Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964

By Bruce Hartford

For the winter soldiers of the Freedom Movement

Contents

[Terminology — Various authors use either "Freedom Summer" or "Summer Project" or both interchangeably. This book uses "Summer Project" to refer specifically to the project organized and led by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). We use "Freedom Summer" to refer to the totality of all Freedom Movement efforts in Mississippi over the summer of 1964, including the efforts of medical, religious, and legal organizations (*see* Organizational Structure of Freedom Summer for details). In this book, we use the term "volunteer" to refer those from out of state who came to Mississippi for Freedom Summer, though of course, the many thousands of Black Mississippians who participated were also unpaid volunteers.]

Origins

With the student-led sit-ins of 1960 and the Freedom Rides of 1961, a new wind begins to blow across the South — a "freedom" wind — an urgent wind of "now." Discontented Black youth are no longer willing to wait for the slow, tedious, ineffectual progress of court cases and legislative reform. No longer are they willing to leave matters of justice and equality in the hands of attorneys and community elders. They want an end to the humiliations of segregation and the

barriers of second-class citizenship, and they want it now. To achieve those ends they are determined to take a stand, to "put their bodies on the line" to win "Freedom Now!"

By the summer of 1961, sit-ins have desegregated some lunch-counters and other public facilities in college towns of the Border South. And the Freedom Rides are in the process of ending separate white and "Colored" facilities in inter-state travel. Yet most of the South remains as thoroughly segregated as ever. The lives of most southern Blacks continue to be ruled by the iron fist of white-supremacy and consist of drudgery and grinding poverty, political powerlessness, and economic dependency.

It is a truism of the era that the further south you travel the more intense grows the racism, the worse becomes the poverty, and the more brutal is the repression. In the mental geography of the Freedom Movement, the South is divided into zones according to the virulence of bigotry and oppression: the "Border States" (Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, and portions of Maryland); the "Upper South" (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, Texas); and the "Deep South" (the Eastern Shore of Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana). And then there is Mississippi, in a class by itself — the absolute deepest pit of racism, violence, and poverty.

In most of the South, the 1950s bring enormous economic changes. "King Cotton" declines as agriculture diversifies and mechanizes. But those economic changes come slowly, if at all, to Mississippi and the Black Belt areas of Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana. In 1960, almost 70% of Mississippi Blacks still live in rural areas, and more than a third (twice the percentage in the rest of the South) work the land as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and farm laborers. In 1960, the median income for Afro-Americans in Mississippi is just $1,444 (equal to a bit over $11,000 in 2013). The median income for Mississippi whites is three times higher. More than four out of every five Mississippi Blacks (85%) exist below the official federal poverty line.

Education for Blacks is totally segregated and severely limited. The average funding for "Colored" schools in Mississippi is less than a quarter of that spent to educate white students, and in rural areas the ratio is even more skewed. In 1960, for example, Pike County spends $30.89 to educate each white pupil and only $0.76 cents per Afro-American child. It is no surprise then that only 7% of Mississippi Blacks finish high school, and in the rural areas where children are sent to the fields early in life, functional illiteracy is widespread.

Mississippi is still dominated — economically and politically — by less than 100 plantation barons who lord it over vast cotton fields worked by Black hand-labor using hoes and fingers the way it was done in slavery times. They are determined to keep their labor force cheap and docile.

The arch-segregationist Senator James Eastland provides a good example of the economic riches reaped by racism in Mississippi. His huge plantation in Sunflower County produces 5,394 bales of cotton in 1961. He sells that cotton for $890,000 (equal to almost $7,000,000 in 2013 dollars). It costs Eastland $566,000 to produce his cotton for a profit of $324,000 (equal to a bit over $2,500,000 in 2013). The Black men and women who labor in his fields under the blazing sun — plowing, planting, chopping, and picking — are paid 30 cents an hour (equal to $2.34 in 2013). That's just $3.00 for a 10-hour day, $18.00 for a six-day, 60-hour week. The children sent to labor in the fields are paid even less.

This system of agricultural feudalism is maintained by Jim Crow segregation laws, state repression, white terrorism, and the systematic disenfranchisement of Afro-Americans. Overall, whites outnumber Blacks in Mississippi, but the ratio of Blacks to whites is higher than any other state in the union. And in a number of rural counties, Blacks outnumber whites, in some cases by large majorities. Given these demographic realities, the power-elites know that white-supremacy can only be maintained if they prevent Afro-Americans from voting. To ensure that nonwhite have no access to the ballot they use rigged "literacy" tests, white-only primaries, poll taxes, and economic retaliation. Any attempt at registering to vote, any act of defiance, any protest, any cry for freedom, is met with swift arrest. Violent repression is also a traditional component of Mississippi's "*Southern Way of Life*." Since 1880, the state has averaged more than six racially-motivated murders per year in the form of mob lynchings and "unsolved" assassinations.

So if you're Black in Mississippi, attempting to register to vote is a courageous act that challenges the established order. You can only register at the courthouse at certain times, the cops are always there to threaten, intimidate, and arrest you on trumped up charges. You have to pass the humiliating, so-called "literacy test," which is not really a test at all, but rather a bogus fraud explicitly designed to deny voting rights to Blacks. Pass or fail, your name is published in the local paper so that the White Citizens Council, your employer, your landlord, and your white business associates know to target you for economic retaliation.

According to the 1960 Census, 41% of the Mississippi population is Black, but in 1961 no more than 5% of them are registered to vote. In many of the Black-majority counties not a single Afro-American citizen is registered, not even decorated military veterans. For example, in some typical Mississippi counties where Blacks are the majority:

Registered Voters as a Percentage of Population		
	Whites	**Blacks**
Coahoma	73%	8%
Holmes	74%	-
Leflore	70%	2%
Marshall	96%	1%
Panola	69%	-
Tallahatchie	85%	-
Source: *U.S. v Mississippi*, Supreme Court, 1964.		

This systematic denial of Black voting rights is not unique to Mississippi, it is replicated in the Black Belt areas of Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, Southwest Georgia, and portions of North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

Much of Mississippi agriculture — particularly the Delta cotton plantations — still rely on large-scale use of cheap Black hand-labor. But after *Brown v Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and now the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, the White Citizens Council has begun urging

plantation owners to replace Black sharecroppers and farm hands with machines. This is a deliberate strategy to force Afros out of the state before they can achieve any share of political power. The Freedom finds itself in a race against time, if Blacks don't get the vote soon, it will be too late.

In the summer of 1960, with student sit-ins roiling the South, Bob Moses, representing the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), meets with Amzie Moore, Medgar Evers, and other local Black leaders in Mississippi. They tell him that voter registration is more important than demonstrations against segregation. Few Mississippi Blacks can afford to eat at lunch counters even if they were allowed to do so. It is poverty that most cruelly affects them, and at the most fundamental level their poverty is rooted in political powerlessness because the lawmakers and judges, sheriffs and school boards, agriculture commissioners, welfare officials, public works agencies, and all other officials are elected only by whites and exclusively serve white interests. When plantation owners cheat Black sharecroppers of their rightful earnings, when stores and utilities over-charge, when wages are not paid or paid only in company-store scrip, when taxes are unfairly assessed, and when economic opportunities are blocked, Afro-Americans have no recourse because they have no vote.

By the spring of 1961, Freedom Rides are rolling across the South. International news stories documenting southern racism and student courage are blazing around the globe, humiliating President John Kennedy (JFK) as leader of the "Free World," and undercutting his Cold War strategies for containing Soviet influence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. JFK believes that if the students turn from protest to voter registration there will be an end to racist violence and embarrassing media attention. Behind the scenes, he arranges for major foundations to fund a Voter Education Project (VEP) in southern states. He promises that if the students stop protesting and turn to registering voters, the federal government will provide protection, legal support, and a vigorous defense of Black voting rights.

But the idea of switching from nonviolent direct action campaigns against segregation to voter-registration projects in rural communities divides SNCC down the middle. Against the argument that poor Blacks need political power that has to begin with winning the right to vote, many in SNCC argue that the sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and other forms of direct action are gaining momentum and bringing the Movement into the darkest corners of the Deep South, raising awareness, building courage, and inspiring both young and old.

SNCC advisor Ella Baker proposes a compromise — do both. Her suggestion is adopted. Diane Nash is chosen to head direct action efforts and Charles Jones is chosen to head voter registration activity. Both groups send activists to join the pioneering voter project that Bob Moses sets up in McComb Mississippi. And as so often turns out to be the case when committed activists passionately disagree over strategy, both sides are proven correct. Both direct action and voter registration are needed. Each supports and strengthens the other. The determination and courage of student protesters inspires and encourages their elders, and the growing community power of adults organizing themselves around the right to vote supports and sustains the young demonstrators.

As the white power-structure's ferocious resistance to Black voting rights becomes evident, it also becomes clear that, in a sense, voter registration *is* a form of direct action. Kennedy's hopes go

unfulfilled. America continues to be embarrassed on the world stage by international news stories of racist violence against Blacks trying to vote, as well as those covering campaigns to end segregation in places like Albany Georgia, Birmingham Alabama, Durham North Carolina, and St. Augustine Florida.

The Struggle for Voting Rights in McComb Mississippi

With a population of 12,000, McComb is the main town of a three-county area in Southwest Mississippi where Black voters are almost nonexistent:

County	Black Adults	Registered Voters
Pike County (McComb)	8,000	200
Amite County	5,000	1
Walthall County	3,000	0

When Bob Moses left Mississippi in the summer of 1960, he promised Amzie Moore he would return the following summer to launch a voter-registration campaign. In July of 1961, he fulfills that promise. At the invitation of local NAACP leader Reverend C.C. Bryant, he starts a SNCC voting rights project in McComb — the first of many to come. Moses leads a small team of community organizers that soon expands to include SNCC Chairman Chuck McDew, John Hardy of the Nashville Student Movement, Reginald Robinson from the Civic Interest Group in Baltimore, Marion Barry, MacArthur Cotton, Charles Sherrod, Travis Britt, Ruby Doris Smith, Charles Jones, Cordelle Reagon, Dion Diamond, Bob Zellner, and others.

Webb Owens, a retired railroad man and Treasurer of the local NAACP chapter introduces the SNCC organizers to people in the Black community. He urges them to support the voter-registration project with donations of food, money, and housing for the civil rights workers. At the South of the Border Cafe, he tells owner Aylene Quinn, "*Whenever any of [the SNCC workers] come by, you feed 'em, you feed 'em whether they got money or not*." Though doing so places her at risk of Klan violence and Citizens Council economic retaliation, she agrees.

Before begining work in McComb, Moses writes to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) asking what the federal response will be if Blacks are prevented from registering. In line with Kennedy's promise to defend voting rights if the students will turn away from direct action, the DOJ replies that it will "vigorously enforce" federal statutes forbidding the use of intimidation, threats, and coercion against voter aspirants.

In late August, after training in the tactics of Nonviolent Resistance by SNCC direct action veterans, two local teenagers — Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes sit-in at the local Woolworth's lunch counter. They are arrested.

Rev. Bryant introduce Moses to Amite County NAACP leader E.W. Steptoe, and the project spreads to cover adjacent Amite and Walthall Counties. On the last day of August, Bob Moses takes two Blacks to the Amite County courthouse in Liberty Mississippi. He is brutally beaten in

the street by Bill Caston, cousin to the sheriff and son-in-law of E. H. Hurst the State Representative. That night in McComb, more than 200 Blacks attend the first Civil Rights Movement mass meeting in the town's history to protest the arrest of the two students and the beating of Moses.

Brenda Travis, a 15 year old high school student in McComb, canvasses the streets with the SNCC voter-registration workers. To awaken and inspire the adults, she leads students on another sit-in. For the crime of ordering a hamburger, she is sentenced to a year in the state juvenile prison. She is also expelled from Burgland High School. In response, McComb's Black students form the Pike County Nonviolent Movement — Hollis Watkins President, Curtis Hayes Vice President.

The Klan and Citizens Council react violently. White "night riders" armed with rifles and shotguns cruise through the Black community at night. SNCC workers John Hardy and Travis Britt are beaten by whites and arrested on trumped up charges when they bring Blacks to the courthouse to register in Walthall and Amite counties.

Herbert Lee, a Black farmer with 9 children, is a founding member of the NAACP in Amite County and a close friend of NAACP county chairman E.W. Steptoe. Lee is one of the few rural Blacks who dares to work on voter registration with Bob Moses and the McComb Project. State Assemblyman E.H. Hurst (white, of course) lives across the street from Lee. They are friends and neighbors. But trying to register Black voters is a challenge to white-supremecy that Hurst cannot accept. He orders Lee to stop.

In mid-September, Justice Department official John Doar learns that Hurst is threatening to kill Lee and other voter-registration activists. Though intimidating or threatening a voter (or prospective voter) is a clear violation of both the U.S. Constitution and federal law, no one in the Department of Justice takes any action at all.

On the morning of September 25, 1961, Lee takes a truckload of cotton to the gin in Liberty Mississippi, the Amite County seat. Hurst follows him. According to witnesses, Lee is sitting in his truck when Hurst angrily walks up, begins arguing, and pulls out a pistol. "*I'm not fooling around this time, I really mean business,*" shouts Hurst. "*Put the gun down,*" responds Lee. "*I won't talk to you unless you put the gun down.*"

Lee slides out of his truck on the other side. Hurst runs around the truck and shoots Lee in the head, killing him instantly. More than 10 people witness this murder.

The Amite County Sheriff surrounds Hurst with armed men — not to keep him from escaping but to protect him from possible retaliation by Blacks. An all-white Coroner's Jury is summoned while Lee's body still lays beside his truck. Hurst, who is 6 foot 3 inches tall and weighs over 200 pounds, claims that Lee who is 5 foot 4 and weighs 150 pounds "attacked" him with a tire iron. He claims he shot Lee in "self-defense." Louis Allen and other witnesses are pressured to confirm Hurst's claim. They know that the what happened to Lee can happen to them if they disobey. The jury accepts the "self-defense" story — the typical result when a white Southerner kills a Black man. Hurst never spends a day in jail. The federal government — does nothing.

In early October, more than 100 Black high-school students led by Hollis Watkins and Curtis

Hayes ditch school and march in McComb to protest Lee's killing and the expulsion of Brenda Travis. When they kneel in prayer at City Hall, they are arrested, as are the SNCC staff who are with them. Bob Moses, Chuck McDew, and Bob Zellner (SNCC's first white field secretary) are beaten. The SNCC workers are charged with "Contributing to the delinquency of minors," a serious felony.

More than 100 students boycott the segregated Burgland High School rather than sign a mandatory pledge that they will not participate in civil rights activity. SNCC sets up "Nonviolent High" for the boycotting students with Moses teaching math, Dion Diamond teaching science, and Chuck McDew teaching history. Nonviolent High is one of the seeds from which grow the "Freedom Schools" that spread across the state three years later in the summer of '64.

Late in October, an all-white jury convicts the SNCC members on the "Contributing" charge. Their attorneys appeal, but bail is set at $14,000 each (equal to $109,000 in 2013 dollars). Unable to raise such a huge amount, they languish in prison. With their SNCC teachers in jail, Nonviolent High cannot continue, and the boycotting students are accepted by Campbell Junior College in Jackson.

Meanwhile, arrests, beatings, and shootings continue. CORE Freedom Riders are brutally attacked by a white mob when they try to integrate the McComb Greyhound station. Paul Potter and Tom Hayden of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) are dragged from their car and beaten in the street when they come to McComb to support the Movement. Shotgun blasts from a Klan nightrider almost kill Dion Diamond and John Hardy.

Despite their repeated promises of protection for voter registration, the Kennedys, the Justice Department, and the FBI do nothing. The arrests, the reign of terror, and the brazen murder of Herbert Lee by a state official, all take their toll. The McComb-area voter registration drive is suppressed — for the moment.

