks: we had the whole city, the black community,

organized, but there were two blocks that went on meeting for about two years after there wasn't really a viable state organization. I thought that was kind of remarkable, that people held them together.

Margaret Kibbee (16)

So bringing black history to people, bringing their voices back to them, we had a newspaper called *The Student Voice*, and the whole idea that voice was really important. I think what most of us discovered, even though there were separate projects; voter-registration, community centers, and Freedom School, we realized before the end of the summer that it was really one project, that you couldn't have voter-registration without Freedom School and you couldn't have a place for all of this without a community center and who you were teaching, if we're going to put that in quotations, who you were "teaching", they're not just teenagers that you thought you were going to be teaching lessons to. It's everybody, it's elderly people who want to learn. It's Paulo Freire's idea, but we didn't know about Paulo Freire at that time, although he was operating in Brazil at the same time as we were operating in Mississippi, but we didn't know about that then. Only later did we find that out.

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)



23. Two children color together in a coloring book during Freedom Summer. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

I used to say that: At first, it was the cotton fields, and everybody worked in the cotton fields to make a white man rich. Then, when cotton started dying out, it was catfish, and it was just the same thing; working in the catfish factories, fileting catfish to make another white man rich. It just continues and continues. If our children don't get an education, then they'll continue to work in a factory or on a field or doing something, whatever the next catfish or cotton is, to make somebody else rich.

Valerie Simpson (51)

• 8 •

THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In 1964, SNCC and Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) challenged the legitimacy of the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party by organizing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and electing 68 delegates to represent their supporters at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. During the Credentials Committee hearings, the MFDP raised the consciousness of the nation when delegate Fannie Lou Hamer gave a televised speech detailing her meager life as a sharecropper and the brutal beatings she endured as a result of her activism. President Johnson offered a compromise of seating two delegates, to which Hamer responded, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats, 'cause all of us is tired."¹³

Though the MFDP was denied official recognition at the DNC, their actions opened the door for women and people of color to exercise positions of leadership in the Democratic Party. The achievements of the MFDP and the civil rights movement in the Deep South led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and Title IX. These important innovations in American law and jurisprudence have benefited millions of Americans in the areas of employment, citizenship, and equal treatment under the law.

What we were able to do with MFDP is cull the best organizers from throughout the state, get them first involved in the Freedom Elections, where they could see that we could run a statewide operation, with very, very little money, with a lot of oppression, and that Freedom Election brought a lot of press which diminished violence. So we learned then that violence wasn't spontaneous; violence could be—if it could be stopped, it can be stopped at other times. We also saw that we had to drive home a point, and that point was that, if blacks were unimpeded when it comes to voting, we would vote in large numbers. We got a hundred thousand people to vote; some people say it was eighty, it was really, factually, a hundred thousand.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

Now, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was organized parallel—parallel party to the regular white Democratic Party in this state. We brought in our summer people, our friends here, who came down in the summer of [19]64, and there were three missions—objectives. One was to continue voter registration, and we did that . . . and to organize the

¹³ Mills, Kay, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*, (New York: Plume, 1994), p. 5.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. We did that. And to establish Freedom Schools in the state. We did that. Then, we went to Washington—I mean, to Atlantic City, New Jersey, to challenge the seating of the regular Mississippi delegation, segregated, racist delegation from Mississippi in Atlantic City. We did go there and, as you know, the highlight of that whole thing was Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony before the credentials committee of the National Democratic Party.

Charles McLaurin (80)

All those people understood that the right to vote was tied to the right to live and die. We all knew somebody who had been killed for the right to vote, and they all knew that they were risking everything they had by going publicly. You can't be any more public than that. You're going to take on the Democratic Party. You've got to remember, at that time, there was no Republican Party in Mississippi. There was no Republican Party in the South. So you're taking on the most—and we did it. And then we forced a situation where it took Lyndon Johnson himself to stop us. And I'm rather proud of that, see, because I'm—he had to exert everything he had control of. There were twenty-five FBI agents that had infiltrated that delegation—

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

I think the most compelling story that I heard when I came, first as a volunteer in the training, was the story of Mrs. Hamer being beaten and, in a sense, the sheriff telling two black prisoners that they had to beat her or they would be beaten. This terrible kind of—she walked with a limp, . . . but the power of her rhetoric and the power of her commitment. She had been, kind of, the accountant on a plantation. When she got involved, they just told her, get out of here. So I'm—if you're, for some people, this is Gandhi. You know? They would be stunned if they got to be where Gandhi's ashes were scattered or Dr. King. For me, Fannie Lou Hamer is all of that. Being famous does not mean—and she's certainly well-known—there are many giants that stride this earth, and only a few of them are found by the camera.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

Mrs. Hamer, I admired her, the way she just left off of that plantation and didn't look back. The best thing they could have done was to let her vote and kept her on that plantation, because she came off of that plantation and brought the world, got the world's attention about what was going on.

Margaret Block (6B)

I got elected as Chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party because I worked very closely with Fannie Lou Hamer, Peggy Jean Connor, Victoria Gray, and Annie Devine. Those are the women who supported me. I ran against Aaron Henry and Leslie Macklemore, but they were the key to getting me in there. And I knew, very, very—why? Because I worked with each one of them, and each one of them understood that my idea of the Freedom

Democratic Party was that it would be a long time. That Atlantic City would be something we did, but that would be just the beginning.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)



24. Campaign posters for two Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party(MFDP) candidates, Aaron Henry and Fannie Lou Hamer. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

And sometimes you'd be out in the country and you're talking to these old people who couldn't read. But they knew something was happening. And you know, they'd say, I've been waiting for this day! So you had moments like that. But the other thing that we were embroiled in was with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. With really nothing, they had done a remarkable job of organizing the community in that they were trying to follow the way that the Democrat Party was supposed to be. You know, we were not a primary state, we were a caucus state, where you have your precinct caucus, your town, city, whatever, city caucus, and then your county, and then your district, No, on to the state. And that's how you elected your delegates to the convention. So they were organized that way.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

Anyone who is aggrieved under Section Five can bring a Section Five case. This changes the whole way lawyers are practicing throughout the South, because we win that Supreme Court decision eight to one. It broadens Section Five and covers everything from moving polling places to requirements for candidates. It does away with all literacy tests, and it says very clearly, you either pre-clear, you litigate, or it's unconstitutional. They're null and void. Which meant that the state of Mississippi had passed twenty-four laws to get under the coverage of the Voting Rights Act. I'd gone to jail, I'd gotten twelve hundred other people

to go to jail with me to prevent them from the doing that, but the Supreme Court overturned every one of those cases. So, we learned that the—that the Voting Rights Act was a powerful weapon.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

But there was a song that we used to sing that [Fanie Lou Hamer] would sing, and I hear it all the time in my soul. *I'm going to do what the spirit say do*. And that was, to me, when she would say, I'm going to do what the spirit say do, I'll go to jail if the spirit say go, I'll go to hell if the spirit say go—see, this was commitment. That was commitment to me, and I learned that song. That has been my commitment, is that I do what the spirit say do. So, because she taught me so well, simply by being who she was—I was now a protégé, and she taught me line by line. But, what she taught me is how she carried herself. She taught me about what she stood for. She taught me about the fact that she was not afraid to be who she was and she was not afraid to say what she had to say. It cost a lot. I know it cost a lot. It cost her her life, in fact. This is why I think that those of us who are left, we have a job to do.

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)



25. Lawrence Guyot, civil rights activist, stands and addresses a seated group. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

So, when I step off the scene, when others step off the scene, then you have peoples that are qualified, peoples that are anxious to carry on what has been started. And, if Ms. Hamer had had—she did have—but if she had peoples around her that was concerned about carrying on what she stood for, then automatically, Ruleville would be more enhanced with

the things that she was doing. Because she would bring clothes, she would bring in—needs, whatever the peoples' needs were, she tried to address.

Hattie Jordan (60)

And what we got, instead, was the most beautiful language ever written, called Section Five of the Voting Rights Act. Section Five, as you remember, very simple. It's the most powerful language in civil rights history. It says, any covered political subdivision, if the state wants to change any law that has to do with voting, that has the possibility of diluting the vote, they must either submit that for pre-clearance to the Department of Justice or they must litigate it on the merits in the Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia only.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

I was married that summer and, after I was married, my wife and I went on our honeymoon, you might say, almost, to Mississippi. And we're assigned to be Freedom School teachers in Indianola. It was the tail end of the summer. People were leaving and there was a question, big question is, what to do now after the Freedom Democratic Party challenge? People coming back, coming home, many of them—at least, the ones I met—both tremendously energized and, at the same time, saddened and disturbed because they didn't want to take just two seats, as Mrs. Hamer said. We didn't come here for just two seats.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

We had sixty-eight members of the delegation, and all sixty-eight members of that delegation voted. Fannie Lou Hamer did not make the decision alone. The delegation made the decision, but Mrs. Hamer was the backbone of it, because they met with her and tried to get her to change; to accept what they told us was a compromise. To accept three seats, at large, representing no state in the United States; nobody told us whether these people were going to be seated on the floor or whether they're going to be seated in Alaska someplace [laughter]. Mrs. Hamer said, we did not come here for that, for three seats. We're all tired and we want the whole thing. Of course, we did not unseat the regular Mississippi delegation in 1964, but we did get rule changes; changes that affect both the Democratic and the Republican parties and broadened the base of participation for people around this country.