In November, Bob Moses manages to slip a message from prison to SNCC headquarters in Atlanta:

> We are smuggling this note from the drunk tank of the county jail in Magnolia, Mississippi. Twelve of us are here, sprawled out along the concrete bunker; Curtis Hayes, Hollis Watkins, Ike Lewis and Robert Talbert, four veterans of the bunker, are sitting up talking — mostly about girls; Charles McDew ("Tell the story") is curled into the concrete and the wall; Harold Robinson, Stephen Ashley, James Wells, Lee Chester Vick, Leotus Eubanks, and Ivory Diggs lay cramped on the cold bunks; I'm sitting with smuggled pen and paper, thinking a little, writing a little; Myrtis Bennett and Janie Campbell are across the way wedded to a different icy cubicle.
>
> Later on, Hollis will lead out with a clear tenor into a freedom song, Talbert and Lewis will supply jokes, and McDew will discourse on the history of the Black man and the Jew. McDew — a black by birth, a Jew by choice, and a revolutionary by necessity — has taken on the deep hates and deep loves which America and the world reserve for those who dare to stand in a strong sun and cast a sharp shadow. ... This is Mississippi, the middle of the iceberg. Hollis is leading off with his tenor, "Michael row the boat ashore, Alleluia; Christian brothers don't be slow, Alleluia; Mississippi's next to go, Alleluia." There is a tremor in the middle of the iceberg — from a stone that the builders rejected. — Bob Moses. [9]

In a narrow sense, McComb is a defeat for SNCC — the project is suppressed and driven out by arrests, brutality, and murder. But in a broader sense it is an important milestone, the crucial lessons learned in McComb form the foundation for years of organizing to come, not just in

Mississippi but in hard places across the South — places like Selma Alabama and Southwest Georgia. In McComb they discover that courage is contagious and that local people — particularly young people — will respond to outside organizers. They discover that as student activists they have much to teach, but also much to learn from the community, and that if they respect the community the community will in turn protect, feed, and nurture them. And from the community will come new leaders and new organizers to expand and sustain the struggle.

> One of the things that we learned out here [in Amite County] was that we could find family in Mississippi. We could go anyplace in Mississippi before we were through, and we knew that somewhere down some road there was family. And we could show up there unannounced with no money or no anything and there were people there ready to take care of us. That's what we had here in Amite. One of the things that happened in the movement was that there was a joining of a young generation of people with an older generation that nurtured and sustained them. ... It was an amazing experience. I've never before or since had that experience where it's almost literally like you're throwing yourself on the people and they have actually picked you up and gone on to carry you so you don't really need money, you don't really need transportation. ... They're going to see that you eat. It's a liberating kind of experience. — Bob Moses. [17]

Out of McComb comes the hard kernel that transforms SNCC into an organization of organizers who in a few short years move the Movement from protest to social revolution. Building on the lessons learned in McComb, they shift the voter registration campaign first to Jackson and then into the Mississippi Delta where Blacks outnumber whites and segregation is deeply rooted and ruthlessly enforced. And out of McComb they bring five young organizers on to the growing SNCC staff — Hollis Watkins, Curtis Hayes, Emma Bell, Ike Lewis, and Bobby Talbot — the first of many to come not from a college campuse but from the red dust roads of the rural South.

Greenwood & the Mississippi Delta

When the arrested SNCC field secretaries are finally released from jail in Pike County, they join other SNCC organizers — many newly hired with VEP money — in resuming voter registration work. By early 1962, Bob Moses, Paul & Catherine Brooks, James Bevel & Diane Nash (newly married), and Bernard Lafayette are working in Jackson; Lester McKinnie in Laurel; Charles McLaurin, Dorie Ladner, and Colia Lidell in Ruleville; James Jones in Clarksdale, Mattie Bivens in Cleveland, Frank Smith in Holly Springs; Emma Bell in Greenville; and Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins in Hattiesburg.

Sam Block, a young Mississippi native and SCLC Citizenship School teacher, is assigned to Greenwood, the seat of Leflore county and the unofficial capitol of the Mississippi Delta. Here, cotton is still king, 800,000 bales pass through Greenwood each year. The work is still mostly hand-labor, plantation-style — but under the urging of the White Citizens Council, land owners are now bringing in machines to replace and displace Black field-hands. With the rise of the Freedom Movement and increased Black assertivness, "Negro-removal" is now the strategy of Mississippi's white power-structure. Between 1950 and 1960, some 200,000 Blacks are forced to

leave the Delta, by 1964 the number of Black sharecroppers is roughly half of what it was six years earlier. Most of those forced off the land migrate to the urban ghettos of the North.

Those who still remain endure grinding poverty and unyielding oppression. According to the 1960 Census, annual median income for rural Blacks in the Delta is just $452 (equal to $3,500 in 2013). On average, white children in the Delta receive 10 years of public schooling, Blacks less than 5 years in schools that are so ill-equipped few are accredited. Segregation remains absolute and the effects are stark.

Leflore County (Including Greenwood Residents)		
	White	**Black**
1960 population	35%	65%
Land owned	90%	10%
Median family income	$5,200 ($41,000 in 2013 dollars)	$1,400 ($11,000 in 2013 dollars)
Median education	11.2 years	5.1 years
Voter registration	Almost 100%	2%
Political offices held	All	None

For Blacks, segregation, exploitation, and abuse permeate every aspect of life. Though almost two-thirds of the county is Black, 131 of the county's 168 hospital beds are reserved for whites-only. More than 80% of Blacks live in dwellings rated "sub-standard," but their tar-paper shacks with a single light bulb are charged more for electricity than whites living in modern homes.

In Leflore county, almost 100% of whites are registered to vote, compared to just 268 Blacks (2%). In the seven years since the *Brown* decision, only 40 Blacks have been allowed to register (compared to 1,664 whites). With Blacks a 2 to 1 majority, whites know that Black voter registration threatens their economic and political control. One white voter tells a reporter: "*We killed two-month-old indian babies to take this country, and now they want us to give it away to the niggers.*"

Sam Block is soon joined by Rust College graduate Willie (Wazir) Peacock, and then Luvaugn Brown, and Lawrence Guyot.

> I canvassed every day and every night until I found about seven or eight people to carry up to register ... We went up to register and it was the first time visiting the courthouse in Greenwood, Mississippi, and the sheriff came up to me and he asked me, he said, "Nigger, where you from?" I told him, "Well, I'm a native Mississippian." He said, "Yeh, yeh, I know that, but where you from? ... I know you ain't from here, cause I know every nigger and his mammy." I said, "Well, you know all the niggers, do you know any colored people?

> He got angry. He spat in my face and walked. So he came back and turned around and told me, "I don't want to see you in town any more. The best thing you better do is pack your clothes and get out and don't never come back no more." I said, "Well, sheriff, if you don't want to see me here, I think the best thing for you to do is pack your clothes and leave, get out of town, 'cause I'm here to stay, I came here to do a job and this is my intention, I'm going to do this job.nbsp;— Sam Block. [25]

White racists attack the SNCC office, and the SNCC organizers barely escape over the roof tops. The building is trashed, and the frightened landlord evicts them. The fear is so intense that people cross to the other side of the street rather than walk past Sam or Wazir and risk whites observing them in proximity to the "race-mixing agitators." It is months before anyone else in the Black community will rent space intended for voter registration work.

Sam and Wazir dig in deep, and hold on. They continue organizing in Greenwood without an office. Fear is pervasive among Greenwood Blacks. Fear of being fired. Fear of being evicted. Fear of beatings, bombings, and murder. Fear that the SNCC workers will stir up trouble and violence and then leave. But gradually, week by week, month by month, as Sam and Wazir hold on, trust is built and their courage inspires first the young students and then their parents.

A new office is finally rented, a church dares to open its doors for a voter registration meeting, and the community begins coming together. Slowly, one by one, two by two, a few Leflore County Blacks begin to make the dangerous journey down to the courthouse to try to register to vote. But in the first six months, only five Blacks of the dozens who try are actually registered.

> Greenwood was so organized — there was not one block that we couldn't have — it was like guerrilla war, we could stop anywhere and duck out of sight, go into somebody's house. At every block in the Black neighborhood. So that's one thing that kept us alive 'cause they would see us at night and the cops would think it was an opportunity to get us, speed up and try to turn around. When they turned around we'd be watching out a window somewhere, see them come back to try to find us. — Wazir Peacock. [26]

By the end of 1962, SNCC's Mississippi field staff has grown to 20 organizers, all but three of them from Mississippi itself.

> I had become part of something else besides a civil rights organization in Mississippi. Everywhere we went, I and other civil rights workers were adopted and nurtured, even protected, as though we were family. We were the community's children, and that closeness rendered moot the label of "outside agitator." Indeed, if we had any label at all, it was "freedom riders." It did not matter whether we had arrived in that fasion or not. This identity was liberating, conferring respect in every community we worked in. In calling us freedom riders these communities were finding the most defiant image they could to signal their approavl of our work, even if they crossed the street when they saw us, or were not yet prepared to brave the dangers of trying to register down at the county courthouse. — Bob Moses. [6]

Defying generations of white-supremacy, a small trickle of Leflore county Blacks continue to show up at the courthouse even though they know they won't be allowed to register. For sharecroppers and farm laborers in the Mississippi Delta, winter is the lean time, the hard time. With no work and nothing to eat, they rely on federal surplus food commodities for survival. The White Citizens Council strikes back — at poor people in general, not just the few Blacks trying to register. The Council controls Greenwood politics, no politician can win election without their support, and as winter closes in they order the County Board of Supervisors to stop distributing federal food aid to 22,000 Leflore County citizens — most of them Black, a few poor white or Choctaw.

> [In this era before Food Stamps, federal "commodity" programs stave off starvation. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provids basic food commodities — bags of flour, rice & beans, boxes of canned goods, dairy products, and so on — to states, counties, and private welfare agencies who distribute them to poor and hungry families. Begun in the 1930s under the Roosevelt administration, the official stated purpose of these programs is to provide subsidies and price support for farmers and agribusiness corporations.]

By mid-winter, conditions are desperate. Sam Block and Wazir Peacock inform SNCC headquarters in Atlanta:

> Saturday, January 19,1963. ... these people here are in a very, very bad need for food and clothes. Look at a case like this man, named Mr. Meeks, who is thirty-seven years old. His wife is thirty-three years old, and they have eleven children, ages ranging from seventeen down to eight months. Seven of the children are school age and not a one is attending school because they have no money, no food, no clothes, and no wood to keep warm by, and they now want to go register. The house they are living in has no paper or nothing on the walls and you can look at the ground through the floor and if you are not careful you will step in one of those holes and break your leg. [9]

And as Bob Moses later writes in a letter to a northern supporter:

> We *do* need the actual food. ... Just this afternoon, I was sitting reading, having finished a bowl of stew, and a silent hand reached over from behind, its owner mumbling some words of apology and stumbling up with a neckbone from the plate under the bowl, one which I had discarded, which had some meat on it. The hand was back again, five seconds later, groping for the potatoe I had left in the bowl. I never saw the face. I didn't look. The hand was dark, dry and wind-cracked, a man's hand, from the cotton chopping and cotton picking. Lafayette and I got up and walked out. What the hell are you going to do when a man has to pick up a left-over potatoe from a bowl of stew? — Bob Moses. [9]

SNCC sends word to its supporters on college campuses and in Friends of SNCC chapters throughout the country — and people respond. Comedian Dick Gregory charters a plane to deliver emergency food supplies to Greenwood. He becomes a Movement stalwart, raising funds, participating in demonstrations, enduring beatings and arrests in the cause of Freedom.

Michigan State students Ivanhoe Donaldson and Ben Taylor drive a truckload of food, clothing, and medicine 1,000 miles down into the Mississippi Delta over the Christmas holidays. The local cops are tipped off — perhaps by some federal agency — and the two are busted in Clarksdale for "possesion of narcotics." The supposed "narcotics" are actually aspirin and vitamins. They are held on $15,000 bail (equal to over $115,000 in 2013). After 11 days in jail, a nation-wide protest gets them released, but the confiscated food, clothing, and medicine mysteriously disappears from

police custody before it can be returned to them. Ivanhoe is not intimidated, in the following months he delivers a dozen truckloads of food to embattled Greenwood and goes on to become a SNCC field secretary.

Meanwhile, the Kennedy administration and U.S. Department of Justice do nothing effective to protect the voting rights of Black citizens. With legal support provided by Dr. King, SNCC sues Attorney General Robert Kennedy and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in January of 1963 demanding that they enforce existing federal voting rights laws. Rather than performing their Constitutionally-required duty to protect the rights of all citizens, federal lawyers quash the suit.

But violence, intimidation, beatings, arrests, and federal dereliction, all fail to halt the growing movement. And the food blockade backfires.

> Whenever we were able to get a little something to give to a hungry family, we also talked about how they ought to register. The food was ...identified in the minds of everyone as food for those who want to be free, and the minimum requirement for freedom is identified as registration to vote. — Bob Moses [20]

In late February of 1963, an anonymous caller warns that the new office SNCC was finally able to rent is going to be destroyed. Four adjacent Black businesses are burnt in a bungled arson attempt, but they miss the SNCC office. When Sam describes the fire as "arson" at a mass meeting he is arrested for "statements calculated to breach the peace." It is his seventh Movement arrest in Greenwood.

More than one hundred Black protesters show up at City Hall on the day of Sam's trial — the first mass protest by Greenwood Blacks in living memory. Sam is sentenced to 6 months in jail and a $500 fine. The Judge offers to suspend the sentence if Sam agrees to leave town and halt efforts to register Black voters. Replies Sam: "*Judge, I ain't gonna do that*." He is released on bond pending appeal, and that night addresses a mass meeting of 250 people — the largest mass meeting to date.

On Tuesday, February 26, more than 200 Blacks line up at the Courthouse to register to vote. They know they will not be allowed to register, but attempting to do so has become for them a symbol of both pride and defiance. And the white power-structure recognizes it as such. The police order them to disperse. They hold their ground, remaining in line. The Registrar delays and evades, admitting only a few to fill out the application and take the so-called "literacy test." Those few who manage to take the test are rejected. But fear is losing its grip.

That night, KKK nightriders ambush a SNCC car on the road, firing 13 rounds from a .45 caliber machine gun at Jimmy Travis, Bob Moses, and VEP Field Director Randolph Blackwell. Jimmy is hit twice, in the neck and shoulder, and has to be rushed to the nearest hospital willing to treat Black freedom fighters. From around the nation demands for protection and enforcement of federal voting-rights laws are sent to Washington. The Kennedy administration takes no noticeable action.

COFO calls on all voter-registration workers in Mississippi to concentrate on Greenwood to show that Klan terror cannot halt a growing freedom movement. By early March, dozens of SNCC organizers, plus some CORE field secretaries and SCLC staff members are working out of the

Greenwood SNCC/COFO office in defiance of Klan terror, police repression, and Citizen Council economic retaliation. Whites shoot at a car containing Sam, Wazir, and local students working with the movement. Greenwood mayor Charles Sampson falsely accuses SNCC of faking the attack to garner support. On March 24th the Klan finally succeeds in fire-bombing the office, destroying it. The Movement continues.

The Greene family is particularly active — father Dewey Greene takes a leading role in encouraging voter-registration, son George and daughter Freddie are leaders among the local students. On the night of March 26, the Klan shoots into the Greene home, narrowly missing three of the children. The Greenes are a well-respected family in Greenwood's Black community and instead of intimidating people the shooting does just the opposite.

> Now the morning of the march we were at the church there and began singing. Forman came by; he was actually on his way out of town, he was driving. So he suggested that maybe we ought to go down to City Hall and protest the shooting. We did not anticipate that the police would react as they did. We were simply going to the police station and request a conference with the police chief asking for police protection in light of the shooting. And they met us there with the dogs and with guns and so forth and I guess, as Jim says, they simply went berserk for a little while. ... — Bob Moses [9]

The marchers — men, women, and children — are singing and praying as they approach City Hall. Suddenly, they are attacked by police dogs and beaten by club-wielding cops. SNCC leaders Bob Moses, Jim Forman, Wazir Peacock, Frank Smith, and six Greenwood activists are arrested.

The Greenwood Movement is not intimidated by dogs or cops or arrests. Where a year earlier local Blacks feared to be seen in the company of Sam Block or Wazir Peacock, now a thousand or more are involved in the Movement in one way or another — protesting, canvasing, trying to register, attending meetings, housing and feeding organizers, providing bail money, and so on. By 10am the next morning there are 50 Blacks lined up at the courthouse to register, by noon more than 100. A small army of helmeted police confront them. Again they attack with dogs and clubs. SNCC field secretary Charlie Cobb reports:

> With the events of the morning of the 28th, the issues in Greenwood broadened beyond voter registration and became more basic. The issue now was, Did people have a right to walk the streets which they had paid for, with whomever they please, as long as they are orderly and obey all traffic laws? The city's answer was, Not if you're a nigger! There was a very direct link between this issue and voter registration, because for years attempting to register to vote for Negroes meant preparing alone to suffer physical assault while making the attempt, economic reprisals after the attempt, and sometimes death. To go with friends and neighbors made the attempt less frightening and reduced the chances of physical assault at the courthouse, since cowards don't like to openly attack numbers. It also reduced the chance of economic reprisal, since the firing of one hundred Negro maids would put the good white housewives of Greenwood in a bind ('tis a grim life for Miss Ann without Mary, Sally, or Sam).nbsp; — Charlie Cobb. [25]

Photos of police dogs savaging nonviolent protesters and news stories describing denial of basic voting rights flash across the world, undercutting Kennedy's "Free World" diplomacy at the United Nations. Moses and the others arrested on the 27th are convicted of "disorderly conduct" and given the maximum sentence, four months in prison and a $200 fine. Hoping to force the Department of Justice to file suit against the county's interference with the right to vote, they refuse to pay the fine or pay bail while the case is appealed.

But the Department of Justice under Attorney General Robert Kennedy cuts a deal instead. Eager to halt the embarrasing news stories coming out of Greenwood, the Feds agree not to file a voting rights suit against local officials. In return, the Greenwood power-structure agrees to release Moses and the others without bond while their case is appealed, and to stop using police brutality against Blacks trying to register. The county also agrees to resume food distribution so long as it is paid for by the federal government (in other words, the Feds supply not only the food, but also pick up the distribution costs which everywhere else in the nation are carried by the county). This allows Leflore politicians to assure their segregationist supporters that local taxes are not being used to "reward uppity Blacks" with food.

With the cops no longer attacking Blacks trying to register to vote, embarrassing photos stop coming out of Greenwood, which relieves the Kennedys. But the deal only halts police repression. The KKK continues to threaten Black voters with terrorist violence and the Citizens Council continues to coerce Blacks with economic terror, firing and evicting those who try to register. And without federal voting-rights enforcement, the Registrar is free to continue rigging the application and "literacy test" to prevent most Blacks from actually registering. In the following months, 1500 Blacks risk life and economic survival by journeying to the courthouse, but only a handful are added to the voting rolls. By the end of 1963 there are only 268 Black voters in Leflore County compared to 10,000 white voters, even though 65% of the population is Black.

After the Greenwood cops agree to stop assaulting Blacks trying to register and LeFlore county resumes food distribution, voter registration organizers once again expand outward into surrounding counties. Greenwood becomes the hub of activity for the Delta counties of LeFlore, Holmes, Carroll, Tallahatchie, Sunflower, and Humphreys. And organizers return to the areas around Laurel, Meridian, Hattiesburg, Holly Springs, and Vicksburg.

White resistance remains vicious. In Holmes county, Hartman Turnbow, a farmer, is one of the first Blacks to try to register since the end of Resonstruction. He leads 12 others to the county courthouse. Klan nightriders surround his home, firebomb it, and then shoot at him, his wife, and daughter when they try to escape the burning building. Turnbow grabs his rifle and returns fire, driving them off. The county Sheriff arrests Turnbow, accusing him of firebombing his own house and shooting it full of holes to win sympathy from Northern movement supporters. Bob Moses and three other SNCC organizers are also arrested. A local court convicts them — without a shred of evidence — but the charges are eventually dismissed when appealed to federal court.

The Movement carries on, and people of courage respond. In Sunflower County, Fannie Lou Hamer, 46 years old, mother of two children, a sharecropper and plantation worker all her life, steps up to register after talking to SNCC organizers and attending a voter registration mass meeting. She and almost 20 others go down to the courthouse in Indianola. The cops stop the old bus they are using, and arrest the driver because the bus is "the wrong color." When Mrs. Hamer

returns home she is fired from her job and evicted from her home of 18 years. Klan marauders shoot up the house of a friend who gives her shelter. Fannie Lou Hamer is not intimidated, she commits her life and soul to the Freedom Movement, first as an SCLC Citizenship School teacher, then as a SNCC field secretary and MFDP candidate for Congress.

In mid-June of 1963, some 150 Blacks hold a "Medgar Evers Memorial" voter registration mass meeting at the little Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church in rural Itta Bena. Klansmen in cars circle around the meeting, a tear gas bomb is thrown under the church and the noxious fumes rise up through the wooden floor boards. Singing freedom songs, SNCC organizer Silas McGee leads them out of the building where they face rocks and bottles and other missiles hurled at them from the speeding cars.

McGee leads the people on a five block protest march to the town hall, dodging into the roadside ditch when cars try to run them down. The town marshall ignores the Klansmen. Instead he arrests 45 of the demonstrators. The next morning they're given one of Mississippi's famous "5-minute" trials and sentenced to the Leflore County prison farm. Movement headquarters in nearby Greenwood has no money to bail them out. A week later, 200 Blacks show up at the county courthouse to try to register and as a show of support for the Itta Bena prisoners. Thirteen Movement activists and leaders, including SNCC field secretaries Hollis Watkins and Lawrence Guyot, are arrested. They are given an instant summary trial, sentenced to four months and a $500 fine, and shipped off to chain-gang labor on the prison farm where they join those arrested in Itta Bena.

1963 is an election year in Mississippi for state offices such as Governor. In later years, out of fury at Democratic Party leaders like the Kennedys and Lyndon Johnson, white racists in the South abandon the Democrats and become hard-line Republicans. But in 1963, that sea change has not yet occurred and Mississippi is still a one-party state — Democrats always win. So the election that actually matters is the summer primary.

Lt. Governor Paul Johnson is running for Governor on a staunch segregationist platform that proclaims his efforts to block James Meredith's integration of 'Ole Miss in 1962. His theme is "Stand tall with Paul against those wanting to change Mississippi's way of life." One of his favorite stump speech lines is: "*You know what the NAACP stands for: Niggers, Alligators, Apes, Coons, and Possums.*"

To dramatize denial of voting rights, SNCC organizes Blacks in the Delta to show up at the polls on primary voting day, August 6th. There is an old Reconstruction Era law — originally passed to let former Confederate soldiers vote — that says people who claim they have been illegally prevented from registering can cast provisional ballots that are set aside pending appeal of their exclusion. Mass meetings are held in Delta communities explaining the strategy and teaching Movement supporters how to cast provisional ballots. Just before election day, Mississippi Attorney General Joe Patterson threatens to "summarily arrest" any Blacks who attempt to cast provisional ballots in the all-white primary.

Almost 1,000 courageous Blacks across the state defy the threat of arrest, Klan intimidation, and Citizens Council retaliation to cast their protest votes. In Greenwood, Billie Johnson, older sister of young activist June Johnson, recalls:

> I had fear in my heart because as soon as morning came, I had to face a big problem. That was going downtown and getting a beating. I know when the police see me they will hit me. I had it all in my mind how it was going to be: one [policeman] would hit me on the head with a night stick, and the other would hit me in the mouth. Another was going to sic five or six dogs on me. I knew they where going to knock me down and kick me in the face. The moment came for me to go downtown. My mind was made up: I looked at the clock — quarter to nine. I was going at nine. If they whipped me for my freedom, I would not mind. And all at once Sam Block came in and said the police said they would not arrest anyone ... I said 'Thank God' three times." [27]

Under the deal cut between the Kennedys and Greenwood officials earlier in the year, the police have promised that they will no longer harass, attack, or arrest Blacks trying to exercise their voting rights. As a result, more than 400 Blacks in Leflore County try to vote in the primary. So many that some polling places are flooded, and dozens are unable to get in before the polls close.

State Democratic Party officials later reject all claims that Blacks had been illegally prevented from registering to vote and none of the provisional ballots are counted. With Blacks across the state denied the right to vote, the racist campaigns of Paul Johnson and other staunch segregationists win solid primary victories.

The Freedom Ballot of 1963

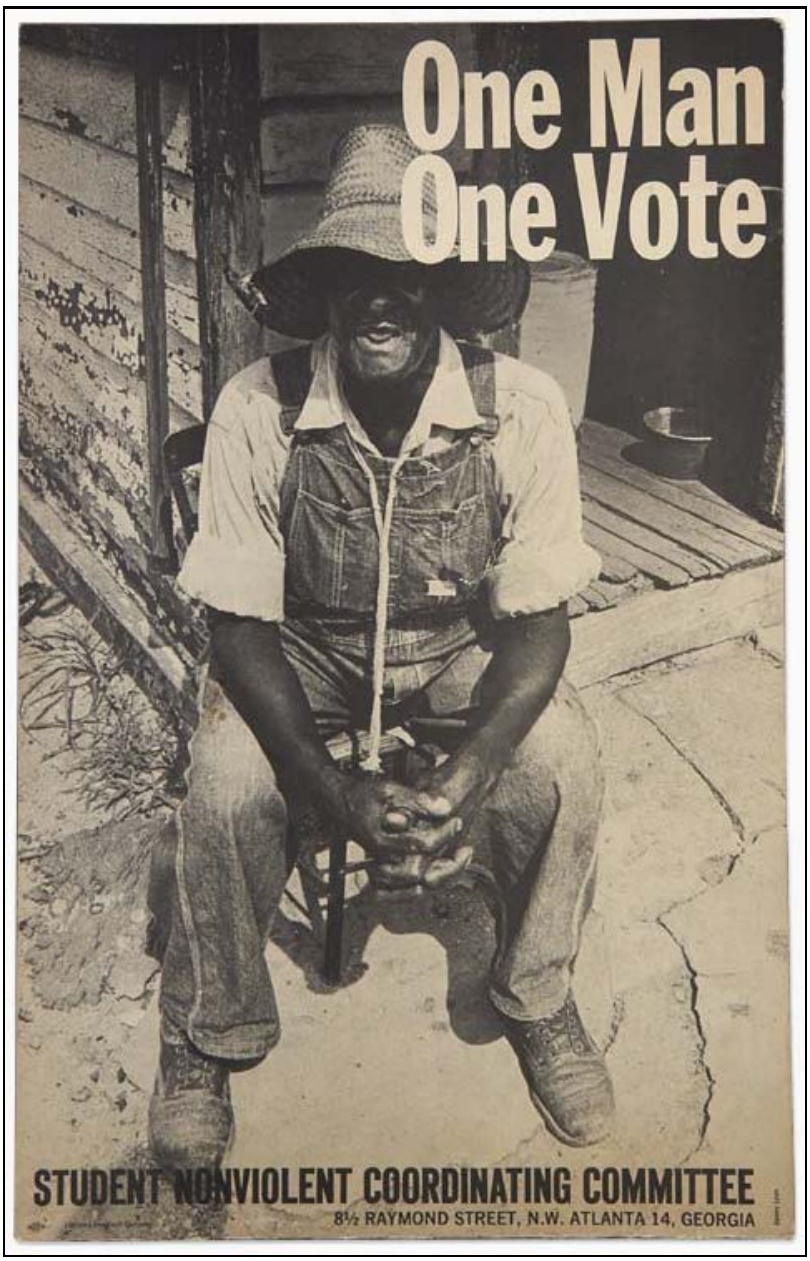
By late 1963, roughly a third of SNCC's 130 staff members are concentrated in Mississippi with most of the remainder in Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Virginia and northern SNCC offices. Of the 41 SNCC field secretaries in Mississippi at the end of 1963, 35 are Black and 6 are white. They range in age from 15 to 50 with most in their late teens or early twenties. Two of the whites and 25 of the Blacks are from the Deep South — the sons and daughters of working class families whose parents are maids, laborers, farmers, and construction workers. Their work is hard and dangerous — with long hours and little success.

Month by month, white resistance to Black voter registration efforts in Mississippi intensifies — bombings, arrests, beatings, shootings, firings, evictions, and other forms of retaliation. Few Blacks dare defy this white terror by trying to register, and only a handful of those that make the attempt are added to the voter rolls. The NAACP files lawsuits which are often eventually won, but county Voter Registrars find ever more devious methods of circumventing court rulings to deny even the most "qualified" applicants.

Federal efforts to enforce voting rights are reluctant and ineffectual. Moreover, they focus on "equal application of the law." Since Mississippi law requires that prospective voters pass a complex and arcane literacy test, and the state's segregated Black school system has systematically denied an adequate education to the overwhelming majority of Blacks, if equal application of the law ever actually occurred it would simply result in disenfranchisement of a good many illiterate whites, and just a tiny increase in the number of Black voters.

In response to these realities, SNCC takes a radical step, it decides to challenge the entire concept

of voter "qualification." Voting is about political power, not academic achievement. Since all citizens are subject to the laws and taxes imposed by elected officials they should all have a right to vote regardless of their education. If the power-structure wants voters to be literate, they should provide a public education system that teaches everyone to read and write regardless of race. SNCC's position is summed up by adopting the South African cry of: "***One Man, One Vote***," and illustrated by a poster of an old sharecropper.



The November general election pits the segregationist Paul Johnson (Democrat) against the equally segregationist Rubel Phillips (Republican). With Blacks prevented from voting — and having little interest in supporting either candidate even if they could vote — COFO decides to hold an unofficial "Freedom Ballot" (or "Freedom Vote"). The Freedom Ballot campaign begins on October 6 with a state-wide convention at the Masonic Temple in Jackson where an interracial slate of candidates is nominated to appear on the Movement's Freedom Ballot along with the Democratic and Republican candidates. Heading the Freedom ticket is NAACP leader Aaron Henry of Clarksdale for Governor, and Movement activist Rev. Ed King of Tougaloo College for

Lt. Governor.

The Freedom Ballot campaign is based on the "One Man, One Vote" principle that all adult citizens should be eligible to vote. The campaign is designed to show that Blacks in large numbers want to vote but are denied the right to do so — and that the white segregationists elected to office do not represent Mississippi Blacks.

Freedom Ballot voters first "register" by filling out a simple Freedom Registration Form which organizers carry door-to-door and make available in those churches, offices, pool-halls, and other locations that are willing to dare white wrath by supporting the Freedom Movement. Once "registered," freedom voters can cast their Freedom Ballot for the candidates of their choice. A state campaign office is set up in Jackson, more SNCC and CORE organizers are added to the COFO staff, and SCLC's Citizenship Schools program is expanded.

> [*See* www.crmvet.org/docs/63_cofo_freedom-reg.pdf for example Freedom Registration form.]

SNCC member Mike Miller recalls:

> [Though this] was obviously not the "legal ballot," everybody realized that it was a test of whether we can really get people to put their bodies on the line for the right to vote, because they would have to show up in a public place and check a ballot. And nobody really knew what was going to be the turnout for this thing. It was a very precarious place for the Movement to be, to face a test like this, which was very different from militant students or young people doing direct action.nbsp;— Mike Miller. [19]

COFO activists, along with local volunteers (mostly young), fan out across the state to organize the Freedom Ballot. The going is tough. Terror lies heavy on the land, people are afraid, Black churches, organizations, and businesses fear they will bombed or evicted if they allow Freedom Balloting on their premises, and any kind of voting on the part of Blacks — even in an unofficial mock election — risks vicious retaliation from the white power- structure. And there are some counties, such as Issaquena, Amite, Neshoba, and Grenada that are simply too dangerous to enter, the risk of local supporters being murdered just too high.

Across the state, in county after county, police and sheriffs harass and threaten Movement activists. In Jackson, a cop shoves SNCC organizer Ivanhoe Donaldson into the back of a police car, draws his gun and points it at Ivanhoe's head, shouting, "*You and the other goddamn Moses niggers around here ain't gonna git nuthing but a bullet in the haid! Black son of a bitch, I'm gonna kill you, nigger!*" Noticing that there are witnesses, another cop suggests that this is not a good time or place for a killing, and Ivanhoe is released.