Charles McLaurin (80)

So, I am convinced that what kept the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party so powerful, so committed to local people and so committed to group decision-making was, it comes out of SNCC. When SNCC was at its best, there was no such thing as hierarchy or criteria. There were no—you didn't get roses and you weren't fettered for who you were or what you were, it's what you were doing. If you could get it, go in to a town and organize it, and if you could get people to take on attempts to register to vote, you were treated as a—you were rewarded for that, okay? But it wasn't like a, well, you know, your daddy's an author, a professor, and somehow—no, no, we didn't have that kind of hierarchy. Our hierarchy

"I Never Will Forget" 74

was who is doing the most to empower people. And we believed very strongly that anyone had the right to empower anyone else. We believed that empowerment was as satisfying as sex and as addictive as crack. We also knew that no movement had ever succeeded without it. We couldn't just ask people to risk their lives unless they were risking their lives for a higher purpose, even of themselves.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

THE DEADLY SERIOUSNESS OF MISSISSIPPI

The majority of the Delta's white residents resented the outsiders who were attempting to shift the power dynamic in Mississippi. Members of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council often overlapped with members of local law enforcement, resulting in a lack of trust between the civil rights workers and the police. Retaliation took the form of harassment, beatings, drive-by shootings, and fire bombings. FBI agents were stationed throughout the Delta to monitor the activities of civil rights organizers and white supremacists alike. Four civil rights workers and three black Mississippians were killed throughout the duration of Freedom Summer. 1,062 people were arrested, 80 volunteers were beaten, and four people were critically wounded. 37 churches and 30 black homes were bombed or burned.¹⁴ Most civil rights era campaigns emphasized non-violent direct action, but in Mississippi, many activists relied on armed self-defense as a means of survival.

I hadn't been taught to be nonviolent. I was taught to protect myself. I just couldn't imagine me allowing somebody to beat me over the head with an axe handle just 'cause they enjoyed it. So, I stayed away from the marches and the demonstrations, but I attended meetings and assisted other ways. My wife testified to a fellow in court two times in order for the city and the county, for the government to get a case against the city and the county for school integration and the voter registration. So, as a result, I had to sit up and guard my house at night, keeping them from burning it down and stuff like that. I was involved. But I didn't march or demonstrate because I believe in self-protection.

Dorsey White (50A)

I didn't never believe in nonviolence. I wasn't going to hit nobody or start nothing, but I was not going to be a recipient of a bullet or something and not try to defend myself. My father and them always taught us that self-defense is the first law of nature. Yeah. Then I used to have me a little switchblade knife. I kept it in the pocket of my skirts or whatever I had on, and I knew how to pull it out. I was going to stick a sheriff in the eye one day over there in Tallahatchie County. Mmm-hmm. Because he said what he was going to do to me, and I told him I will get you before you get me. And when I popped that knife, at that time,

¹⁴ McAdam, Doug (1988). *Freedom Summer*. Oxford University Press.

we was at the courthouse, so the Justice Department was watching the whole thing, John Doar. So they came up there and they told me to go back over here, and I went, well, you just saved his life. Mmm-hmm, I wasn't going to take it [laughter].

Margaret Block (6A)

Linda [Seese] went into the restroom and I was on the couch and I heard, boom. She stepped out of the bathroom and let out a yell. She said, we're on fire, and they'd thrown a Molotov cocktail through the window into my bed. I grabbed the fire extinguisher and ran there, and my bed and the floor was aflame with gasoline. The fire extinguisher would do nothing. So I yelled for everyone to get out, and by that time the smoke—the black smoke—we had to leave like that. We got Mrs. Magruder into her bath robe and got her out, she owned the house. Wilton, who was here, her nephew, we all got out. Then I ran back in because I had my jacket and my father's World War II Bible that he had carried through the war, and I got it. It's been forty-five years, it still gets me emotional.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

The fire engines came, and I heard somebody yell, they got the Freedom House, which was around a little curlicue, which, it was a little house that we used as our office and for volunteers to stay in. They bombed that, too. The Molotov cocktail came through the window and some poor little Oberlin student was in his sleeping bag and it landed on his sleeping bag and started the flame.

Bright Winn (3)



26. A woman stands in the foreground looking at the camera, while behind her two law enforcement officers wearing helmets examine protestors during a Freedom Summer protest outside a Woolworth's department store. 1964.

Wisconsin Historical Society.

Yeah, we had a shootout. It was August the 7th, 1964. We had taken the Brewer Brothers from Sharkey Road, which was out from Glendora, the farmers. We had taken them over to Charleston to the courthouse to vote, and we expected trouble because we knew those people over – that was one of the strongholds of the Klan, too, was Tallahatchie County . . . So when they came, when these Klan came down there at night, we were out in the country and we was on this farm and it was one long road. When we came out from the country, they was gonna shoot at us. I mean, when we came back, they came down through the road, they was gonna shoot at us and they were so surprised when we shot at them first. They took off. We had our spotlights. This lady named Ms. Elsie Brewer, she turned on a big ol' spotlight, turned it on, and they didn't know what to think of, and when we shot at them, we didn't hear nothing else from them. They would harass us on the radio and stuff, but we didn't hear anything else about them coming out there to shoot nobody. Because we let them know that we were fully prepared to shoot it out with them. We even made Molotov cocktails.

Margaret Block (6A)

This is a three-cell jail with a holding cell that is not as big as most people's garage—in this town, not even in another town—meaning that this can only have been a hundred and ten to a hundred and fifteen degrees when people were in there. It tells you the conditions. And we talk about them for civil rights workers—here was the conditions of every weekend for people who were black and might be on the streets too late at night or might be whatever the reason. As Charles was saying, plantation owners used to call ahead and say, don't let them out till Sunday night, I'll need them in the morning.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

As far as spying on a regular basis, I don't know that there was somebody doing that. I mean, later on, you know, we looked at my Sovereignty Commission file. It was, in my case, kind of stupid, they were a little overly preoccupied with who I might be going with, or something like that. That was a big preoccupation with the white folks.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

So, I calmed that down and ran to Giles's. Well, as a matter of fact, I grabbed a kid's bicycle and I pedaled to Giles's. Giles was there and he had, by now, suppressed his fire. It all landed in one area, and when the fire department came, he denied them entrance. He wouldn't let the firemen in, all-white. He said, I'll fight my own fire, and he did.

Bright Winn (3)

The sheriff came around and said, what the hell are you doing? Wouldn't even get out of the car. We said, we're just sitting here keeping warm. He knew who we were. He just drove off, and when he drove off Otis and I put the fire out and crawled under the car. The car was on a ditch alongside the road. I parked it so that there was a big opening underneath. We crawled under there, and the whole white section of Inverness came cruising around, looking for us, driving all the way through. When they got past us we got out from under

the car and went into the middle of a sewer field. It smelled like hell, and we laid between the furrows. The furrows were like, that high. We were laying down in the sewage, but out in the middle of the field. Nobody wanted to walk in the sewer water, and they put their searchlights out but they couldn't see us because the furrows were a little bit higher than we were. We stayed out there for a while until they finally gave up and went home, and we crawled over to an old man's house.

Allen Cooper (1)

I was the first person out there. I was working all by myself. So, one day I came home, Mrs. Brewer asked me, what does SNCC mean? I told her, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She pulled that big old rifle from behind her chair and she said, shit, we ain't—I mean, they ain't nonviolent.

Margaret Block (6A)

At one time a bomb was thrown over to our office, but they were so far away they couldn't get there, and it was just in our driveway, so we saw it the next day. They made bombs out of Coke bottles and some kind of rag, and gasoline. Usually they'd get drinks from the country club, which was not that far from there. They'd make 'em there. But they had to be, like, a street away and throw 'em over a row of houses. So they weren't that good. And so that was the only way they got to bomb the office. But they couldn't go down there without us seeing them. So if you were by the store you could see 'em. You knew what was going on.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)



27. A line of protestors outside of a Woolworth's department store during Freedom Summer hold signs while law enforcement officers stand nearby. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

Now, one time – that's the time when Stokely [Carmichael] was out on the project with me out there in Tallahatchie, and Stokely going to tell me, we gonna make some Molotov cocktails, we gotta go to town to the gas station, and I'm going, mmm-hmm. He's telling me, gimme the cash money, we makin' Molotov cocktails tonight, and I'm looking at him, never have been nowhere but to Chicago and Memphis and Jackson all my growing up years, and I'm lookin' at him. Pretty soon I went, Stokely, I don't drink, and I don't want no cocktail. I thought he was talking about something to drink. I knew what a cocktail was, but he's talking about the Molotov cocktails.