At a Freedom Ballot campaign rally in Hattiesburg, police cars circle the church with their sirens howling. Fire trucks add to the din, and firemen (all of them white, of course) storm into the sanctuary, claiming there is a fire. Shouting over the clamor, Aaron Henry defiantly tells them, "*The fire within us cannot be extinguished with water!*" When Freedom Ballot votes are cast in November, 3500 of 7500 eligible Blacks in Hattiesburg and Forrest County participate — the highest turnout in the state.

In late October, almost 100 students — mainly from Yale and Stanford, and most of them white — are recruited by National Student Association and Democratic Party activist Allard Lowenstein to come work as volunteers on the Freedom Ballot campaign. They represent the first large influx of northern whites into a Mississippi Freedom Movement which is 99.9% Black. They share the work and the danger that Blacks have endured for years, some are arrested, some are beaten, but overall violence across the state drops noticeably during the two weeks they are in Mississippi. The white students also draw expanded coverage from the press, and with it increased political pressure on the Kennedy administration. The visible presence of federal law enforcement suddenly increases — but only temporarily. When the white students leave, so do the federal agents. As Lawrence Guyot put it: "*Wherever those white volunteers went FBI agents followed. It was really a problem to count the number of FBI agents who were there to protect the [white] students. It was just that gross.*"

But the white students also bring culture clashes and ingrained assumptions that spark racial tensions between Blacks and whites within the Movement. Some of the white students from elite universities express attitudes — conscious or unconscious — of privilege, superiority, authority and assertiveness that rub raw against Black activists who have been putting their lives on the line for years.

In churches and other venues, Freedom Voting takes place from Friday, November 1st to Tuesday the 5th, with records kept so that no one can vote more than once. More than 80,000 people — four times the total number of Blacks officially registered to vote — defy the cops, the Klan, and the Citizens Council to mark Freedom Ballots. There is significant coverage in the national and northern press and increased demands that the Kennedy administration defend Black voting rights.

> [Two weeks later, President Kennedy visits Dallas Texas, where white racists and right-wingers call him a "traitor." He is shot to death on a downtown street and Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) assumes office.]

The Freedom Ballot becomes a pilot program for future Movement political organization in Mississippi. It lays the foundation of a powerful, Black-led, state-wide, political organization that soon evolves into the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and it lays the groundwork for Freedom Summer and the 1964 MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City.

Freedom Day in Hattiesburg

Hattiesburg, Mississippi, population 35,000 in 1960, is the seat of Forrest County where almost every white is registered to vote, but only 12 of the 7,500 eligible Blacks — one-tenth of 1% — are on the rolls.

Unlike the Delta counties where Blacks are a majority, in Forrest County Blacks are a bit under one-third of the population. And also unlike the Delta where agriculture completely dominates the economy and poverty is extreme, Hattiesburg has the benefit of some Black-owned farms, and some Blacks are employed in timber-based manufacturing, at the University of Southern Mississippi, and at adjacent Camp Shelby, the second largest Army base in America. So while

most Hattiesburg Blacks are poor — median annual family income is $4,000 (equal to $30,000 in 2013) — their economic situation is not as desperate as in the Delta.

Just south of Hattiesburg is the unincorporated town of Palmer's Crossing, one of Mississippi's historically Black communities where African-Americans own property and businesses, and which to some degree serve as havens from white oppression.

[Today, Palmer's Crossing is incorporated into Hattiesburg.]

Hattiesburg & Palmer's Crossing are no strangers to the freedom struggle. When Clyde Kennard was framed and jailed in 1959 for trying to integrate the university, NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer and many others worked to free him. For years, Forrest County Blacks filed voting rights lawsuits against Therron Lynd, the notoriously racist Registrar of Voters. As of March 1962, he has not allowed a single Black to register, but he's registered 1,836 whites without requiring them to even fill out an application or take the literacy test. Lynd not only requires Blacks to take the official test, he is famous for making up questions on the spot such as, "*How many bubbles in a bar of soap?*" Then "failing" the applicant regardless of the answer. As in the rest of the state, Blacks who try to register face violence, jailing, firings, and evictions. And also as elsewhere in Mississippi, anyone who tries to picket, march, sit-in, or protest in any other way, is instantly arrested.

In March of 1962, two SNCC organizers — Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins, both veterans of the McComb project and the Pike County jail — arrive in Hattiesburg to begin a voter registration campaign and shake Hattiesburg to its social roots. They find fertile ground. In addition to Vernon Dahmer, there is NAACP leader J.C. Fairly, beauty-shop owner Peggy Jean Connor, and over in Palmer's Crossing there is Victoria Jackson Gray — an SCLC Citizenship School teacher and later a SNCC field organizer of renown. Along with John Henry Gould, Johnnie Mae Walker, and others, they found the Forrest County Voters League and begin holding voter-registration meetings in St. Johns United Methodist Church in Palmers Crossing. When Hayes and Watkins are transferred to the Delta in September, Victoria Gray assumes leadership of the Voters League.

By the fall of 1963, Hattiesburg and Palmer's Crossing are centers of Movement activity. A storefront owned by Mrs. Lenon Woods on Mobile Street in the heart of Hattiesburg's Black community becomes the SNCC Freedom House and COFO headquarters. After being released from jail in Winona, SNCC organizer Lawrence Guyot is assigned to Hattiesburg as project director. When Freedom Ballot votes are cast in November, almost half (3,500 of 7,500) of Forrest County's eligible Blacks participate in the mock vote, the highest percentage of any county in the state.

Building on the Freedom Ballot success, movement leaders call for a Freedom Day in Hattiesburg. Modeled on the one in Selma, Alabama, it is to be a major mobilization of potential voters, local activists & students, and SNCC leadership. Working with the Commission on Religion and Race (CORR) of the National Council of Churches, SNCC asks northern ministers to participate. The hope is that as in Selma the mostly white clergy will draw national media attention and that their presence will both prevent police repression and pressure the federal government to enforce legal rulings requiring Therron Lynd to stop blocking Black voting rights.

This experiment of using northerners occurs in the context of a fierce debate within SNCC over bringing a large number of white supporters into an overwhelmingly Black struggle. SNCC's Black activists are divided. The presence of whites might (it is hoped) provide some protection for local Blacks, focus national attention on denial of human rights, and increase pressure on the Johnson administration to enforce the Constitution and federal court rulings. But using whites for protection that is not given to Blacks perpetuates the racist double-standard they so strongly oppose, and there is deep concern that highly educated whites will dominate the fledgling community organizations being slowly built by Mississippi Blacks. Local leaders in Hattiesburg, however, are clear — they want all the support they can muster and if white clergymen are willing to put their bodies on the line at the Forrest County courthouse they are welcome.

On the eve of Freedom Day, some fifty northern clergymen — mostly Presbyterians, some Episcopalians and Methodists, a Unitarian, and two Jewish Rabbis — arrive in Hattiesburg and Palmer's Crossing. Most are white, a few are Black and one is a Chinese-American from San Francisco. Led by the Rev. John Coventry Smith, some are ready to picket the courthouse which they know in Mississippi normally means immediate arrest. Others are there to witness, but are not yet ready to face jail.

The mass meeting that night is the largest held to date. More than 600 people are jammed into St. Paul's Methodist church and overflow outside. Among them them are James Forman, Fannie Lou Hamer, John Lewis, Amzie Moore, and Bob Moses. State NAACP President Aaron Henry is arrested on some pretext as he drives into town, but he's bailed out in time to address the meeting. Annell Ponder of SCLC, Dave Dennis of CORE, Lawrence Guyot of SNCC, and local leaders Vernon Dahmer and Victoria Gray speak. As does Ella Baker of SNCC who says:

> Even if segregation is gone, we will still need to be free; we will still have to see that everyone has a job. Even if we can all vote, if people are still hungry, we will not be free ... Singing alone is not enough; we need schools and learning ... Remember, we are not fighting for the freedom of the Negro alone, but for the freedom of the human spirit, a larger freedom that encompasses all mankind.nbsp;— Ella Baker. [1]

January 22nd, 1964, is Freedom Day in Hattiesburg. A cold rain is falling. Fifty Blacks, mostly students plus a few adults, plus thirty of the northern clergy, picket the Forrest County courthouse. Some carry signs with SNCC's new slogan, "*One Man One Vote*." Close to 100 Black adults are lined up at the building to register, their numbers dwarfing all previous attempts.

A phalanx of cops and volunteer "auxiliary police" (possemen) in helmets and rain slickers, guns on their hips, clubs in their hands, march down the middle of Main Street towards the protesters. Using a bullhorn, they issue their order: "*This is the Hattiesburg Police Department. We're ordering you to disperse. Clear the sidewalk!*" The pickets hold the line. No one leaves. The cops threaten again. The pickets hold. SNCC leader Bob Moses is arrested for "Disturbing the Peace" when he tries to escort an elderly Black women into the courthouse to register. But none of the pickets are arrested. For the first time in living memory, an inter-racial civil rights demonstration in Mississippi is not suppressed. As it becomes clear there won't be a mass jailing, more people join the picket line, swelling it to over 200 who by the end of the day are massed on the courthouse steps singing freedom songs.

Theron Lynd allows only four voter applicants at a time into the building. He slowly takes as long as he can to process each application. Meanwhile, the other applicants continue to stand in the cold rain waiting their turn. Whites are allowed to freely enter the building, but Blacks are not. Justice Department officials and FBI agents take notes, but refuse to intervene. When the courthouse is closed at noon for lunch, only 12 applicants have been processed. The rain, the waiting, and the pickets continue all day until the courthouse closes at 5pm.

Yale graduate Oscar Chase, a white member of SNCC, is arrested on a phony vehicle charge. He is put in a cell with white prisoners who beat him into bloody unconsiousness while the guards watch. The most brutal of the white inmates is rewarded with early release. After Chase is bailed out the next morning, historian Howard Zinn and two Freedom Movement lawyers take him to the FBI office to file a complaint. His clothes are covered with blood, his nose broken, and his face swollen and bruised. The FBI agent studies the clean-shaven college professor, the two lawyers in their neatly-pressed suits, and the battered freedom fighter. "*Who was it got the beating?*" he asks.

Freedom Day is considered a Movement victory. The pickets are not dispersed by police billy clubs, nor are there mass arrests. More than 150 Forrest County Blacks defy generations of repression by trying to register. Therron Lynd is forced to allow at least some of them into the office to fill out the application and take the literacy test. But it is only a partial victory. Neither the Justice Department nor the FBI enforce the Constitution, federal law, or court orders to protect voting rights and few, if any, Blacks are actually registered. And when some of those who protested or attempted to register are later fired from their jobs, the federal government does nothing.

The next day, the picket line returns to the courthouse. All day they picket, and then the following day, and then every day, in what becomes known as the "Perpetual Picket." Week after week, month after month until the late spring when the focus shifts to Freedom Summer organizing, relays of northern clergy join local Blacks on the line. Though there are no mass busts, individual activists continue to be arrested. Guyot makes a freedom speech and is jailed for "corrupting minors." Then in April the state legislature passes a draconian (and utterly unconstitutional) anti-picketing law. The Hattiesburg movement defies it, and 44 pickets, including 8 northern ministers, are arrested.

Beatings, violence, evictions, and firings continue, but for the first time since the end of Reconstruction, Blacks file to run for national office — Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville and John Cameron of Hattiesburg for the 2nd and 5th Congressional Districts. And Victoria Jackson Gray of Palmers Crossing for U.S. Senate against the arch-racist John Stennis of Mississippi. The crack in the iceberg of segregation that began in McComb, widened in Greenwood, and expanded across the state in the Freedom Ballot, now threatens to shatter and obliterate the old order.

Mississippi Summer Project

The Situation

As the new year of 1964 begins, everyone in the South, Black and white, understand that when Afro-Americans demand the vote they are defying a century of oppression — and that a cry for the vote is actually a demand for social and political equality with whites.

For three hard years the Freedom Movement in Mississippi has been trying to register Black voters against the adamant opposition of white political power, the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, and the economic warfare of the White Citizens Council. With steadfast courage, freedom fighters have suffered and endured beatings, jailings, shootings, bombings, and assassinations in places like McComb, Jackson, Greenwood, the Delta, and Hattiesburg. They have built a broad and determined mass movement — yet no more than a few hundred new voters have been added to the rolls.

As 1963 ends, the number of Blacks registered by the Mississippi Movement is so small that the Voter Education Project (VEP) halts all further funding for COFO projects because they're simply not cost-effective, the money can be better spent elsewhere. Loss of the VEP grants is critically important, without them the Mississippi Movement faces financial starvation.

In Washington DC, Mississippi's Congressional delegation of five Representatives plus Senators Eastland and Stennis are among the most racist and reactionary the entire nation. With Blacks disenfranchised, the undemocratic, "good 'ole boy," crony politics of the South return the same corrupt "Dixiecrat" incumbents to Congress year after year, allowing them to build seniority and amass enormous power. All legislation has to pass through the committees they control. They use that power to block civil rights legislation, prevent the federal government from defending racial minorities, and halt any national program or reform that might benefit the poor and working class regardless of race.

With the Dixiecrats controlling the key Congressional committees, first Kennedy, and then Johnson, hesitate to offend the powerful southern bloc. So despite their many public promises, neither of them take effective action to defend Black voters in the Deep South. Though laws are on the books making it a federal crime to interfere with voting rights, neither the FBI, nor the Department of Justice (DOJ), nor the federal courts enforce those laws. The FBI is able to track down and jail kidnappers and bank robbers, but when crimes against Blacks are committed right before their eyes they claim they are "only an investigative agency," with no power to make arrests. The DOJ files lawsuit after lawsuit, which they often win in court, but nothing changes and no Afro-American voters are added to the rolls because no action is taken against the politically well-connected officials who violate the law and flout the court rulings. Nor is there any relief in sight because LBJ has stripped out any meaningful voting rights protection from the draft Civil Rights bill being debated by Congress.

While most of the national media covers dramatic, photogenic events such as the Freedom Rides and the Birmingham marches they either ignore the issue of Black voting rights or relegate coverage to small articles on the back pages — leaving most Americans outside the South unaware of the South's brutal political realities.

The Dilemma

By November of 1963, Movement activists in Mississippi are exhausted, frustrated, and

discouraged. Their efforts and strategies have built a movement — but not increased the number of Black voters. But movements *move*, if one strategy fails you try another. Something new is needed, something dramatic, something bold.

Structurally, the Mississippi Movement is led by COFO, the coalition of SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC. But CORE's attention and resources are primarily focused on the North, particularly at this time around protests at the New York World's Fair, and much of their small southern staff is concentrated in Louisiana. SCLC's participation in COFO is small, and its attention is on St. Augustine, Florida and the state of Alabama. The NAACP national leadership is mainly interested in legal cases and they are uneasy with the growing radicalization and militance of the young organizers of SNCC and CORE. SNCC provides most of the COFO staff, and with VEP funds now cut off, SNCC is shouldering most of the financial burden as well. So the decision of what to do falls largely on SNCC — as SNCC decides, so COFO will go. (*See* Organizational Stucture of Freedom Summer for additional information)

SNCC activists note that in October, the presence of northern white supporters at Freedom Day in Selma Alabama encourages Black turnout, draws national media attention, and restrains the normally vicious Sheriff Clark from the kind of violence and arrests previously inflicted on Blacks lining up at the courthouse to register. Even the notorious State Troopers are held in check. Will the same strategy produce the same results at the upcoming Freedom Day in Hattiesburg? SNCC leaders decide to find out.

Similarly, they also note the heightened FBI presence, extensive media coverage, and decrease in violence during the two weeks that white students from Yale and Stanford are in Mississippi to support the statewide Freedom Ballot in November. As SNCC/COFO leader Bob Moses later put it: "*That was the first time that I realized that the violence could actually be controlled. Turned on and off. That it wasn't totally random. I realized that somewhere along the line there was someone who ... could at least send out word for it to stop. And it would. That was a revelation.*" [1]

If the presence of a handful of northern whites can restrain Jim Clark in Selma, and if 80 white students can reduce violence in Mississippi for two weeks, what would happen if a thousand northern students, most of them white, came to Mississippi for the entire summer of 1964? In mid-November of 1963, the COFO staff meets in Greenville after the Freedom Ballot. They discuss the idea of a summer project involving a large number of northern white students. The debate is long and intense.