Margaret Block (6A)

Yeah. We didn't have a place to meet, so then we had to meet—we could still meet out in the open, but classes pretty much ground to a halt except the ones I mentioned with the older people, about the sort of visionary classes. I'm sure we met in people's living rooms or . . . and then, I can't remember where we sort of set up shop after that. It seemed like the people—it didn't really, I don't feel like it hurt the spirit. If anything, it helped. You know? People were more . . . by that time, people were either in or out, and if they were in, they were more determined then.

Linda Seese (23)

And, see, the worst, the most dangerous person in our area, really, [the police would] get the black person to do stuff. That's what your problem was. You didn't have to worry about anybody running down the street with a hood on. You had to worry about the black [informant]. Well, in our case we knew who it was. It was Pogey Slim, Nathaniel Jack, who was the black policeman. And he was the one who did stuff. And he was on the police force. And so when Police Slim would drive by your house at night, you know, you better be careful!

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

At times, I would have to go to SNCC people, I'd say, wait, no, you can't drive to Jackson like that, you know better. Black people in one seat, white people in another. You folks are driving off integrated, you can't do that. Black and white could not ride together because, as soon as you do, people know. No Mississippians drove integrated. If it was an integrated car, it was always separate. I'd have to catch our own people and say, don't do that.

Bright Winn (11C)

So, I'm naïve, wondering where in the world [the police] are going to take us, you know? So, by that time, some kids who had heard about arresting us, they got one of the girls' cars that had stayed on campus, and they followed. Somebody said, if we go down old rural road, I know where they're taking us. I said, well, where are they taking us? I'm not going to say—oh, no. They took us to Parchman Penitentiary. They said that's the only place they had some room. Excuse me. The only place they had some room at Parchman Penitentiary was in maximum security, and that's where, you know, they got the people on death row. But they were on one side, and they had us on the other side of the wall. There

was—I can't think of his name, but there was a young warden there, a white warden. He said that I didn't want them to bring you all here, but since you are here, we're going to make your stay as comfortable as possible. Well, how comfortable can you be?

Jennifer Buckner (68)

They nearly killed seven people in one attack. Mrs. Magruder's house? That's Stacy [White]'s grandmother, one part of Stacy's family, and they burned that. They hit it with Molotov cocktails on all sides, and a whole bunch of people were asleep inside, but luckily got out. Boy, it burned to the ground. I took pictures of it, Stacy has them. In a box, the camera was in a cardboard box so it didn't look like a camera, and I took pictures during the fire and after the fire. People disappeared, never seen again. I remember a family, I can't remember the name of the family now but they were in the Neshoba county. A family of like four or five, a young family. They were all involved in the movement, all of them, and the whole family disappeared. There was a meal on the stove, a car was parked outside. There was a family living within a couple of blocks in the black community. Gone, just gone. When they were looking for Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, they found the bodies of eight black men that had been tortured and killed.

Allen Cooper (1)

But then, the night of the shootout, they were making Molotov cocktails, and Ms. Brewer was in the kitchen, too, trying to pour the gas in the bottles. Her hands were shaking and she was wasting gas everywhere. I'm going, okay [laughter]. Ed Brown was looking at me, and he says, do you know, if she had set this house on fire, they'd have swore the Klan killed us, burned us out, and it would have been Mr. Brewer wasting all this gas up in here.

Margaret Block (6B)

One of the things that was a moment of success for me—Dr. Stacy White and I, about ten years ago, were driving out of Greenville and we went up into the hill country, because she wanted to show me a blues house. But, in the hills country? I'm sorry, that's Klan territory: weeping willows and the kudzu and the roads going like this, and my, distances between—I was scared. I was a civil rights workers by thirty-five or forty years, I was scared. Here we are, riding in an integrated car. Now, Dr. White—who had been a little girl [during the movement]—and I finally said to her, are you scared? She looked at me, she said, why? That speaks volumes. You know? We're driving through Klan territory, or what was, and she's not at all scared. She's a citizen driving through a portion of her state, and violence is not a factor. Great. So, it's two sides of the fence, though, as to what is great and what's yet to become great.

Bright Winn (11C)

And with everyone, the other whites who—three other whites confined there who were talking about the damn Freedom Riders. I passed myself off, I had some—I didn't look like a typical Freedom Rider. At that time, my hair was short. I didn't have a beard, I didn't have a mustache. I was wearing—I think I had a Army Surplus or military fatigues and a light military jacket, something. So I kind of passed, I believe, I passed myself off—as what, I

cannot remember. But I remained silent, particularly whenever the local—it wasn't the Chief of Police who came to see how everybody was doing, I think it was Sheriff, it was Bill Hollowell. He would come and not even blink at me, but he knew who I was, and I think, from what I learned about Hollowell later on since, he had FBI training and was supposed to represent this new, more, what can we say? Responsible breed of Mississippi lawmen, believe it or not.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)

At that time, I had left SCLC and was working for SNCC. I came and was going around to people—I noticed every time they'd see me coming and go in the house and close the door, and they didn't have air conditioners. It was extremely hot [laughter]. But I kept going. I went, oh, they're just scared. I'm going to keep on. If they see me every day, then they'll come, they'll start talking. The third day I was there, somebody came and found me and told me I got to run back over to the funeral home. I'm going, what happened? Where? I got there, everybody's sitting up there looking so crazy, and I'm going, damn, what I do? [Laughter] But the Klan had put the word out that they were going to get me. I had to get in the back of that hearse and go out on Creek Road with Ms. [Birdia] Keglal until somebody from the Greenwood office came and picked me up.

Margaret Block (6C)



28. A man stands inside the ruins of a church building in McComb, MS. 1965. *Wisconsin Historical Society.*

I mean, I couldn't see a white person down here without—I wouldn't even go on the white part of town. That's the only time in my life I had long hair, because all the blacks would say—I'd say, cut my hair. No, I can't deal with white people's hair. I said, well, I'm not going over there [laughter]. They'll cut my neck.

Linda Seese (23)

I was at the meeting that night, and we saw an airplane flying around and everything. I don't know, lucky they didn't drop the bomb or whatever on us while we were there, but about an hour or so after we left—and we left there about 10:30, we heard fire whistles and things blowing. I said, mm. I wonder where that's at. And see, Baptist school really wasn't too far from where we lived, less than a mile. I got up and went out there and got in the car and just made a circle, going to go up through town and see what could I see. I saw the Baptist school on fire. I didn't know Mrs. Magruder's house had been burned till the next morning; neither did I know Mr. Giles' store had got burned until the next morning. But I knew the Baptist school had been burned.

Elmo Proctor (27B)



29. A photograph showing what appears to be a demonstration of non-violence techniques. Photographs in this collection credited to Danny Lyon. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

And so the only way to go to our office was to go past the Ford store. So if we had enough people, we kept a guard person at the office and one at the store, when we had the full staff during the summer of [19]65, we had several people up. And Otis's rule was, you had to be there from twelve to four. Anything that happened was gonna happen then, if it didn't happen then, it wasn't gonna happen. You'd go to bed at four o'clock in the morning. So I took my turn. And he took us out on a shooting range, and we'd practice shooting, and I realized that I didn't like handguns at all. So I had a rifle, we sat in the car and I had the rifle

down in the back seat of the station wagon, and sometimes I would just do it from twelve to two, and somebody else would relieve me from two to four, and sometimes I'd just go from twelve to four.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

They had said to us not to go to the COFO office—we were with COFO—and they told us not to go to the COFO office, because of the threat of the Ku Klux Klan being in town. We were getting ready for the rally in the evening. So, I had gone to my friend's house, and I didn't know that they had said not go to the COFO office. I was walking down the street and these two guys, these two white guys with rifles on the back of their truck, started to follow me. You know, one of the things is that you can go up on somebody's porch and pretend that you're going in the house and that would deter them, so that's what I did. I went and put my hand on the knob and pretended I was going in the house, but the door was locked, so I couldn't open the door. I stayed there and they went around the corner and I ran around the back of the house, but I went on to the COFO office, and I went inside. There wasn't anybody there. So, I decided that I was just going to sit there, and somebody came and said, you're not supposed to be here, because the Klan is in town. You have to get out of the office. Now, I'm not even afraid; I'm trying to take a nap, you know?

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)

You knew, I explained it, this was a police state, they had a certain vested interest in you not succeeding, and they were trying to sabotage whatever you did, and ultimately their last-ditch thing would be to kill you. Now, as to whether they had a full-scale plan to eliminate all of us all the time, no. It turned out, Otis, they really did target Otis. But it was kinda funny, you had funny little things like this, where you'd have people, snitches, I mean, white snitches, who would say, you know, just call on the phone real quick and tell him, don't go to a certain place, and he listened. And he doesn't know exactly who it was, but it kept him alive.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

And other civil rights workers are outside, and a car full of white men pulled up and they jumped out and they started beating—I think it was beating Charlie Scattergood, and the FBI just sat in their car. I was standing next to their car and I was saying, do something about it, and they said, this is not in our jurisdiction. That was a very radicalizing moment for me, because I went down there, it was to teach reading and to make a statement, and I felt that with a moral statement, people could be educated and the federal government would step in when they realized that all these things were wrong down here and make things right. Then, at that moment, I realized that the federal government was part of the problem and I could no longer look to them to be part of the solution.

Karen Jo Koonan (30)

Dr. Bowell, Reverend Lee . . . a few of the blacks that wasn't afraid to come to the meeting. Well, I couldn't get there because I had a major examination that Saturday at college, and I told him I won't be able to get there. But that was the same Saturday that there was a

bunch of white people out, I'm pretty sure they were Ku Klux Klan, because I wasn't down there, Dr. Howell just told me about it. They came up with shotguns and just blasted Reverend Lee right there on the courthouse steps. Dr. Howell, he was showing me where he had about three pellets of a shotgun hit him, because they're shooting at him. He said, I'm kind of glad you had an examination and you weren't with me, because you probably would have got killed.

Charles Featherstone (33)

Well, now, the White Citizens Council were the people that you saw every day; people who were merchants, preachers, and all kinds of people. The Klan would be henchmen. See, you have to understand the difference. The difference is that, some of the people that you saw every day may have been in the Klan, but most of the people weren't. The Klan was their employees. They were the ones who did that work of making sure that people were fearful and that they didn't step over the boundaries that they had set for them. But the Council were the people who gave orders to the Klan. See, we have to understand that there was a real difference. Not everyone in the Klan was a councilman, you see? But the Klansmen could be a councilman. You see, there's a real difference, to me, that those people who ran certain businesses were not the people on those horses and with their heads covered up. Some of them maybe have been, but most of them were not. They were the people that you see every day, smiling at you in the particular businesses. You may be paying your rent to them, you may be buying your cars from them, you may be buying your groceries from them, you see?

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)



30. 'Greenwood, Mississippi, March 1963.' Originally printed in the SNCC pamphlet entitled, 'A Chronology of Violence and Intimidation in Mississippi since 1961.' by Jack Minnis. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

I was on when [Killens] was tried for the killing of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman. The Attorney General of Mississippi and I were on *Court TV* together, talking nationally about this trial. He said, well, you know, anybody could have brought this case at any time. I said, that's just not true. You needed to have a climate in the state where people could sit down in a jury, listen to the facts, come up with an opinion, and not go home and expect crosses to be burning in front of their houses. We're past that. But the way we got past that was by changing the contours of who and what the electorate is.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

I finally did get nailed; I got ambushed in Inverness one morning. Otis Brown and I were—it was a Saturday, I'm almost positive. It's Saturday morning and it was quiet and we were driving over to Inverness to pick up a couple of people, we were going to have a meeting up in Ruleville or Drew, I can't remember which, organizing a union. We walked into this little converted house, a little shack. They sold cigarettes and coffee, sandwiches, stuff like that. The people we were picking up wouldn't look at us. We walked into the house in this building in Inverness, and they wouldn't look at us, wouldn't talk to us, they were looking down. I looked at Otis, Otis looked at me, and I said, oh shit. Something's coming down. We went outside and there they were. It's like they came out of an apparition, Jesus came. Except it wasn't Jesus. Whoever Jesus is, by the way. Otis made a break for it, and got through and ran, and I didn't. They axe-handled me for a while, busted up my right knee pretty bad, fractured my skull right here along that line. I lost a kidney, and fractured my wrist. I was pissing blood for about six weeks. After the beating I kind of lost my nerve, took the steam out of me for a while. By that time I was pretty messed up anyway. It's like living in a state of terror all the time.

Allen Cooper (1)

Well, we called for a mass meeting. They've done a hit to us, we're going to rally, and we're going to yell and scream and make sure people didn't stay scared, because that was a very scary thing. So, we put a table out in front of this brick building, and we got a kerosene lamp. We lit it and people came. Of course, this was apropos; *This little light of mine*, we sang to a lamp and we made our speeches, the subject of the day, and whatnot. Well, all of a sudden we realize, there was about sixty cops surrounding us. They brought out the auxiliary because they thought we were going to riot because the Freedom School had been burned. Well, rioting or anything like that was the furthest thing from our mind, but they thought that.

Bright Winn (3)



Figure 31. Source: Jewish Currents, Mississippi Freedom Summer Fifty Years Later
<http://jewishcurrents.org/mississippi-freedom-summer-fifty-years-later-part-two-28099>

• 10 •

“I NEVER WILL FORGET”

By the end of the ten-week campaign known as Freedom Summer, volunteers felt weary, terrorized, and out-strategized at every turn. The Freedom House and the Freedom School in Sunflower County were leveled by overnight bombings. The leadership of SNCC was evolving, and many volunteers moved on to new campaigns. Freedom Summer brought attention to the persistence of Jim Crow segregation and racial violence in Mississippi. The struggle for justice in Mississippi contributed to the political momentum leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and helped birth new social movements across the country. Volunteers and Delta residents alike maintain that Freedom Summer activities were empowering for themselves and the communities in which they worked. In the 1980s and 1990s, Mississippi elected more black officials than any other state. Veterans of Freedom Summer went on to participate in numerous social movements throughout the world. Many continue to be community organizers, educators, and social justice activists.

It's very important to preserve the history because so many of our civil rights veterans are passing on, and when they pass on their stories pass along with them. So it's important to preserve their stories, and I think what you all are doing is a great, great service to us. Because the students need to know what took place many years ago, and that people came down, Freedom Summer volunteers and also local people who were active in the movement, in that they weren't always able to go to McDonald's and eat or ride in an airplane or sit in a restaurant. People paved the way to make this possible.

Stacy White (7)

I don't know, it's just, I'm the type of person who thinks that injustice in any form is wrong and I'm going to try to do something about it. If it's injustice, it's not good for the person that's perpetrating the racism, and it's not good for us that's on the receiving end, because the person that's perpetrating the racism, they are ignorant and they need to get an education. Then, on the other hand, we need to get an education. I'm not a leader. Somebody try to follow me, they're going to be in big-time trouble [laughter]. I don't consider myself a leader. I'm outspoken, and if I see something wrong, I'm going to say something about it, because that's my nature.

Margaret Block (6B)



32. An integrated group sing-along at a Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) function. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

I think it's like going to war, it's like going to Iraq now. You're scared, and much of you doesn't want to, because—and I think for young men—and you might have some relationship with this idea, at least—for young men, manhood, and have I got the nerve, and all that sort of stuff is a part of your life. In a sense, coming here is something that I felt was necessary; necessary for my soul and for the souls of my country. But more than that, there's some adventure to it. You're getting out of your hometown. You're getting out of Little Pond, Washington, into something. That it was history; it wasn't something recognized in the sense of, oh, you're off to do historical work, but that it was important work, and that I wanted to test my mettle against the deadly serious life of Mississippi. It's a long ways to come. To drive back through to Indianola and there's the beautiful museum, and then there's the boarded-up downtown. You want more for this place. And [John Louis's] speech reminded me that it is the last—the last mile of a marathon that's hard work, but if you don't keep going, you don't run the marathon. The civil rights struggle and my own struggles is the soul that we each are; means that you got to keep—what I took home, and what was worth coming for, was being determined that we need our soul in saving the soul of this nation. I don't think anybody who saves souls—and I'm not in that business—says, I'll stop, I done enough souls today. So, that's what I learned.

Dennis Flannigan (8)

One of the things that I think we as a people miss most is basically helping each other out. Because I can remember my parents canning pears and giving them to the neighbor up the street, and the neighbor up the street had some figs and they gave them—you know,

we swapped back and forth. So we were never without anything to eat, even though we swapped clothes. If you had some clothes that someone could wear, you passed them around in the neighborhood, and everybody in the neighborhood worked together.

John Tubbs (10)

If you just sit there and not say nothing, then you giving them your consent to do whatever it is they're doing. So I'm trying to tell all these young people, don't be apathetic about nothing, and live out loud. Let people know that you have a voice and you're going to express your opinions and you're going to fight for what you believe in. But make sure you pick the right fight. Don't just go around fighting, just nonsensical stuff.

Margaret Block (6D)

The passage of time is, again, a dichotomy. What we wanted—and we only understood—we thought, you get the vote, everything will be fine. We got the vote, and I'm very, very proud of that. We integrated public facilities, and I'm very proud of that. I'm disheartened that Mississippi's school system still is a segregated school system. I'm disheartened by the fact that black Mississippians do not have the access to economic vertical mobility to the point that I would like, but here, oh, my goodness. All of the cafes have black employees, the motel has black employees. This didn't happen. Black folks picked cotton, and that damn near was it.

Bright Winn (11C)

[My mother] would be thrilled to death. She would be thrilled to death. She would say, you know, all the work that we did has not been done in vain. You know, people died for this, I mean people went to jail for it, beat and all kinds of things. She would say, finally, we're seeing some of that work pay off, and we have to be thankful to our ancestors for what they did for us, and that's one reason I like to do work myself because there are others out there who have paved the way for me and I have to honor my ancestors. I'm obligated to honor my ancestors with giving back what I can give back, because somebody gave back so that I could have. So she would be thrilled to death.