Proponents — among them Fannie Lou Hamer, Lawrence Guyot, and CORE's Dave Dennis — argue that Mississippi's iron-grip of repression can only be broken by creating a crises which forces the federal government to seriously confront the state. Asking the sons and daughters of white America to join them on the front line of danger might do that. And if nothing else, it would focus national media attention on the realities of Black oppression in the Deep South. As SNCC Chair John Lewis put it: "*Mississippi was deadly, and it was getting worse each day. Our people were essentially being slaughtered down there. If white America would not respond to the deaths of our people, the thinking went, maybe it would react to the deaths of its own children.*" [2]

Moreover, bringing white supporters to share the dangers of Mississippi will prove to Black communities that they are not alone, that there are people across the country who stand with

them. By breaking down the sense of isolation, fear can be reduced and participation encouraged.

But many other dedicated and experienced COFO organizers — including Sam Block, Wazir Peacock, Hollis Watkins, Charlie Cobb, Ivanhoe Donaldson, and Macarthur Cotton — firmly oppose to the idea. Some argue that white volunteers will increase the danger to local Blacks because the presence of white "race traitors" will enrage the Klan and Citizens Council. And unlike Black activists, whites cannot blend into the community, instead they will be beacons drawing the attention of both KKK and cops.

Others are concerned that recruiting an army of white students is an admission of racial dependence — that Blacks need whites to get anything done — and that whites urging Blacks to register to vote will simply reinforce traditional patterns of racial subservience. Ever since the sit-ins of 1960, Movement activists have confronted and opposed racism in whatever form, whenever and wherever they encountered it, but the strategic premise of the summer project is based on using the racism of a mass media that covers whites but not Blacks, and the racism of a federal government that has not protected Blacks, but which *might* protect whites. The proposal for a summer project appears to acquiesce in, and accommodate, the very racism they are trying to oppose.

Moreover, many Black organizers are uneasy that whites — with skills and confidence born of privilege, Ivy League educations, and ingrained attitudes of superiority — will push aside both Black organizers and emerging local leaders. One long-time SNCC organizer expressed the worry of many, "*The white volunteers who know more about office work such as organizing files and making long-distance calls will end up in charge, telling me what to do.*"

Though it is not obvious at the time, when dedicated organizers doing serious work with real people passionately disagree, it is usually the case that both sides have valid points. When abstract issues are debated in coffee houses and university classrooms, choices may seem clear. But when you're actually on the ground there are often no ideal solutions to imperfect realities. The Greenville meeting ends with no decision.

But as the discussion continues over the following weeks a central fact emerges — the local people who are the heart and soul of the Movement need and want all the help they can get. If northern students are willing to put their bodies on the line in Mississippi, local Blacks in the freedom struggle will welcome them no matter what color they are. The firm support for the summer project by local leaders like Fannie Lou Hamer, Amzie Moore, and E.W. Steptoe carries great weight with field secretaries who are deeply committed to the principle of, "*Let the people decide*." As does Mrs. Hamer's argument that, "*If we're trying to break down segregation, we can't segregate ourselves.*"

The debate continues at COFO's meeting in December, ending with a tentative agreement for a very limited summer project of no more than 100 white students. At the end of December 1963, SNCC's Executive Committee weighs the pros and cons at length. The motion they adopt — " To obtain the right for all citizens of Mississippi to vote, using as many people as necessary to obtain that endnbsp;— implies a large project with many northern whites.

The final decision comes down to the January COFO meeting held in Hattiesburg after Freedom

Day which itself becomes an argument for the summer project. The presence of white clergymen on the line at the Forrest County courthouse not only restrains police violence and state repression of free speech rights, but encourages Blacks to try to register in large numbers — 150 on Freedom Day, more than 500 over the following weeks.

The COFO meeting is interrupted by news from nearby Amite County — Louis Allen has been murdered. Bob Moses later recalled, "*...it became clear that we had to do something, something big, that would really open the situation up. Otherwise they'd simply continue to kill the best among us. ... that's when I began to argue strongly that we had to have the Summer Project*." A majority of the COFO staff agree. The concerns regarding large numbers of white volunteers remain serious and real, but something has to be done to confront white terror in Mississippi. The Summer Project — which grows and expands into Freedom Summer — is on.

Pulling it Together

Though the mass media seems to believe that Freedom Movement events simply occur spontaneously, in real life careful planning is essential and where planning is absent failure results. By March, the basic structure of Freedom Summer is coming into focus — recruitment and training of volunteers, voter registration, building the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), challenging Mississippi's all-white delegation at the Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City, Freedom Schools, community centers, and legal support. But as always, the devil is in the details and some of the issues are thorny.

Finances. The Freedom Movement is always starved for funds, and with the loss of VEP grants the financial situation is desperate. The original (highly optimistic) plan calls for a large Summer Project budget, but by early May only $10,000 has been raised and there is not even $5 to fix the clogged toilet at COFO Headquarters in Jackson. Comedian and Movement stalwart Dick Gregory does a fund-raising tour that nets $97,000, but that is nowhere near enough, and on three occasions before summer SNCC is unable to pay its staff their munificent salary of $10 per week (equal to $75 a week in 2013).

Nonviolence. The issue of nonviolence is troublesome. Some activists hold to Gandhian "philosophic" nonviolence, but most organizers in Mississippi are "tactically" nonviolent. They adhere to nonviolence on protests because anything else is both counter-productive and suicidal, but self-defense outside of demonstrations is a different matter. Most Blacks in Mississippi are armed, and they are determined to defend both themselves and Freedom Movement guests.

But civil rights workers are caught in a "trick bagnbsp;— unarmed they cannot defend themselves from the Klan, but police frequently stop, harass, and arrest them, and possession of a weapon can be used as a pretext for charges carrying heavy prison sentences. If the stop occurs on an isolated rural road with no witnesses, there is nothing to prevent the cops from shooting the activist in cold blood and then claiming "self-defense" with the activist's gun as "evidence." In regards to firearms, some field secretaries adopt the self-defense philosophy of "*Rather be caught with it, than without it*," others who judge the danger of police assassination and prison to be greater rely on agile feet and a fast car to escape.

Within SNCC, questions related to nonviolence are hotly debated: Should SNCC staff carry guns?

Should weapons be stored in offices and freedom houses? Should SNCC declare itself in favor of armed self-defense as Robert Williams did? The decisions they reach are based on practical politics and tactical realities. Away from protests and those public events where search and arrest is highly likely, going armed is left up to individual staff members, but the highly-visible white volunteers who are most likely to be stopped and searched are not to carry weapons. Weapons are not to be kept in offices or freedom houses because police raids are expected and the presence of guns can be used to whip up media-hysteria and jail Movement leaders on phony charges. But during the night, armed locals will be stationed as guards around offices and freedom houses as necessary. SNCC will not publicly endorse armed self-defense at this time — but neither will they condemn it.

Anti-Communism. Though finally beginning to weaken, in 1964 the "red scare" anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era still exerts a powerful influence on government, the media, and mainstream America. Government officials and many liberal organizations & individuals still shun groups that work with, or have among their members, "known Communists," "pinkos," or "fellow-travelers." Dr. King and SCLC endure, and at times succumb to, unremitting pressure from the Kennedys and President Johnson to disassociate themselves from individuals whom FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover deems too radical, including Jack O'Dell, Stanley Levison, and Bayard Rustin.

Few Freedom Movement activists have ever met an actual real-life Communist, but those who have generally consider them to be part of the, "*You're going too fast, you're going too far*" wing of the liberal establishment. So to those on the front lines of the Movement, the obsession over "Communist influence" is absurd and laughable — except when it threatens desperately needed fund raising. Which it very much does.

With rare exceptions, CORE and SNCC resist pressure to disassociate themselves from "dangerous radicals." Their attitude is that so long as leftists refrain from disrupting the Freedom Movement with extraneous political controversies, anyone willing "*to put their body on the line*" is welcome to participate regardless of their political beliefs or affiliations.

After John Lewis' speech at the March on Washington, and with growing media attention on the upcoming Summer Project, liberal pundits such as Theodore White and Arthur Schlesinger step up their attacks on SNCC, and SNCC's association with "Reds," while conservatives such as Evans & Novak allege that SNCC has been "penetrated" by "subversive elements." The FBI's COINTELPRO operation increasingly focuses on SNCC, working to isolate it and destroy its funding base. A favorite tactic is to plant smear stories in the media. One example is the *The New York Times* article titled, Hoover Says Reds Exploit Negroes," which runs shortly before the start of Freedom Summer. Hoover is enraged when Lewis responds with "*The Director of the FBI should spend less time turning over logs looking for the Red Menace and more time pursuing the bombers, midnight assassins, and brutal racists who daily make a mockery of the United States Constitution*."

But the national leaders of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York and Washington threaten to withdraw their considerable legal and financial support if the Summer Project accepts help from anyone affiliated with the National Lawyers Guild (NLG). NLG attorneys have defended Communists, and some self-acknowledged Communists and former-Communists are

NLG members. NLG attorneys have also defended labor unions, peace activists, abortionists, beatniks, homosexuals, and others deemed by the establishment to be social-undesirables.

Leaders from the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and National Council of Churches (NCC) all advise SNCC to reject any assistance from the NLG. But NLG lawyers such as Arthur Kinoy, William Kunstler, Len Holt, Ben Smith, and Victor Rabinowitz have been in the forefront of the struggle throughout the South. SNCC refuses to abandon its "*body on the line*" principle, and NLG lawyers provide legal services throughout the summer — as do NAACP lawyers.

"What If?" Controversies. No one really knows what to expect. In a very real sense the Summer Project is a huge leap of faith into the unknown — "*jumping off a cliff and learning to fly on the way down*nbsp;— as one SNCC activist put it. Inevitably, there are long, intense discussions about hypothetical "*what if*" situations. What if, for example, the daughter of a U.S. Senator is arrested, who decides when she is bailed out? The Movement? The daughter? Her father? If she's arrested with local Blacks, must everyone be released together? What happens if her father pulls strings to spring her while the local folk languish in jail? How do you weigh their safety and suffering against the political value and media attention of continued incarceration?

As it turns out, when actual events on the ground pose these kind of questions they are answered on the basis of the specific circumstances at that time and place, rather than abstract theories and principles. And for the most part, the summer volunteers prove to be courageous and committed, standing in solidarity with Mississippi Blacks regardless of their parents' fears, desires or demands.

Mississippi Girds for Armageddon

Mississippi's white power-structure and local media react to Freedom Summer as if they face invasion by another "War of Northern Aggression" (their term for what the rest of the nation knows as the "Civil War"). Amid rhetoric about "*..savage blacks and their Communist masters*," and the absolute necessity of, "*...the strict segregation of the races controlled by Christian Anglo-Saxon white men, the only race that can build and maintain just and stable government*," the Klan issues its own warning — on a single night crosses are burned in 64 of the state's 82 counties. Some of the churches that had agreed to host Freedom Schools are firebombed. In many cases, shortly before buildings are burned their fire insurance policies are suddenly cancelled by their white insurance agents — a typical example of the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizen Council working in tandem.

The state legislature passes laws outlawing Freedom Schools, allowing officials to declare dawn-to-dusk curfews, and making it a crime to pass out leaflets advocating a boycott. The number of State Troopers is doubled, cities and towns hastily deputize and arm white men (many of them Klansmen) to repel the "beatnik horde." Jackson police purchase 200 new shotguns, stockpile tear gas, build troop carriers and searchlight trucks, and convert an armored car into an urban battle tank. Mayor Allen Thompson tells a reporter: "*This is it. They are not bluffing, and we are not bluffing. We are going to be ready for them. ... They won't have a chance.*"

Washington Does Nothing

While white Mississippi mobilizes to defend the "*Southern Way of Life*" with billy clubs and jail cells, guns and bombs, the White House and Justice Department do nothing. Despite repeated pleas from civil rights leaders, they refuse to condemn or criticize the hate and hysteria being whipped to fever pitch in Mississippi. They refuse to issue any public statement or give any private signal that violence or state repression against nonviolent voter registration efforts will be prosecuted as required by federal law. They refuse to even acknowledge that registering voters and teaching children are neither criminal acts nor subversive plots. FBI Director Hoover does, however, tell the press: "*We will not wet-nurse troublemakers.*"

In early June, just before the project is to begin, a Black delegation travels from Mississippi to Washington to warn of impending violence and beg for protection. The President is out of town. The Attorney General is unavailable. Congress is uninterested in holding any hearings. The FBI rebuffs them as subversives and Communist dupes.

Desperate for someone to hear their pleas, the delegation holds a conference at the National Theater, addressing a volunteer panel of writers, educators, and lawyers, along with several hundred ordinary citizens. Fannie Lou Hamer describes the brutal police beating in Winona MS, Mrs. Allen testifies about the recent murder of her husband, a boy of 14 tells of police brutality against peaceful pickets, and SNCC worker Jimmy Travis talks of being shot in Greenwood and asks for federal marshals to protect voter registration workers. Legal scholars describe the statutes allowing — in fact, requiring — the federal government to enforce the law, make arrests, and protect the rights of voters. The transcript is sent to President Johnson and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. There is no response.

At the volunteer-orientation in Oxford Ohio, DOJ official John Doar addresses the volunteers who are about to go down into Mississippi. They ask him: "*What will be the role of the federal government in protecting our lives?*" He replies that so far as their government is concerned they will have to take their chances with a hostile state — defenseless. They will be in the same situation that southern Blacks have endured for generations. The volunteers boo, but Bob Moses stops them, saying, "*We don't do that.*" He tells them that Doar is just being honest.

This utter failure of the Johnson administration and Congress has tragic human consequences.

> I remain convinced to this day that the slightest intervention — public or private — indicating firmly to the Mississippi authorities that acts of terrorism and lawlessness would bring serious federal consequences would have saved lives. But that would have required a 'profile of courage' from someone in the Johnson administration.nbsp;— Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael). [1]

Recruitment & Training

Recruitment. The responsibility of recruiting the volunteers falls mainly on Friends of SNCC and CORE chapters in the North and in the South campus SNCC affiliates, NAACP youth groups, and independent civil rights organizations. By March, brochures have been printed and SNCC leaders like John Lewis are touring campuses and speaking before Movement and religious groups.

[You can find examples of Freedom Summer recruitment brochures on the web at: www.crmvet.org/docs/fs64-1.pdf and www.crmvet.org/docs/fs64-2.pdf. (These documents won't display well — or at all — on some Kindles so this is not a live link, you'll have to copy or paste it into a web browser.]

Recruitment focuses on the elite private and state universities. In part, this is practical politics, those are the schools where the sons and daughters of the rich and powerful are to be found. But more important are the hard financial realities. SNCC and COFO are broke and the Summer Project is operating on a frayed shoestring. There are no funds to pay for transportation or bail bonds. Summer volunteers have to pay their own way and bring $500 in cash (equal to $3700 in 2013) for bail and other expenses. Most students — particularly Black students whose families are scraping every dime to keep them in college — don't have and cannot possibly raise that kind of money. And many Black students have to work at full-time summer jobs to pay for fall tuition.

As it turns out, close to half of all Summer Project volunteers have previously been active in the Freedom Movement, primarily in the North. Most of them are students, though not necessarily from elite colleges. Some have been arrested on protests, many have participated in pickets and marches, others have been involved in fund-raising and support work.

Parental Opposition. The opportunity to endure long hours, stifling heat, likely arrest, possible violence, and perhaps even death, all for no pay and no reward other than the satisfaction of a just cause, proves surprisingly attractive. Well over a thousand young men and women apply. Their parents, however, are not so enthusiastic. Most parents fear for their children's safety — with good reason. And among whites, some oppose the whole concept of equality and civil rights for Blacks. Others are aghast at the thought of social interaction (to say nothing of sex) between their daughters and Black men. The number of young people who want to participate but whose parents prevent them from applying is unknown, but probably significant. In tenor with the times and to avoid legal repercussions from litigious fathers and mothers, SNCC requires that female volunteers under the age of 21 provide written consent from their parents — many of whom outright refuse. Male volunteers are not rquired to obtain parental permission.