Gloria Carter Dickerson (12)

I was elected on Fannie Lou Hamer's birthday the first time I was elected, and so it was a powerful day. It was a powerful movement. Being the first African American, and at the time, the youngest to ever be elected mayor in Greenville—I was elected when I was twenty-seven. It was a lot for people to take in all at one time.

Heather Hudson (17)

I had planned to go back home and go back to California at the end of the summer myself. And at the end of the summer, everybody else left. And I saw all the things that Otis was trying to do, and all the things that were still going on, and things hadn't changed that much. I mean, we still had all this stuff to do, all these people to register, the community center to build, and all these things going on, and I said, I couldn't leave all this on Otis,

and so I didn't go back home. Then I called my mother and told her to go to College of Marin and cancel my classes.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

Then, I walked into a Freedom House on Fillmore Street with my girlfriend, who was a black Mississippian and came home with me. I said, hi, my name is, and we've just come to Mississippi, and what are you guys doing and where can we fit in? They said, you can't. My heart was broken. I did not continue in the movement because I was told to get out of the movement, and in a very negative way. So there are things that I carried on in my life that were movement-bound.

Bright Winn (11C)

I know somebody told me one time, I was speaking wherever, but they told me I sound angry. Well, I am . . . I was somewhere, maybe in Cincinnati, wherever, but anyway, they told me I sound angry. A black lady walked up to me and told me I sound angry. I'm going, well, damn, when are you going to get angry?

Margaret Block (40)



33. A group sings freedom songs at the Freedom School Convention during Freedom Summer. 1964.

Wisconsin Historical Society.

There are more black women that are elected officials in Mississippi, especially in the Mississippi Delta, than any other state in the Union. In fact, at last count, there were twenty-three African American mayors in the state of Mississippi alone. So, you see, we bring a presence, but what does that say when we're the ones who are in leadership and in power, and people still suffer? What does it say about what we're doing and the setup that I believe—I do believe a conspiracy theory, if you will allow me to say such—for us to be in such harsh economic times but we're in and acting as elected officials. Healthcare in this particular region: we have the highest rate of heart disease, highest rate of diabetes, highest rate of high blood pressure in the Mississippi Delta than any other part of the state and the entire United States of America. Who does it impact? It impacts the African American community. So, as we talk about continued struggle and continued things that we need to do, it becomes now teaching this next generation about basic human rights and things that we know we should all be standing for. The fight and the struggle to get a good education and to be able to go to the schools—it's a shame when children don't go on a daily basis. The fight and the struggle to be able to go to any doctor that you wanted to go to, and now we can't even allow our people to go because they can't afford it. So the struggles that previously were based upon race have now been changed to economics. So, as the game has changed, so we must change also and learn what it is that we need to do. Learn that we have to continue to struggle, that we have to continue to fight. Learning what the new fight is and involving everybody in that. Your role in that is important and it's critical: that is to teach.

Heather Hudson (17)

Well, the movement itself gave me a greater understanding of justice, gave me a greater understanding of the need for equality. Gave me a greater respect for the individual and what we can do, the realization that just a few can make a little bit of a difference and a few more can make a greater difference. You know that *We, the People*, and in this democratic process we can make a difference. The movement itself did that to me, helped me along that road.

Bright Winn (11D)

I got a call at school and she said, Liz Aaronsohn, were you Liz Fusco in Indianola? My heart stopped because no one knew me in my new life in that way, but it was such a pivotal experience for me. Ever since that moment of talking to Stacy [White] on the phone I was very excited to come back. Then I started thinking about all the toes that I had stepped on and I called Stacy and I said, you know what Stacy? I'm reluctant to come because if a couple of people are coming whom I really know I gave pain to, I don't want them to have to suffer my presence. She said to me something that I knew in my head from Nelson Mandela, but I hadn't put together in terms of me. She said; you've been carrying that burden for forty years, we're a forgiving people. If those people are here, they will forgive you, and you come on down. So I just felt so welcomed, but it's been a pilgrimage to tell you the truth . . .

Liz Fusco Aaronsohn (21)



34. A group of men and women talk outside on the steps of a building and in the open doorway likely attending a mass meeting. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

[Charles Scattergood] was killed just before this idea was conceived, was carried out; this idea was to have a reunion of lives who came down and helped changed the Delta into the way it is now. He wanted to meet with some of his colleagues, some of them just get back together and possibly really, really energize things, because there was more work to be done that was sought, and his name was Charles Scattergood. My friend's name is Zellie Rainey Orr. She was married, her husband passed, so she and Charles got together and they got engaged. They were engaged to get married. One day, he was on his way home, got killed on the expressway in Atlanta, Georgia. She had moved to Atlanta, Georgia from California. She would often come back and talk and we would talk about different things, because when she was a young girl, a lot of us would be out singing Freedom Songs and follow the, roll around with the civil rights workers when we were trying to do it in the early [19]60s, as young teenagers. So, she carried out the plan after he got killed. She came down, she organized, she got with Stacey and I and Charles McLaurin, so we went online and looked up people, she would make phone calls and she did the research. She would come there and check on things and go back to Atlanta. She finally got the folk together, and some of it materialized. It's a great feeling, you know, because I remember these guys coming in and liberating us. It's a great joy to me and a comfort to me in my heart to help get these guys back together. It just seems like, you know, it's one big family that has the long lost brother, for guys to come back.

Foster King (20)

I had never been able to see it before I was in Mississippi. And when I came back to Mill Valley, and—yeah! This place is racist! And they're not even admitting it! At least Mississippi isn't fooling themselves [laughter]! So I felt more comfortable with the straight-up honesty of Mississippi. So, as I said, at the end of the summer of [19]65, I realized that I was not going anywhere. And that I was part of the movement and I wasn't able to extricate myself from it. So I didn't try.

Margaret Kibbee (16B)

There's a lot of work that has to be done in order for the next generation to understand just how important and how critical where we are today is and how easily it can be lost. That's the reason why we've done what we've done, and why we've worked in the areas in which we work. We could be anywhere in the world, but there is no place I'd rather be than in the Mississippi Delta. It's my home, I love it, and as the Bible says, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. We have been last for so long, I know it is now our time [laughter]. I just want to be there, I want to see it.

Heather Hudson (17)

Today, I stand before you as mayor of the city of Greenwood, Mississippi, where the hands that once picked cotton picked me as their mayor. Today, I stand boldly, fully aware of the importance and historical milestone of what my being elected mayor means to this organization, and others who sacrificed their lives for me to be where I am. Today, I boldly stand as the evidence of things not seen. During the 1960s, when the civil rights movement was launched, I was only five years old, growing up in Gulfport, Mississippi. Even at that age, I knew there were places I couldn't go, places where I could not eat, places and fountains where I could not drink.

Cheryl Perkins (18)

I want to share with you, to let you know how far we have come in Itta Bena. I grew up there. As a little girl—and I want to share this story with you so you will know why the tears are coming. As a little girl, growing up in that small municipality, one day my sister and I decided that we were going to go across the track. All of you understand, when you go across the track, you're in another world. Well, my sister and I decided that we were going to go across the track and look at the beautiful Christmas decorations. Of course, you know we were poor; didn't have those type of decorations. So we decided, oh, well, we're going to go across the track and look at all the beautiful Christmas decorations on the other side of town. Well, by the time we got over there and kind of toured around and got back across the railroad track, back to our side of town, the police officer stopped us. He said very harshly, what are you all doing across there? Of course, we're just shaking. My sister said, we're just across there looking at the Christmas decorations. He said, don't you ever, don't you ever let me catch you across there again. And when I think of that situation and I say to myself, you know, at that moment, God had already ordained me in my mother's womb that I would be the mayor of that entire city.

Thelma Collins (19)

And I think the other thing that got me about everything—once I got in Mississippi and I saw how things were working, and I saw that, I always felt like, well, if everybody knows how Mississippi is, then we're gonna do something about it. And then I realized that...they're not gonna do anything about it unless we make 'em. It's not a question of not knowing. You're just really gonna have to fight for everything you get. And I also realized that there was a pervasive racism that the country as a whole was not committed to ending. And they really liked the idea of, ooh, look at that awful Mississippi! I'm glad we're not like that! And – they were, you know? But it was different. But I could see it. And It's just like that with some people. You have a few people that gets a job done, and it was just a handful of them that came down and shook up the Delta, especially in Sunflower County. Now, they were strategically placed across the Mississippi Delta, and some of them in other states tried to accomplish the same goals. That's one of the reasons we brought Congressman John Lewis in. He was from the state of Georgia, working with Dr. King and others. But we felt it incumbent upon us to work with Zellie to help her make her endeavor come true, to bring back these guys together. Like I say, it's what one of their comrades, Charlie Scattergood, wanted to do, to bring back the guys that he'd worked with here in Sunflower County, to bring them together. Now, he has a housing complex named in his honor, all because of his fiancée, Zellie Rainey. She did this for her fiancée.

Foster King (20)

When I learned about John Brown, I said I think I'm going to be a John Brown. Fuck racism. I'm not going to do that. I think that's one of the factors for me was that discovery. Not taking it on as my own, because he did it, I didn't. But I can do something about it. My whole family is real straight, and they don't like me. So I built a family, a community, of my own based on friendship and struggle and working together. I've been operating as an ally all my life. I think allies are really important as a way of breaking down barriers between people. I never recall having serious problems with anybody, either white or black, in the movement here in Indianola. I worked in Ruleville a little bit, but mostly I worked in Indianola and Inverness.

Allen Cooper (1)

So it was a very exciting time in which I certainly grew a great deal, and getting some sense of how—what can I say? How difficult, not just social and political change is, but the enormous risks that some people are willing to take to make it happen. I mean, I think of Elmo [Proctor] in particular and then—whose job was on the line all during that period. I also viewed it from some of a historian's perspective and that—and yet, at the same time, I had certainly developed a sense of the costs of making a commitment to changing one's circumstances. We always said, well, we could leave; we could get up and go, and leave, and the folks who were really the movement couldn't. They were going to be having to deal with the same, to a large extent, the same kind of daily humiliation that they had known all their lives. And with, you know, behind that line; behind that oppression, there was enforcement of violence and, possibly, even possible death. And I do remember, in

particular, watching. You know, we watched Lyndon Johnson's "We Shall Overcome"—must have been Voting Rights Act speech—with a number of local people. We watched that speech on television—there weren't all that many television sets, as I recall, in Indianola. Certainly, not as much as I was accustomed to having around—and people expressing a great deal of skepticism.

Hershel Kaminsky (25)



35. A nighttime rally outside the Atlantic City Convention Hall in support of seating the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

Now, the movement did something else. We all may think of it as a civil rights movement, but it was more. Out of the civil rights movement came the equal opportunity thing, too. And, after civil rights blossomed, then the equal rights started to persist more. And who did it help? It helped the hundreds and hundreds of whites, especially women, as much as it did anybody else. And why people would complain about what's civil or equal or one thing another—when, as a whole, the movement helped the entire United States come to grips with itself and saw itself for what it really was.

Elmo Proctor (27A)

I feel very proud and privileged to be able to bring them in and see all this, and to give you some insight on what it was and what it's like now, and what it needs, to be state-enforced. Because a lot of our young people don't realize how well, just a few years ago—that what we did have, what we do have now. When I tell them about certain things, they say, wow. It baffles them. It really amazes them, just a few years ago, the things we had to deal with,

things our foreparents had to deal with. So, it's really pleasing to me and it's gratifying just to be able to bring them here, before this, and have the opportunity to let him witness this.

Foster King (20)

I've always taught to kids that I am a young, black man from the Delta of Mississippi, from a single-parent home, and I went from the cotton fields of Belzoni of Humphreys County all the way up where I could stand in the halls of the New York Stock Exchange. And, if I could do it, then the opportunity exists for everybody. Yeah, we had some hard times, but they were learning times, you know? I know now that it can be done.

Wardell Walton (106)

Community is everything, and that's what we have, and still have. Even people that weren't in it knew, had kind of a visceral sense of what the movement needs. I had friends that hung around on the periphery of the movement, and the reason they were hanging around is because we had community. We had each other's backs. When you've got each others backs, man, that means a lot. Trust is part of it, transparency and honesty, and all those good words. That's what community is, that's what community was. It was a mutual support system, a network coalition alliance, however you want to describe it.

Allen Cooper (1)

The Medgar Evers case, and other cases—recently, Belzoni, people going back that have been murdered thirty-some years and they trying to bring old folks to trial now, that's history in the past coming back to haunt them [laughter]. Coming back to haunt them. And my history—when I look back at my history, I look at a well-spent life. I did something worthwhile.

Leon Minniefield (32)

He asked me the question, how did I feel teaching white children? I told him, I didn't teach color. I taught science. Which was a real short answer to him, because he wasn't used to black folks making no kind of statements. He was real upset about it, but he had to live with that. I told him, I don't teach color; I teach biology, which is good for me and you.

Charles Scott (34)

And if someone should happen to fail in his quest for knowledge, don't down that person. If there's any way you can reach out and lend that person a helping hand, do that; Because, after all, we're all just plain human beings. All of us have different callings. All of us are made up differently to do certain things. And it's just a chain, where everybody depends on everybody else. The doctor, the lawyer, the shoemaker, the man that tilled the soil. We're all just one segment that's working in a chain and, when the chain breaks and leave out any one segment of it, it refuse to be as long a chain as it was.

Elmo Proctor (27A)



36. The Mt. Zion church burned down on June 17, 1964, prompting Freedom Summer volunteers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner to travel to view the remains. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

This is the most important part of our history. The blues isn't. It's right up there with the Emancipation Proclamation, just what we did. They decided that they're going to create a Blues Trail, and that's to exploit the blues music now. Because I remember, back in the day, when they called it race music and wouldn't play it on the radio. Now, it's the most popular kind of music that's in Mississippi. That's because they can exploit it and make money off of tourism, off of it.

Margaret Block (37A)

I'm interested in it today because we still in the same position that we was in forty, fifty years ago. We still can't get the—banks won't do nothing for us, we can't get no money from the banks, we can't get no help from nobody. We can't get no help, period, from the government, from nobody else. For one reason, it's because it's not fair. What people do is not fair. The people that controlling the money, the people that have the money, they ain't being fair. I think, until folks that's running our system want to do better and to improve our system, you're going to need somebody struggling and doing what they're supposed to do.

Lee Roy Carter (39)

Well, we still have a long way to go; a real long way to go. The only thing we can do right now is to make these bridges we've built stay there, because there's a still a fundamental, underlying cause of social and economic differences. When you got any—well, you studied sociology, I'm sure, haven't you? When you've got two groups, if they don't have any

interaction, they form their own little sets of rules and stuff. You've got two different cultures operating here, basically, even though they share some fundamental things, you got two different cultures. I don't care what culture it is, there's always going to be tension.

Margaret Block (37A)

We've got progress. We've got a lot of problems here. I mean, it's one of the poorest places in the nation; the economy is bad. Primary source of income has always been government transfer funds, and you still got this divide between some sections of the black community and some sections of the white community, who don't always think before they do or say.

David Rushing (41)

So, we have to carry on this whole idea of equality, that all of us are equal and there's no inequality in God. If we allow ourselves to continue to feel or act inferior, then we're allowing the inequality that doesn't really exist, to exist.

Tommie Novick Lunsford (43)

Of course, you know, Boys and Girls [Club], our motive is to make a difference; to make our children feel at home, safe in that, and make them aware of the opportunities that are presented. We want them to be positive citizens, and that's what I'm doing as of today. I retired from the area director, but I'm still working with Boys and Girls Club in Leflore County. If I can make it to a facility where children are—I'm a diabetic, and some days, now, I really have some bad days, but my worst day, if I can make it to a facility, and those babies come in running, hey, Mr. Nance, hey, Mr. Nance, I promise, it's just like insulin to me. I just pop right back. I'm ready to work.

Benjamin Nance (46)

I have read every civil rights thing that you could think of, was always in Chicago, I was always in some kind of meeting with Dr. King or Jesse Jackson, I'm a member of PUSH and stuff like that. I always think about when I come back home. There were times—I've never really been scared. In [19]65, I came home, my grandmother died and my three kids, we sat right on the front of the bus. The bus driver said to me, you cannot sit that close, the children might get hurt. You know, I'm sitting right behind him. I says, I'll watch them. They won't get hurt. We're the only black people on the bus, 1965. My oldest son says, Mom, why are they staring at us like that? They're staring at us because the civil rights thing had just started to happening, and they didn't feel like we should have been sitting there, that I was being militant.

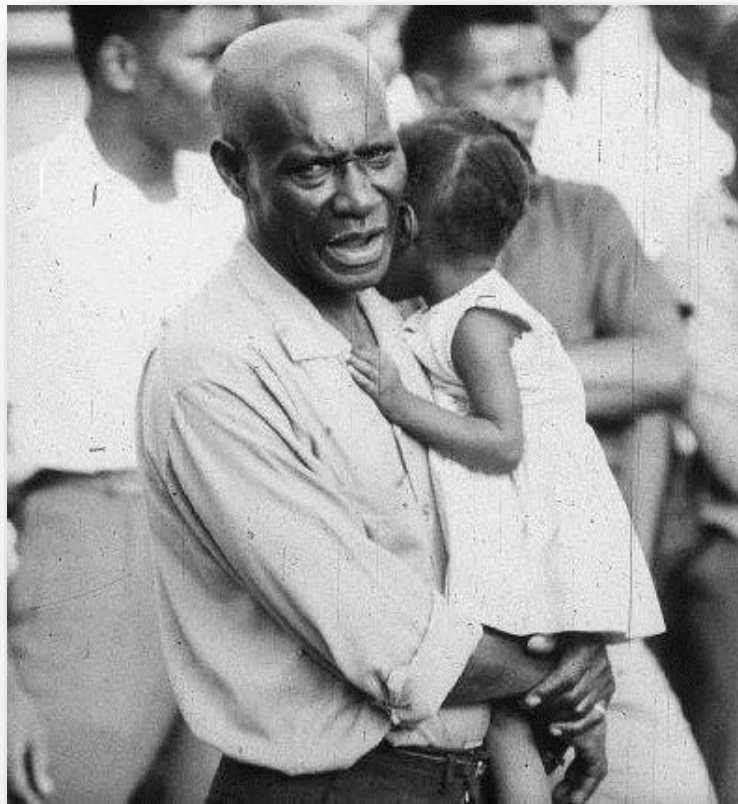
Lilly Lavallais (47)

I hope, and I can tell you, as well as the board, we are so hoping that a civil rights trail is equal, or maybe even better to the Blues Trail, is formed and becomes successful. It just will bring more people to the Delta to see, to learn about the history of the Delta, and hopefully to help the Delta. Because things are still sad here. There's still a long ways to go.