A number of the volunteers who do apply later withdraw their applications, in most cases because they can't come up with the money. However, some withdraw because of parental opposition. Yet there's a rebellious wind beginning to stir among America's youth, and many Summer Project participants go to Mississippi in open and wrenching defiance of their families. Playing in the background of their rebellion is the soundtrack of Bob Dylan's 1964, "*The Times They Are A-changin'*"

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand.
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command.

For a few volunteers, the break they make with family is permanent. But most parents either initially support their sons and daughters or they reluctantly come to do so over the course of the

summer. And once they realize how serious is the danger their children have chosen to face, many step up to take a stand. In some areas, parents form support groups to lobby Washington, others send money and supplies, or publish letters they receive from Mississippi in local papers and church bulletins.

Screening the Applicants. By April, applications are arriving at COFO headquarters in Jackson — close to 1200 by June — and the screening process begins. The most important issue of concern is a volunteer's willingness to accept and work under the leadership of Blacks who might have little or no formal education. Where feasible, candidates are interviewed by SNCC or CORE staff, Friends of SNCC or CORE chapters, or sympathetic professors.

> In truth, we ended up actively discouraging many more people than we accepted. We needed volunteers who were] in control of their lives. Sober, intelligent, self-controlled, disciplined folk who were clear on what they were getting into and why. ... People, we hoped, who could handle a kind of stress they had never before imagined, much less encountered. ... No missionaries going to save the benighted Negro or martyrs looking for redemption through suffering. ... No mystics. No flakes. No kids in rebellion, looking for attention or to get back at Mom and Dad. No druggies, beatniks, or premature-hippie types — too irresponsible. Plus folks in Mississippi wouldn't know what to make of them. Nobody flunking out of school and looking for a place to crash. No self-righteous ideologues or zealots out to make a personal statement to the world.nbsp;— Kwame Ture. [1]

The Volunteers. Most histories estimate the number of Freedom Summer volunteers at between 700 and 1,000. This includes the 550-600 who attend one of the two training sessions at Western College for Women in Ohio (today, part of Miami University) and some or all of the many who arrive in Mississippi later. But those estimates mainly count the volunteers who formally apply through COFO and work the majority of the 10-week Summer Project. The figures may, or may not, include the 140 or so SNCC and CORE field staff. It is unclear how many of the 300-500 professionals and graduate students who serve a week to a month (or more) with medical, legal, and religious organizations are included.

The 700-1,000 figure does not include the unknown number of out-of-state volunteers who come to Mississippi and participate on local projects for various lengths of time through personal or family connections, or direct organizational affiliations with SNCC, CORE, NAACP, SCLC, SCEF, or other Movement organizations. So the actual number of Freedom Summer participants from outside the state cannot be accurately assessed. Yet it is legitimate to say that in the summer of 1964 the very best of America came to Mississippi to confront and challenge the very worst.

The average age of Summer Project volunteers recruited by COFO is 21 (though a few are well into adulthood including at least one veteran of the Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War). Depending on how you count the volunteers, roughly 85-90% of them are white, the remaining 10-15% are Black with a few Latinos and Asians. Most of them are from middle and upper-middle class families, and the majority (57%) are from the top 30 universities in the nation (123 are from Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Princeton alone). Almost half (48%) are already members of a Freedom Movement organization (mostly CORE or Friends of SNCC), 21% actively participate in a religious group, and 14% belong to leftist or Socialist organizations. Not surprisingly, the

graduate student and professional volunteers recruited by supporting organizations for legal, medical, and religious duties are older, and among them are even fewer Blacks.

But focusing on the out-of-state volunteers — their numbers and who they are — can give the false impression that they are the central element of Freedom Summer. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is Black Mississippians who are the heart and soul of Freedom Summer — the local activists who provide leadership and guidance, the youth who canvas and help teach in Freedom Schools, the Freedom School students themselves, the Citizenship School teachers, the families who feed and house outside volunteers, the people who register FDP voters in their homes and shops and churches, the men who guard the Freedom Houses at night, the people who drive workers around the county, the ministers and deacons who open their churches, and of course the courageous men and women who risk their lives and livlihood by trying to register to vote at the courthouse. They too are unpaid volunteers, and they number in the many thousands, far more than the northerners.

Volunteer Orientation. Two orientations for Summer Project volunteers are funded and coordinated by the National Council of Churches (NCC). Berea College in Kentucky agrees to host the sessions, but they back out when faced with angry denunciations from southern alumni and trustees. Western College for Women (now Miami Univeristy) in Oxford, Ohio steps up with an offer to use their campus.

The first of the week-long sessions for roughly 300 volunteers begins June 13, the second session commences June 20. Most of those attending the June 13 orientation are assigned to voter registration and building the MFDP, most of those at the second are to be Freedom School teachers or work in the community centers. Roughly 150 volunteer lawyers and law students, from the National Lawyers Guild and other organizations also participate, as do clergy recruited by the NCC. About 100 SNCC and 40 CORE staff members and local activists provide most of the training, along with guest speakers such as Bayard Rustin, James Lawson, and Vincent Harding.

> [Examples of Freedom Summer planning, recruitment, training, and operational documents are posted on the web at: www.crmvet.org/docs/msfsdocs.htm. Unfortunately, they are probably not readable on a Kindle's small screen so you'll have to access them with a larger-screen web browser.]

COFO Project Director Bob Moses tells them:

> Don't come to Mississippi this summer to save the Mississippi Negro. Only come if you understand, really understand, that his freedom and yours are one. ... Maybe we're not going to get many people registered this summer. Maybe, even, we're not going to get very many people into Freedom Schools. Maybe all we're going to do is **live** through this summer. In Mississippi, that will be so much!nbsp;— Bob Moses. [2]

The format is varied — general assemblies, small group discussions, work team meetings. The curriculum is intense: racism, voter registration, poverty, Movement history, exploitation, the Black community, police repression, role of the federal government, health, purpose and strategy of the Summer Project, housing, Jim Crow and segregation, psychology & sociology of oppression and liberation, songs, safety rules and procedures. And above all — violence.

Stories of violence, warnings of violence to come, training in how to survive beatings and jailings, frank discussions about fear and courage and endurance. Workshops in Nonviolent Resistance teach the techniques of survival when under attack, and the volunteers are trained in the safety practices and security procedures that are habitual with SNCC and CORE field staff:

- Don't let cops or whites see you enter or leave the Black home where you are staying.
- Don't carry the names of local supporters on you, don't tell cops or strangers who you are living with.
- Keep the shades down at night and never stand in a lighted doorway.
- Remove the dome light of your car so it doesn't illuminate you when the door is opened.
- Each morning check your car for bombs (Volunteer David Gelfand does, and discovers 4-sticks of dynamite wired to his ignition).
- Learn all roads in and out of town, and the danger spots to avoid.
- Vary your driving routes, and never — ever — let a strange car pass you on a deserted road.
- Always be prepared for arrest and police-search at any time.
- Never go anywhere alone.
- Leave word where you are going and when you are expected to get there. Check-in on arrival.

The Role of Volunteers There is thorough discussion about the role of volunteers in relationship to the Black communities they will be working with. The volunteers are to bring their energy, ideas, and skills to the service of the local community, but they not there to be leaders, or to supplant local activists. In a memo to volunteers, Annell Ponder of SCLC's Citizenship Schools program sums up the tight line they are expected to walk:

> Let the people speak for and with you. Whenever possible get some good, strong local person (and there are many around) sold on your idea and ask him or her to tell others about it. You may need to do all of the arranging and contacting for setting up the opportunity in some cases (often spelling out or rehearsing with the local what he should get over, or going along with him) but if people see one of their neighbors either alone or with one of the volunteers making a bold step forward, they are more likely to see such action as possible for themselves. ... Talk to them with confidence, with a sense of "expectation." ... Remember that they are adult, though many of them will be overly dependent because of this repressive culture ... As you work you must somehow resist the temptation to do things for the people, but share the work, the planning and the decision-making with them, so they realize that if the center is to continue after the summer, they will have to do it.nbsp;— Annell Ponder. [17]

Black and White Together (Mostly). The dominant theme of the orientation sessions is Black & white together fighting racism. But given the realities of race, class, and culture in America there are inevitable tensions.

In her excellent memoir, *Freedom Summer*, volunteer Sally Belfrage recalled:

> [The Black staff] were very much an in-group, because of what they have gone through together. They tend to be suspicious of us, because we are white, northern, urban, rich, inexperienced. We are somewhat in awe of them, and conscious of our

> own inferiority. ... Implicit in the songs, tears, speeches, work and laughter was the knowledge, secure in both them and us, that ultimately we could return to a white refuge. The struggle was their life sentence, implanted in their pigment, and ours only so long as we cared to identify...nbsp;— Sally Belfrage. [3]

SNCC worker Frank Smith commented: "*I grew up hating all white folks. It wasn't till a couple of years ago that I learned that there could be good white — and even now I sometimes wonder.*"

Emotions are intense and complicated. The COFO staff are uneasy about the role of white activists in Mississippi, and deeply ambivalent about sending them into the danger that they are so familiar with and the white volunteers so utterly ignorant of. Said one Black organizer: "*We cried over you in the staff meeting, because we love you and we are afraid for you.*"

> Was there tension? What'd you expect? 'Course there was. Were people nervous and edgy? Wouldn't you be? Was this based on race? Not really. I mean, yes, the Mississippi staff was mostly black, Southern, and poor, and the volunteers mostly white, Northern, and middle class. ... In truth, many of the volunteers, like most white Americans, had never really been around black people in any significant way. And the Southern staff was not in the habit of assuming *anything* about strange white folk. ... Given the climate they had left in Mississippi, people had a deep foreboding. But race *per se* was the least of it. ...nbsp;— Kwame Ture [1]

Everywhere they go the white volunteers are followed by the mass media in full feeding frenzy — reporters, photographers, TV cameras. But they only focus their attention on the whites, ignoring the Black freedom fighters who have risked their lives on the front lines for years. The resentment of Black staff and volunteers is volcanic, and the white volunteers also become disgusted. Said one: "*At the beginning it made me feel important. But they have a way of degrading everything they touch. I feel unclean.*"

> I think that a lot of the exaggeration about *racial* tension came from the media. They were of course all white and probably felt real discomfort in our black presence. The press also really contributed to this 'racial difference' in their own inimitable way by making it immediately clear what story they had come to report. What and who, so far as they were concerned, represented the real importance of the event.nbsp;— Kwame Ture. [1]

The Disappearance of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman. The first group of volunteers leave Ohio and go down into Mississippi on June 20th. On the following day three of them, including one summer volunteer, disappear.

Word arrives in Oxford where the second orientation session is underway:

> There was an interruption then at a side entrance: three or four staff members had come in and were whispering agitatedly. One of them walked over to the stage and sprang up to whisper to Moses who bent on his knees to hear. In a moment he was alone again. Still crouched, he gazed at the floor at his feet, unconscious of us. Time passed. When he stood and spoke, he was somewhere else; it was simply that he was

> obliged to say something, but his voice was automatic. "Yesterday morning, three of our people left Meridian, Mississippi to investigate a church-burning in Neshoba County. They haven't come back and we haven't had any word from them...." [3]

In the days that follow, hope wars with dread, hope that the missing are held in captivity but still alive, against the growing certainty that they have been lynched. Anxious parents call or come in person, urging, pleading, begging, their sons and daughters to come home and not go to Mississippi. A few leave, a few under the age of 21 are forced against their will to quit. But most hold fast.

On the last night of the second orientation, Bob Moses addresses the volunteers and tells them: "*The kids are dead.*" When he finishes speaking the auditorium is deathly silent. Then a woman raises her voice in song, "*They say that freedom, is a constant struggle...*" The next morning the second wave of volunteers board the buses to go down into Mississippi.

10 Weeks That Shake Mississippi

The volunteers arrive in Mississippi on June 20th and June 27th. To the extent that they encounter whites, they are greeted with suspicion and outright hostility. But they feel welcomed — even loved — by the Black communities they become part of.

But the volunteers, white and Black both, soon discover that the Black community is split. Many local Afros eagerly await their arrival and the support they bring. As Holly Springs resident Rita Walker put it in Meeting the Freedom Workers, "*I always pictured them coming in a bus with "FREEDOM" written on it. I would meet with some of my friends, and we would go up to the bus station and wait for them so that we could welcome them in.*" Others, however, fear white retaliation if they even speak to a civil rights worker — they are polite, but distant. They assure their white employers and landlords that they are not involved in "*that mess,*" and when white volunteers approach them as social equals they are deeply uneasy and profoundly conflicted — hesitant to offend these white strangers, but terrified of what will happen to them if their boss or the sheriff thinks they are defying the "*Southern Way of Life*."

For the volunteers, the work is long and grueling. Up at dawn with the family they live with. No hot shower. No morning paper. No leisurely cup of coffee. Often, no toilet. Strange food for breakfast — hominy grits, collard greens, biscuits & gravy. Then out the door into the brutal, muggy heat.

> It was hot, tiring, tedious work. Walking door-to-door, canvassing and convincing people to come to class at one of our Freedom Schools, to come to the courthouse to register to vote. Standing in unmoving lines outside those antebellum courthouses for hours on end, facing heat and hunger and harassment and worse. Our Freedom Schools — nearly fifty of them, all told — were often hardly more than shacks, with hand-painted signs out front and classes held as often on the grass or dirt outside as in, where the heat was stifling and the small rooms too dark to see. We reached people wherever we could, staging meetings and workshops in beauty parlors or barbershops, in storefront churches, even out in the fields where the people were plowing and

> chopping. — John Lewis [2]

Kwame Ture later said of the volunteers:

> For most of them the next two and a half months would be the sternest test of their lives thus far. How would they do? This heah was for real now, Jack. For the most part, I'd say they did just fine. For the overwhelming majority — white or black — it would a life-changing experience politically and culturally. In black Mississippi, the whites experienced at first-hand a side of America they'd not seen and could scarcely have imagined. They learned something about their country, about black culture, and about themselves. Their presence changed black Mississippi, but clearly black Mississippi changed them even more. — Kwame Ture. [1]

Headquarters. Day-to-day, the Summer Project is coordinated out of the crowded COFO office on Lynch Street in Jackson which functions as command post, press room, administrative center, personnel department, bursar, supply depot, emergency first-aid station and basic training camp for volunteers who missed the Oxford orientation. A hand-lettered sign declares: No one would dare bomb this office and end all the confusion. The office is also a terminus for COFO's Wide Area Telephone Service (WATS). Volunteers monitor the life-saving WATS line around the clock, recording incidents of violence and arrest, dispatching lawyers and doctors, notifying press and Justice Department, and compiling the daily "WATS Report."

> [WATS service was a forerunner of "800" numbers which do not yet exist in 1964. You can find examples of Freedom Summer WATS Reports on the web at: www.crmvet.org/docs/wats/watshome.htm. (These documents won't display well — or at all — on some Kindles so this is not a live link, you'll have to copy or paste it into a web browser.)]

For the duration of the Summer Project, SNCC's national office temporarily moves from Atlanta to Greenwood. For three months, this office on Avenue N becomes the nerve-center of SNCC activities nationwide, raising money, and mobilizing national political support for the Democratic convention challenge in Atlantic City. SNCC's nationwide WATS line in Greenwood is manned (or, more accurately, woman-ed) 24 hours a day. Local men with rifles are discreetly posted in the vicinity to protect the office which is also the home of two cats — one named "Freedom," the other "Now."

Projects. Local projects are the basic unit of organization. Each project is assigned to a designated county or community. Most are led by one or more SNCC or CORE staff members with a varying number of volunteers. Grouped by congressional district for administration and MFDP organizing, there are at least 44 projects across the state, with the heaviest concentration in the Delta (*see* Project Map). The largest single project is in Hattiesburg serving Forrest County with 50 staff & volunteers. At the other end of the scale some projects have as few as two workers. The number of projects and the number of people assigned to them change over the summer, some projects start late, others grow and spawn new sub-projects, some wither and die in the face of unrelenting opposition from the white power-structure.

Projects are not imposed on Black communities. They are only established in places where local folk ask for them and are willing to provide housing for volunteers and a church or other building

for Movement use. In many Mississippi counties, white opposition is so intense, the fear so great, that there is not enough local support to sustain any Freedom Summer activities. Though media attention is on the danger to white volunteers, the risks taken by local activists and those who open their homes are far greater. To defy the white power-structure by publicly standing for the Freedom Movement, or to break the segregation taboo by inviting whites — including young white women — into a Afro-American home, are irrevocable steps of enormous courage. The volunteers are scheduled to leave at the end of the summer, but local Blacks will bear the consequences for the rest of their lives. And white retaliation is swift and brutal — churches are burned, people are fired and evicted, there are arrests, beatings, and shootings that continue long after the summer ends.

Each project is led by a project director. All of them are Black except for Bob Zellner, a white SNCC veteran in Greenwood. The projects focus on:

- **Voter Registration.** There are two kinds of registration: Official, legal, registration requires Blacks to defy social custom, police intimidation, and the threat of Klan violence. Those who go down to the courthouse to fill out the form and take the so-called "literacy test" also run the risk of economic retaliation organized by the White Citizens Councils. The unofficial, MFDP "freedom registration" is symbolic, but far less dangerous because it is done within the Movement and the Black community.
- **Building the MFDP.** This requires learning and teaching the rules and procedures of electoral parties and then organizing precinct, county, district, and state-level MFDP bodies in strict accordance with the official rules of the national Democratic Party. Blacks who take an active role in the party and assume leadership positions in the organization run increased risk of white retaliation.
- **Freedom Schools.** Most projects operate a Freedom School taught by volunteers. Mississippi's segregated school system is designed to keep Blacks in their proper place as determined by the *southern way of life* — subservient, low-paid, and isolated. The Freedom Schools challenge that regime, beginning a process of opening up new worlds of thought and possibility for Black children. Yet it is difficult to say who learns more, the Freedom School students or their volunteer teachers.
- **Community Centers.** Many projects open community centers that provide cultural and educational programs for the Black community, including political organization, adult-literacy courses staffed by Citizenship School teachers, health-education classes taught by Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) volunteers, vocational training centers, and live theater shows by the Free Southern Theater. Libraries of books donated by northern sympathizers are established to serve communities who have been denied access to the state's publicly-funded but "white-only" libraries.
- **Letters.** One strategic objective of the Summer Project's is to raise national awareness of southern realities, demand federal action, and mobilize political support for the MFDP. All volunteers are urged to write frequent letters to family, friends, teachers, and ministers about the Freedom Movement and their experiences. Many volunteers arrange to have their letters published in local newspapers, school or church bulletins, or reproduced and distributed to informal networks. This is before the era of cheap photocopy machines, so letters have to be retyped with carbon copies, or mimeographed from hand-typed stencils, often by parents who just days or weeks earlier had been desperately pleading with their

> daughters and sons not to participate in Freedom Summer. Some of these letters are later collected and published as a powerful statement in *Letters From Mississippi*.

For all participants — SNCC & CORE staff, local activists, and summer volunteers — Black and white — the projects become life-altering experiences. Writing years later, SNCC staff member Cleveland Sellers' remembrance of one project stands for them all:

> The Holly Springs Project with Ivanhoe Donaldson as its director, was a true reflection of the "beloved community." This project became a fervent, collective spirit born out of the hearts of many caring, committed, and diverse individuals. The unsurpassable sense of love and hope among us created such an unbreakable bond that for one brief period of history the "band of brothers (and sisters)," the "circle of trust" felt invincible, even in the face of relentlessly imminent danger. Never has any experience paralleled the intense exhilaration and passion that we felt for our work, the local people and one another. — Cleveland Sellers. [5]

The social revolution. The Freedom Movement as a whole, and within it the Summer Project, is about more than just voter registration or education. It is at heart a social revolution. A revolution that defies fear, throws off enforced subservience, asserts dignity and rejects externally- imposed inferiority. A social revolution that demands an equal share of economic and political power. A social revolution that abolishes old relations, and forges new personal, political, and social identities.

Social revolutions are not made from manifestos or political analyses, but rather by people fundamentally altering their view of themselves and their place in society. Such revolutions are not imposed by leaders from above, but rather are nurtured from below. Nor are social revolutions accomplished in a single summer. The social revolution transforming the South neither began, nor ended, with Freedom Summer.

> Today's commentary and analysis of the movement often miss the crucial point that, in addition to challenging the white power-structure, the movement also demanded that Black people challenge themselves. Small meetings and workshops became the spaces within the Black community where people could stand up and speak, or in groups outline their concerns. In them, folks were feeling themselves out, learning how to use words to articulate what they wanted and needed. In these meetings, they were taking the first step toward gaining control over their lives, and the decision making that affected their lives, by making demands on themselves. This important dimension of the movement has been almost completely lost in the imagery of hand-clapping, song-filled rallies for protest demonstrations that have come to define portrayals of 1960s civil rights meetings: dynamic individual leaders using their powerful voices to inspire listening crowds. Our meetings were conducted so that sharecroppers, farmers, and ordinary working people could participate, so that Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Devine, Hartman Turnbow, all of them were empowered. They weren't just sitting there. — Bob Moses [6]

Unita Blackwell, a Mayersville Mississippi sharecropper with an 8th grade education recalls how the social revolution first affected her:

> To have wonderful new friends — black and white, educated, people of means, some of them, who'd been places and done things I'd never even dreamed of — sitting on the floor or in the old broke-down furniture in my front room, talking about our lives and times, gave me a feeling I'd never had before. Nobody had to say that all of us were equal; we could feel it. These were the first moments of my life when I knew that people outside my family respected me for what I knew and what I had to offer. They wanted to know *my* ideas, to get *my* advice about what *they* should do. I was telling them what to do. Even in my own community, as a woman, my opinion didn't mean much unless it was in agreement with a man's. I had been beat way down, and the realization that I had something of value to give someone else was a powerful sensation. At the time I didn't even know how to describe it, but it gave me strength. — Unita Blackwell. [7]
>
> [Unita Blackwell goes on to become a SNCC field secretary and MFDP Delegate. In later life she becomes the first Black women in living memory to be elected Mayor of a Mississippi town, founds the U.S. China People's Friendship Association, receives a Masters degree from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and is awarded a MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Fellowship grant in 1992.]

By definition, social revolutions run deep, deep down to the very bottom. The worst poverty and fiercest oppression is found among the plantation sharecroppers and farm laborers who endure semi-slavery on the vast feudal domains of the richest and most powerful cotton planters. Often they are forbidden contact with the outside world, terrorized by unrestrained physical and sexual violence of white foremen, forced to subsist on over-priced, shoddy goods at the company store — not even paid in money but rather working off constantly increasing debt. Yet by 1964, the Freedom Movement's social revolution has reached down even to these depths. For the organizers and volunteers sneaking onto plantations to visit the tumble-down shacks in the dead of night, the deadly dangerous work is reminiscent of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railway stealing away slaves from America's "Egypt." As one summer volunteer recalled:

> On a drooping cot to our right as we came in the door lay a small child (six months old). The child's eyes, nose, and mouth were covered with flies. Not being able to stand such a sight, I tried to chase them away only to be met with the reply of the mother "hey will only come back again." The whole house seemed diseased, rotten, and splitting at the seams with infection. Nevertheless, the people knew what we were coming for, and the forms were filled out without our asking... This is a scene that was burned into all of our minds and which will make quiet sleep impossible. [4]

Violence. Across the state there is widespread violence, police repression, and economic retaliation against local Blacks and Freedom Summer participants. For example, the following violent incidents are culled from the daily WATS report for the single week of July 6-12:

> July 6, Moss Point. Lawrence Guyot addressing a voter registration rally. Racists shoot into the crowd seriously wounding a woman. Three Blacks arrested when they chase the attackers.
>
> July 6, Jackson. McCraven Hill Missionary Baptist Church damaged by firebomb.

July 6, Raleigh. Two churches destroyed by fire.

July 8, McComb. Freedom House bombed, wounding SNCC organizer Curtis Hayes and summer volunteer Dennis Sweeney.

July 9, Vicksburg. Young Freedom School students stoned while walking to class.

July 10, Hattiesburg. Klansmen attack Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld with steel pipes. He and two other summer volunteers hospitalized with injuries.

July 11, Canton. Firebomb thrown at Freedom House.

July 11, Vicksburg. Black cafe that served white volunteers bombed.

July 11, Browning. Missionary Baptist Church destroyed by fire.

July 12, Jackson. White man attacks Black woman at Greyhound depot. After being treated for injuries, she is arrested for "Disturbing the Peace." Her attacker is not charged.

July 12, Natchez. Jerusalem Baptist and Bethel Methodist Churches burned to the ground.

And from the same period, the following reports of police harassment and abuse:

July 6, Itta Bena. Police seize a civil rights worker and disappear him, triggering a search by SNCC and federal agents.

July 7, Greenwood. Six local students and three volunteers arrested for peacefully picketing.

July 8, Hattiesburg. Rev. Robert Beech of National Council of Churches arrested on felony charges because his checking account is briefly overdrawn.

July 8, Columbus. Three volunteers arrested for "trespass" after stopping at a gas station to buy cold soft drinks.

July 9, Clarksdale. Cops spray cleaning chemicals on two Black girls inside the courthouse. A volunteer arrested for taking a photo of the incident.

July 9, Gulfport. Four volunteers arrested on anti-picketing charges as they escort Blacks to courthouse for voter registration attempt.

July 10, Greenwood. A cop overhears a SNCC staff member tell another activist: "*We've got to get some damn organization in our office.*" The SNCC organizer is arrested and jailed for "Public Profanity."

COFO's assumption that the mass media and federal government will swiftly respond to attacks

on white volunteers proves correct. The disappearance of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman is headline news and lead story across the nation. Reporters flock to the state and the DOJ springs into frenzied action. But the strategy of using white students to bring attention and protection to all Movement participants — white **and** Black — fails.

For the most part, both the media and the federal government are only interested in attacks and threats against the white volunteers. A massive federal search is launched to find the missing men, and President Johnson meets with the parents of the two white activists at the White House. When white activists are beaten or shot at, the FBI quickly investigates (though they rarely arrest anyone). But both media and government show little interest in attacks on either local Blacks or Black freedom workers. Civil rights leaders demand that federal marshals be mobilized to protect people working on voter registration. They are ignored. The number of FBI agents assigned to Mississippi is increased from 15 to 150, but when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover opens the new FBI office in Jackson, he assures white Mississippi that the FBI will give "*no protection*" to civil rights agitators.

The death of Black activist Wayne Yancey and serious injury to Charlie Scales in a mysterious "car crash" is another example. SNCC staff member Cleveland Sellers of the Holly Springs project later recalled:

> I remember a black man, someone I had never seen before, rushed up to us and said, "A Freedom Rider has been killed up the road in a car crash!" We had not seen an ambulance nor any emergency vehicle. We began to scout around to see what was going on. We found the badly damaged car at a service station and then went to the hospital. Oddly, the police were already at the hospital. We were shocked to find Wayne's body lying in the back of the ambulance/hearse with blood dripping into a puddle beneath. We could not tell how long the body had been there or if Wayne had died at the scene or while still in the ambulance waiting for medical attention.
>
> Charlie was inside the hospital when we took Kathy Dahl, the project's nurse, inside to check on him. Even though the hospital had not provided extensive medical treatment to Charlie, the chief of police was trying to put him under arrest for vehicular homicide. Immediately Ivanhoe asked Kathy to work on getting Charlie to a Memphis hospital. Kathy, in her authoritative voice, said that Charlie was in need of immediate attention and if he didn't get to Memphis quickly he may die. The police chief was reluctant to let Charlie go. More negotiations were required for the sheriff to finally release Charlie, who was driven to Memphis and then flown to Chicago. Charlie maintained that he was lying on the ground immediately following the wreck, some white men walked over to him and said, "Stay still or you will get the same as your buddy.
>
> Wayne's death had a profound impact on those of us in Holly Springs, not only because we loved him like a brother, but because for some they saw first hand how the lives of poor black males were not valued in Mississippi. There was no fanfare, no FBI, no investigation, no massive press coverage. No named civil rights leader rushed down to Paris (Tennessee where he was buried). Just us, the family and our

brother. — Cleveland Sellers. [5]

It is no surprise then that a bitterly ironic, hand-lettered sign hangs on one wall of the SNCC office in Greenwood:

There's a street in Itta Bena called Freedom
There's a town in Mississippi called Liberty
There's a department in Washington called Justice

It is the local Black community, not the federal government or local law enforcement, that provides protection. As volunteer Gren Whitman writes in his journal: "*I am writing this at 6am. Just now coming down the hall from the bathroom, I met Mrs. Fairley coming down the hall from the front porch, carrying a rifle in one hand [and] a pistol in the other. I do not know what is going on ... [All she said was] "You go to sleep, let me fight for you.*"

A New Kind of Leadership. Though they are repeatedly cautioned not to act or think of themselves as leaders, the inexorable reality of day-to-day circumstances force staff and volunteers of both races into assuming leadership roles greater than most of them have ever previously experienced. And with that roll comes burdens of responsibility for their own lives and safety — and that of others.

From class background, academic or organizational experience, and general familiarity with the power manipulations and media-hype of Americn politics-as-usual, many volunteers are familiar with traditional styles of leadership based on social position, organizational title, personal prestige, intellectual brilliance, verbal rhetoric and calculated image enhancement. Nor are they unfamiliar with the posturing and domination, political maneuvering, self-aggrandizement, ego-gratification, and sexual-predation that so often characterizes the exercise of leadership in the halls of power, corporate offices, and groves of academia.

But by their example, many of the SNCC and CORE staff who head the projects provide the volunteers with a new model of leadership that is profoundly different from the American norm. Out in the field, away from headquarters, status and leadership is, for the most part, based on what people actually do, what they endure, and their success (or lack thereof) in organizing real people to do real things to improve their lives. One Freedom Movement activist later described the goal (if not always the reality): "*No self-promoting, 'I'm the boss, look at me, do it my way,' type leaders. It's the concept of ego-less leadership. It was the complete opposite of the kind of leadership that seems so common today — 'I'm the leader! I'm in charge! I'm important! I'm on stage! I'm the one who goes on TV!*"

At root, the difference in leadership stems from the organizer's point of view. Self-promoting, self-centered leaders seek power and prestige for themselves on the promise of providing benefits to their constituents. But an organizer's goal is to find and nurture leaders among the local folk who will build their own organizations and achieve a share of political power for themselves — thereby allowing the organizer to move on to some other community to repeat the process. At least in theory. In practical reality over the long run, that concept proves difficult to achieve, but in 1964, field secretaries of the Southern Freedom Movement are doing their level best to live up to that ideal.

Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) of SNCC is project director for the 2nd Congressional district in the Missisippi Delta, and therefore an acknowledged leader by necessity. From that perspective, he later described the demands placed on him:

> People depended on you to inspire confidence. You inspired confidence by showing confidence. Yeah, they expected clarity and decisiveness at all times. But the decisions had to be seen to be fair and intelligent. No stupid moves. No bombast, no empty guarantees: no overstated promises that you couldn't keep and which people knew you couldn't keep. You had to be **credible**. To keep trust, you had to perform. To keep authority, you had to earn it, over and over. To lead not by fiat, but by example and work. — Kwame Ture. [1]

Direct Action and the Civil Rights Act

Shortly after the volunteers arrive in Mississippi, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is signed into law on July 2nd. Though its passage is a huge victory for the Freedom Movement as a whole, it presents serious problems for the Summer Project.

Beginning with the first voter-registration effort in McComb after the Freedom Rides in 1961, SNCC's Mississippi strategy has been based on two premises: First, that the primary goal must be achieving political power for Blacks, which requires voter-registration. Second, that most Afro-Americans in the state cannot afford to patronize white restaurants or theaters, so integrating them is at best merely symbolic. But there is a long-standing disagreement between those who argue that integration efforts provoke so much white violence and state repression that voter-registration is crippled, and those who believe that defiant action by young people awakens courage in adults, helps them rise above their fears, and encourages them to register. That may be true, argue others, but staff and volunteers languishing in jail cells can't canvas or organize and diverting desperately need funds to bail them out weakens the central effort.