James Abbott (48)

Now, the things that's happening now, I never thought that I would be around to see it, especially with our president. I never thought that I would live to see a black president, you know? But I wish now that a lot of my parents and older people could see this. This is the way it should be. I don't care what color a person's skin is, you still have morals and values and stuff, and want to be treated to the best that you can be. Right now, I ride through the country and stuff, see a lot of things. My dad was a sharecropper and I worked on a farm all my life; a lot of hard work. Now, my younger siblings, we put them through college and stuff, through school. Now, my kids, now, is out of school. I'm sixty-three years old, and I knew the change is going to have to come, where education is the key to everything.

McKinley Mack (52)



37. A man holds a young girl in his arms. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

We can talk about the justice system when it comes to crack cocaine versus powder cocaine. They have a stiffer sentence for black men that's selling crack cocaine—all of it is poison, but they're sentencing a black man to jail way, I mean, a long time, and white men, whoever the drug dealers are that's selling powder cocaine, get off sometimes on probation and community service. It's still going on. We can talk about the juvenile justice system, because I work with the juvenile center for justice out of Jackson. It's bad when a country is going to build jail cells around black boys. If they can't read by the time they in the third grade, then that's how they're building their new jail cells; that's how they're estimating how many jail cells they're going to need in the future. Something is wrong with a country that say they're

all democratic and you got freedom. If one injustice might not affect you or you, but it's going to affect the whole community after a while, because don't think that you're immune to it. It can happen to you anytime and anybody.

Margaret Block (40)

[My family was] scared to death. One time, now, earlier, I left this out—I left and moved to Ohio because, at the time, the Klansmen came down to burn the house down, my dad and one of my other brother's screened in porch. They came at night, around three o'clock in the morning, to burn the house down. Just happened they was out there on the porch and saw them. Then, the next morning, police came down and saw they little old bottles of gas with the thing in it, to throw it, but nothing was ever done about it. So I said to myself, the best thing for me to do to keep my family from being hurt is just to leave for a while. So, that's why I left . . . I stayed there seventeen years, but I never forgot about what I was doing here.

McKinley Mack (52)

I think a lot of things that happened should not have happened—that's on both sides—that should have not have happened. Like, it's all hearsay, because like I say, I've never been involved. I was born in [19]62, and I had to be a little girl to know exactly what was coming. I just didn't appreciate, after hearing what went on, I just didn't appreciate it. No, I did not get angry; I questioned why all this had to happen, why all this had to happen. We all stayed in the same town. Why did this have to happen?

Mary White (53)

I think Ruleville people do not appreciate or do not know Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer as they should know her. People like you know her and what she has done. But, as Jesus said, you get no honor where? At home. Peoples at home don't honor you like peoples away. So, we want to educate the young people about what Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer has done. What we want to focus on would be, what? Housing. Because, as you know, it is said that those houses in this area, down Fannie Lou Hamer and adjacent to that, that she donated the first two hundred dollars to help those people get lots. Another emphasis, as she emphasized, would be economic growth. You may not know, but at first, she had a little garment factory down to Doddsville, where any individual would go and sew. So, they would teach individuals how to work. The Freedom Farm, which was land that she had—and that gravesite is a part of Freedom Farm land—that she would raise gardens, she would raise pigs and hogs, as we called them, and it is said that she would give you a female and a male pig and you raise it. Then, when the pigs reproduce, then you would give back to the pig farm. So, she fed individuals. Another thing that we would focus on would be education. The Fannie Lou Hamer Daycare is still here. So, she emphasized education. I think that she is probably responsible for Ruleville Central High staying the high school and not the Junior High, 'cause she fought for education. So, we emphasized education. Last but not least, political involvement. As you know, she believed in voter registration and she believed that, if you could vote, then you had a part in the political system. She emphasized

voting. And I just wonder, what accomplishments have we made to quality political advancement.

Hattie Jordan (60)

Whether you can read or write or not, you can organize. That, when you get people operating in their self-interest, that's one of the greatest motivators that there is, and that it is impossible to find people, to get them to do something that doesn't change them forever. You like the old saying that you can't step in the same river? Well, once a person makes something happen, they're different from the person they used to be the day before. The day after they make something happen, they look around and say, well, what am I going to do today? That's completely different from, I wonder if somebody going to help, come help do something for me today.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)



38. A group of adults and children at an impromptu concert held outdoors during Freedom Summer. 1964.
Wisconsin Historical Society.

At one point, Laurel was larger than Hattiesburg. It had a transit system that ran from Laurel to Ellisville, but when the Civil Rights Bill passed and they had to integrate the businesses and storage, Laurel almost folded completely because that mindset, they couldn't bend from it. And a lot of businesses actually left. So, we are trying to re-establish the history and let people know. A lot of parts of Mississippi have those histories that we don't want to talk about, but that's in everybody's life, and in every state there are areas that had that.

Tanya Evans (59)

We're sitting just a couple hundred yards right now from the north door of the courthouse where [Fannie Lou Hamer] walked after being turned away from the right to vote, and next morning, she and her husband were kicked off of the plantation that they worked on for, what? Fourteen years at one point. Somebody that inspired so many people, and somebody who was mistreated terribly. I'll never forget the day that I went to Drew on Sunday afternoon. I was with the funeral service in the Drew High School auditorium—this is in 1971. A young girl named Joy Collier was walking with two of her friends from high school graduation—they'd just graduated from high school—and three yahoo whites were riding around Drew and shooting out streetlights. The guy with the pistol shot her and killed her. That was a very . . . there was a . . . well, before the big trial here in Indianola, they had this funeral service at the Drew High School auditorium. I went up there to cover it. I think I was maybe one of the few whites in the building. I was up in the balcony with a friend. Fannie Lou got up and spoke and sang and cried, and it was, I can play that back in this, full brain, right now. That's one of my memories of her. I saw her several other times as well. Important lady.

James Abbott (48)

But, from individuals that knew Ms. Hamer, individuals that had a love for Ms. Hamer and wanted to see things happening, contributed [to the memorial]. Now, I did encounter a problem because, as you know, peoples have always been selling, doing things for Ms. Hamer, but nothing has come where people could say, I see this. I don't know what they did with the money, maybe they put it in their pocket or did something else with it. So, as I began the campaign for finance, a lot of them here in Ruleville said, well, we have given this, and peoples have been selling t-shirts, been selling books, been doing all of this in name of Ms. Hamer and nothing has been done. So I had to tell them, well, trust me. Trust me and we would do what we said we were going to do with the money. I was under the impression, if people like you from Florida, from all over the United States—even, we had a group coming from Alaska one time—if those people can honor a person from Ruleville, certainly Rulevillans should have done something to say we appreciate what you have done, and we are carrying on your life and legacy.

Hattie Jordan (60)

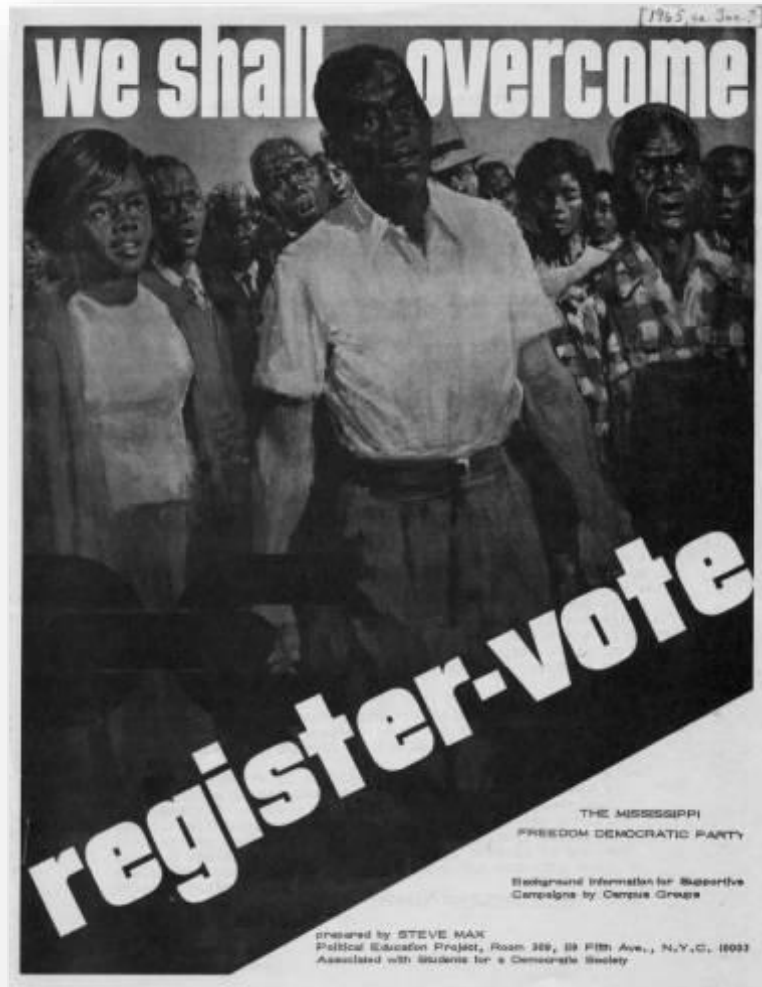
At first, I didn't believe it, because I was born in [19]67; I was young. I said, it couldn't have been that bad. It's all come off the books. It couldn't have been that bad. My sister was telling me stories, say, you all just don't realize how hard it was for us. When I hear the stories, I actually cry. It breaks my heart, and it always hurts. It's like it's a hurt that you don't understand why, it's because of the color of your skin that you're not liked; because of the color of your skin. It hurts. It's always a hurt, it never goes away.

Catherine Bacon (97)

I see you got—not just here at the schools and stuff, it's not separate. You got white kids going to school with the black kids, black going to school with the white kids, you know. It's not as bad as it was, but it still have some of the people with hate and stuff in their heart is

still around here. Not as many as there was, but it's still here, you know. It just do me good to go through neighborhoods and stuff and go visit places. People have the same rights that anybody else have, and nothing's said about it. Makes a big difference.

McKinley Mack (52)



39. Used as the cover on a 14 page mimeographed pamphlet entitled, 'The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: Background and Recent Developments' by Steve Max, dated in manuscript. January, 1965. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.

They went through hell to bring about those changes. Some of them said, I won't live to see it, but I want my children to have a better crack at life than I had. We broke down the peonage system in Mississippi. We fought for the right of women to serve on juries in [19]65; we acquired that. We fought to the right to vote and acquired that. We fought for the right to be free politically; we acquired that. See, when Lyndon gives his, "We Shall Overcome" speech, if he hadn't fought us tooth and nail in [19]64, he could have used Mississippi as the example of why he was going to pass the Voting Rights Act. He could have said it like this, no state has lost more lives and been creative and resilient enough to conduct their own elections. They fought to get into the Democratic Party in [19]64 in Atlantic City; they fought to challenge the congressional delegation under Section Two of

the Fourteenth Amendment. We are going to award them and the rest of the country; I'll pass the Voting Rights Act.

Lawrence Guyot (78A)

So, our problem in the United States is, we are so impatient. And some folk might not like what I say, but we are hypocritical. We are really hypocritical . . . But it's the truth. We are just hypocritical. The Native American befriended the European when they came over here. What did they do to him? . . . Queen Liliuokalani in Hawaii befriended the United States. What did they do to her? Locked her in her own palace. So, this is what I'm saying. We're so hypocritical. We don't like to admit our wrongs, but we see everybody else as wrong, and that's not right. We should fess up to what we do, too. You see what I'm saying?

Jennifer Buckner (68)

Now I'm back from Vietnam, and the place that I work—I'll never forget this—the first day back, I had to go back through orientation. They used to have a cigarette machine up on the second floor of this building, where I was in the orientation, and they ran out of cigarettes. During the break, I went downstairs and went across the street. There was a bar there, that's quite far from the place where I worked. I went in and asked for a pack of cigarettes, and they told me to go to the back. This is 1973, man, you know. I got so mad, because I felt like I been halfway around the world fighting for so-called freedom and I can't buy a pack of cigarettes right across the street from where I work. Of course, I refused to go around to the back and get them, too.

John Tubbs (10)

"The zeal and strength of our endeavors must be superior to the difficulties to be surmounted. Discouragement should have no place where industry, persistency, and ingenuity or faith eternal may at last bring the required results." That is a quotation by Charles Price Jones. . . the zeal, the inspiration- the fervor behind what I am trying to do must be superior above more than the difficulties that I will face in doing it. And discouragement should have no place where industry, persistency, integrity or faith eternal should bring lasting results. In other words, I am working towards these results that will be lasting, on-going, eternal and I can't let the difficulties stop me from allowing that to happen.

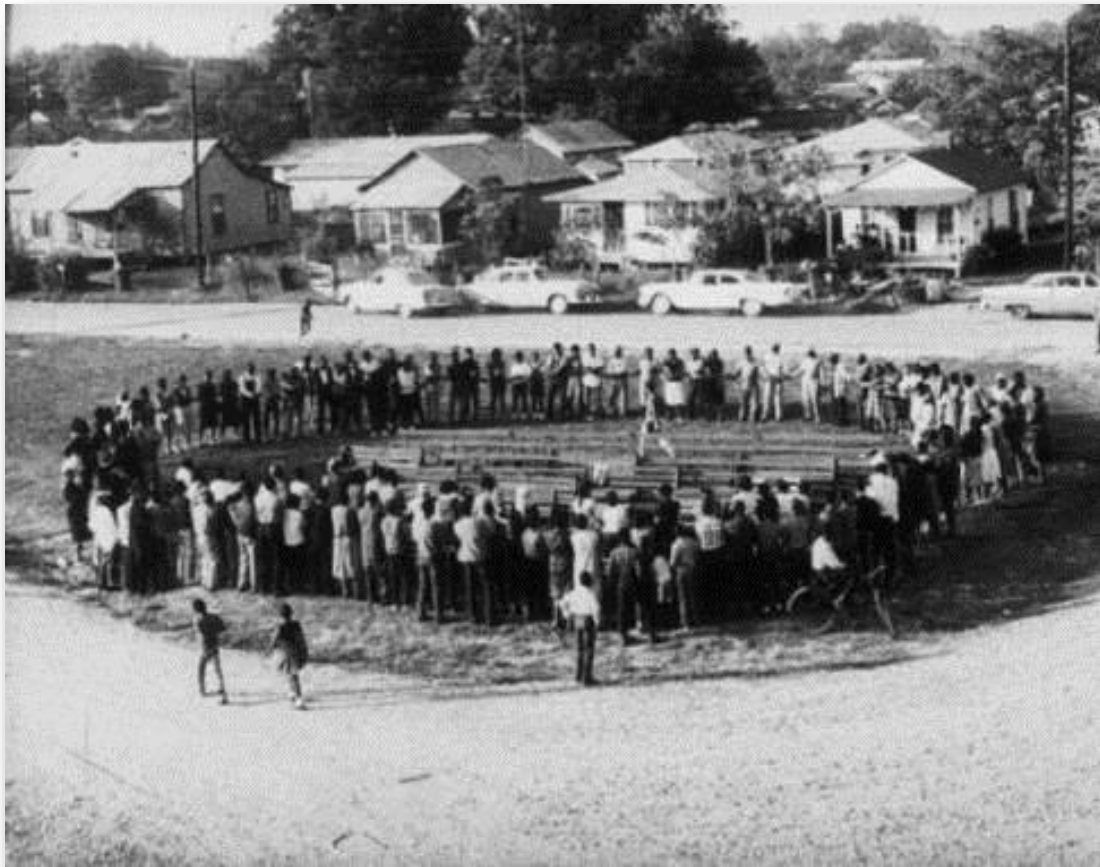
Anita Jefferson (76)

They have got all of these Blues Trail markers all over Mississippi. I'm going, well, the blues—we're still having this debate about the blues as our culture. History, you know, we did significant stuff to change people's lives. Blues just make you feel either down or happy, but it was not a movement, and it was not anything that we benefited from. Like B.B. King gave all of his stuff to Ole Miss. Well, he was raised right over there in Itta Bena and there's Mississippi Valley State over there. Why couldn't he have given it to Mississippi Valley State instead of to Ole Miss?

Margaret Block (39)

I would get young people to read the literature and look at the tapes that SNCC had at its fiftieth anniversary. The best organizers in America is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I don't care what historian wants to take me on, on that [laughter]. But what we've got to do is get them to learn that ordinary people like them made this history. It wasn't geniuses and holy people and labor unions. They were ordinary—I mean, there's no better case than Sunflower County, where ordinary people did some astounding . . . the people in Sunflower County began a process that changed the world.

Lawrence Guyot (80)



40. An elevated view of a large group of people standing in a circle around empty benches holding hands. Vehicles are parked near houses in the background. 1964. *Wisconsin Historical Society*.



Figure 41. Earl Newman: SNCC (mother and child). *Oakland Museum of California.*

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