But after passage of the Act, young Blacks across the state are eager to defy segregation and exercise their new rights. They want to "*spit in the eye*" of white racists by integrating hamburger joints and movie theaters. Three years of Movement activity have filled them with courage and now they believe the law is on their side.

Whites, however, are already enraged by the mere existence of Freedom Summer and further inflamed by Johnson signing the Act. In Greenwood and other communities, carloads of armed thugs prowl the streets looking for trouble, some are members of the Sheriff's posse, some are outright Klan. One of these "auxiliary" deputies is Byron De la Beckwith, and everyone in Leflore County, Black and white, knows he murdered Medgar Evers.

The question is thrashed out in meeting after meeting. The majority of SNCC staff agree with Bob Moses that they have to remain disciplined, stick to the plan, and not let themselves or the Movement become distracted. But some staff and some summer volunteers argue that it was the sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the early 1960s that sparked and energized the Movement and that if the Civil Rights Act is not tested and enforced immediately it will wither away and become just another unenforced law. By and large, adults in the community agree that now is not the time for

integrating lunch counters. But young activists not yet old enough to vote are restless, in some communities they take independent action on their own, and when they are arrested or beaten a portion of Movement time and resources has to be diverted in response. Yet at the same time, their courage and defiance does encourage and inspire their elders.

The issue is most acute in Greenwood which has been a center of Freedom Movement activity since early 1962. It comes to a head after national NAACP leaders swoop into town accompanied by reporters and FBI agents. They integrate a few upscale establishments to great media acclaim and then drive off. Afterwards, no one, not even SNCC, can restrain Greenwood's Black youth from direct action at "white-only" establishments. Then Silas McGhee goes to the movies, touching off a new front in the struggle. There are arrests and beatings and shootings. SNCC staff and summer volunteers have to be shifted from voter registration and MFDP organizing to raising bail money and keeping protests disciplined, focused, and nonviolent.

Martha Lamb is the Registrar of Voters for Leflore County. She is notorious for her refusal to register Afro-Americans. To dramatize her violation of Black voting rights and pressure her to obey federal law, federal court rulings, and the U.S. Constitution, July 16 is declared "Freedom Day" in Greenwood. For more than a week there are mass meetings and house-to-house canvassing to urge Black citizens to sign up as members in the MFDP and then attempt to register at the courthouse *en masse* on Freedom Day. To support those trying to register, and call attention to the denial of basic human rights in Mississippi, Black students eager for direct action are asked to peacefully picket the courthouse in violation of the state's anti-picketing law — it is certain they will be arrested. Most of the summer volunteers also want to join the line, but if everyone is in jail the main work of the project halts, so only a limited number are chosen.

On July 16, the line of Black adults waiting to register stretches down the courthouse steps and around the corner. No more than three are allowed into the courthouse at a time. The line crawls forward at a snail's pace — most will never even reach the door. A swarm of local and state police harass and intimidate them, as do "deputized" toughs and furious white citizens.

The first wave of young pickets and summer volunteers walk single file along the sidewalk singing freedom songs. They are quickly arrested. Their "One Man/One Vote" and "End Voting Discrimination" signs are torn from their grasp and they are shoved into a police bus. Their singing intensifies: "*Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, turn me 'round...*" The pickets are staggered throughout the day, wave after wave are arrested, 111 in all, including 13 summer volunteers and some SNCC staff. Those arrested are sentenced to 30 days in jail and $100 fine. They go on hunger strike. After 6 days they are released on appeal bond of $200 each. The work of the project — voter registration, building the MFDP, Freedom Schools, and community organizing continues.

Internal Tensions

Fear, exhaustion, heat, the passion and depth of commitment, cultural differences of wealth & poverty, black & white, north & south, urban & rural, and the enormous gap between hope and reality, all combine to create an emotional pressure cooker that intensifies inherent conflicts of

race, gender, and class. As the weeks pass, the strains increase, "*Fear can't become a habit,*" writes one volunteer — but it can, and it has.

Race. The deepest tensions are around race. Most of the white volunteers are fervently committed to the ideal of an inter-racial "beloved community." But the habits and assumptions of white superiority are deeply ingrained and often manifest despite their best intentions. In the pressure of events, some of the white volunteers fail to understand that their skills, training, and confidence are the product of privilege. In their eagerness, they sometimes push Blacks aside. Then they are bewildered and hurt when Black staff members verbally slap them down.

After three years of Mississippi's blood and brutality, and three years of failure on the part of liberal white America and the federal government to live up their professed ideals and oft-stated promises, some of SNCC and CORE's Black staff no longer see inter-racial brotherhood, integration, or appeals to white liberalism as a viable strategy for ending the nightmare of racism, segregation, exploitation, and powerlessness. They find it hard to trust any whites, even the summer volunteers working beside them. Most of them are moving towards Black pride and Black self-reliance, and some are headed toward Black Power, Black nationalism, and Black separatism. Inevitably, there is friction with both white volunteers and those Black activists who still adhere to the beloved community outlook.

The mass media exacerbates and exaggerates these internal tensions. Black organizers who have endured years on the front lines are deeply embittered when the white gentlemen of the press ignore them and instead milk recently arrived white volunteers for their wisdom and insight regarding America, race, and politics. And when Black anger is expressed to the white volunteers, the mass media emphasizes it out of all proportion, over-reporting the conflicts as if to deny the broader current of racial solidarity that characterizes Freedom Summer.

Gender. Tensions related to gender fester beneath the surface — particularly among some of the white women volunteers. In 1964, the term "*sexism*" has not yet come into wide use, and compared to issues of race there is little articulation and even less discussion about discrimination against women in the broader society, women's roles and treatment within the Movement, or inequality and abuse in personal interactions between women and men. One woman later said: "*Sexism was not something that ... had been made conscious to me at the time, but looking back on [Freedom Summer], that's ... what it was.*"

Some SNCC staff view the presence of white women volunteers as a mixed blessing.

> Not through any fault of the women's, but because of the deeply ingrained, almost psychotic Southern male attitudes about 'white womanhood.' This was cause for real concern, Jack. Young white women in the black community would be seen as a provocation and a flash point for violence. That was reality. A security risk to themselves and everyone else in communities in which lynching was by no means a distant memory. ... One expedient was to try to 'hide' the women in libraries and freedom schools as opposed to sending them canvassing door-to-door. (Course, some women did do canvassing, but in all-women or all- white teams.) — Kwame Ture [1]

Yet while individual safety and project security are valid concerns, they are not the only factors.

Though some Black women are involved in voter registration, most are assigned to Freedom Schools, community centers, and office jobs. For some staff and volunteers, particularly some of the men, there is a hierarchy of work-related prestige; voter-registration is the "real" work, Freedom Schools and community centers are of secondary importance, and office-clerical is the least valued (except when paychecks or operating expenses arrive late, of course). Since work assignments are skewed by gender (9% of the women are engaged in voter-registration, for example, compared to 47% of the men), this sometimes results in women being treated as second-class freedom fighters — not unlike the way society at large under-values women, and "womens work."

But "sometimes" is not the same as "always," and "some men" is not the same as "all mennbsp; — particularly in SNCC. Some project directors and field leaders in SNCC's area of operations are Black women, and overall the number of SNCC women in significant leadership roles is far higher than in other Freedom Movement organizations such as CORE, SCLC, and the NAACP.

Class. Issues and tensions rooted in class are examined the least and only rarely discussed. After a generation of red-baiting and McCarthyism, concepts of class division, class oppression, class consciousness, and class warfare are the taboo topics of American politics (as to some extent they still are today). In 1964, awareness of such issues has barely begun to stir. Most of the white volunteers are from the middle and upper-classes, while Black activists and local folk are often from the very bottom of the economic pyramid. But aspects of class are often overlooked, or interpreted solely as Black-white issues, or as North-South, or urban-rural cultural differences.

Class divisions also exist within the local Black community, among Black volunteers and staff, and between college-educated Blacks and rural farm laborers. After years of organizing experience working in the poverty-stricken communities of the agrarian South, John Lewis later touched on SNCC's growing awareness of class when he wrote:

> As for our black volunteers and staffers, we had to be as sensitive and careful about our behavior and appearance as the whites. We knew we could easily be resented by the local blacks as outsiders, college-educated kids from a different class, really from a different **country** from the one in which they lived. We had to be extremely careful about any hint of condescension or superiority, from the way we acted to the way we dressed. Overalls became the standard outfit for our black volunteers. Blue denim bib overalls and a white T-shirt underneath, became the symbol of SNCC. And it was practical. It fit our lifestyle of sleeping on sofas and floors and walking miles and miles of dusty back roads. It also identified us with the people we were working with — farmers and poor people. — John Lewis. [2]

Lynching of Chaney, Schwerner & Goodman

CORE field secretaries Mickey and Rita Schwerner arrive in Meridian at the beginning of 1964. Meridian is the seat of Lauderdale County and the center of CORE organizing in east-central Mississippi. Along with local CORE leader James Chaney of Meridian, they meet frequently with Freedom Movement supporters in adjacent Neshoba County, and Mt. Zion Church in the

unincorporated Longdale community agrees to host a Freedom School for the upcoming Summer Project. On the evening of June 16, while CORE staff is in Ohio for the orientation of the summer volunteers, Klansmen attack the church, beat members of the congregation, and burn the building.

On Saturday, June 20, Schwerner and Chaney return to Meridian with the first wave of volunteers. They enter a state where press and political leaders from the Governor on down are whipping up a frenzy of hate and violence among the white population. Instead of countering their incitements, FBI Director Hoover tells white Mississippi, "*We will not wet-nurse troublemakers.*"

The next day, Schwerner, Chaney, and summer volunteer Andy Goodman, drive up to Neshoba County to meet with local Blacks about the church burning. Sheriff's deputy Cecil Price — who is also a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan — stops them for "speeding" (their car is well known to both cops and Klan as a CORE vehicle). But instead of issuing a ticket to the driver, he arrests all three men, incarcerating them in the county jail in Philadelphia. None of them are allowed to make any phone calls. While the three are held incommunicado, Price contacts his KKK associates and the Klan gathers. They arrange with Sheriff Lawrence Rainey to release the civil rights workers once an ambush has been set up on the road back to Meridian.

Search procedures are initiated at the Meridian CORE office when the three miss their check-in time. Summer volunteer Louise Hermey, on her first day in Mississippi, begins calling jails and hospitals. The Neshoba County jail denies all knowledge of the three, though in fact they are being held there. The SNCC office is notified, and Mary King alerts the FBI and Justice Department — who show little interest. Had the federal government bestirred itself during the five hours Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman are held in jail, the Sheriff might have hesitated before turning them over to Klan lynch mob. But the Feds do nothing (as usual).

Around 10:30pm, when the Klan is ready and Price is positioned on the road in his squad car, Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman are released from jail and told to "get out of town." As they drive the dark road towards Meridian, Price pulls them over with his police siren. He then turns them over to the Klan murder squad. They are taken to an isolated spot where James Chaney is savagely beaten and all three are shot to death. In the early morning hours of Monday, June 22nd, their bodies are buried in an earthen dam on the property of wealthy landowner Olen Burrage. Their car is driven into Bogue Chitto swamp and set on fire.

By Tuesday, the story of their disappearance is on the front page of the *New York Times* and the burned out car is discovered in the swamp. Now Lyndon Johnson and the federal government suddenly wake up — two white men (and a colored kid too) are missing, probably murdered. The FBI and military search teams are ordered into action. LBJ meets with the parents of Goodman and Schwerner who have come to Washington from New York to plead for federal action. Johnson assures them that "everything possible" is being done. In Mississippi, Chaney's mother waits for word of her son. There is no White House invitation for her.

Secure in their certainty that bodies buried beneath an earthen dam can never be found, Mississippi officials claim it is all a hoax, a Communist plot to stir up sympathy for agitators, and that the missing men are hiding in Mexico. Or, as Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson tells reporters: "*Those boys are in Cuba.*"

The Freedom Movement, of course, knows different, and the murders hit hard. Like most Freedom Movement activists, the three are young — one is a native Mississippian, one a staff field secretary, and one a summer volunteer — and all those who are putting their bodies on the line know that next time it could be them. Protests and sit-ins are mounted at federal buildings around the country — New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco — and speaking for the Goodman family, attorney Martin Popper tells the press: "*The murder of the boys is the first interracial lynching in the history of the United States.*"

The number of FBI agents assigned to Mississippi is increased ten-fold, from 15 to 150, and for the first time an FBI office is established in the state. But Hoover again reassures white Mississippi that the FBI will give, "*no protection,*" to civil rights workers.

Throwing corpses of murdered Blacks into the nearest river is a traditional component of the *southern way of life*, so hundreds of Navy sailors are assigned to search the swamps, and Navy divers drag the rivers. Soon Black bodies are being pulled from the waters. Among them are Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore, lynched by the Klan after Moore is expelled from Alcorn A&M for participating in civil rights protests. The Klansmen falsely believe that Dee and Moore are "Black militants" collecting guns for a race war against whites. For this imaginary crime they are murdered. Another young victim, tentatively identified as 14-year old Herbert Oarsby, is found wearing a CORE T-shirt. The remains of five other Black men are never identified. But none of the bodies are those of the missing white men, and both the media and the FBI quickly loose interest in them. (Forty-three years later, in 2007, a Klansmen is convicted in the Moore and Dee murders after *Jackson Free Press* and Canadian Broadcast Corporation reporters locate the killer and uncover new evidence. Their stories prod the Justice Department to finally reopen the case.)

In Neshoba County, a paid informant directs the FBI to the dam where the three are buried, and their bodies are recovered on August 4th. Rita Schwerner tells the press, "*My husband, Michael Schwerner, did not die in vain. If he and Andrew Goodman had been Negroes, the world would have taken little notice of their deaths. After all, the slaying of a Negro in Mississippi is not news. It is only because my husband and Andrew Goodman were white that the national alarm has been sounded.*"

At his eulogy for James Chaney, CORE leader Dave Dennis voices the rage, anguish, and turmoil of Movement veterans and summer volunteers alike:

> I want to talk about right now the living dead that we have right among our midst, not only in the state of Mississippi but throughout the nation. Those are the people who don't care, those who do care but don't have the guts enough to stand up for it, and those people busy up in Washington and other places using my freedom and my life to play politics with. That includes the President on down to the Governor of the state of Mississippi. ... I blame the people in Washington DC and on down in the state of Mississippi just as much as I blame those who pulled the trigger. ... I'm tired of that! Another thing that makes me even tireder though, that is the fact that we as people here in the state and the country are allowing it to continue to happen. ... Your work is just beginning. If you go back home and sit down and take what these white men in Mississippi are doing to us. ...if you take it and don't do something about it. ...then God damn your souls! — Dave Dennis. [14]

After the bodies are recovered, their families ask Freedom Movement attornies Arthur Kinoy and William Kunstler to ensure that the legally- required autopsies be done correctly and reported accurately. They ask that MCHR doctors be allowed to inspect the bodies and observe the procedure. But when Movement doctors Charles Goodrich and Alfred Kogon attempt to do so, they are blocked by the cops — Mississippi officials refuse to allow access to anyone representing the Freedom Movement or the families.

The autopsy results are not released to the public, but mysterious leaks to the press imply that the three men were shot but not tortured or mutilated. The MCHR suspects a cover-up. They ask Dr. David Spain, a respected New York pathologist to inspect the bodies. State officials try to block a second autopsy, but the families hold firm and prevail. The first autopsy done under FBI and state authority had reported no injuries other than the fatal gunshots, but Dr. Spain discovers obvious evidence of horrendous torture and brutality suffered by James Chaney. He tells reporters:

> I could barely believe the destruction to these frail young bones. In my 25 years as a pathologyist and medical examiner, I have never seen bones so severely shattered, except in tremendously high speed accidents or airplane crashes. It was obvious to any first-year medical student that this boy had been beaten to a pulp. — David Spain. [15]

Mickey Schwerner's parents ask that his body be buried next to James Chaney, but that violates Mississippi's rigid code of segregation extending even unto death — whites and Blacks cannot be layed to rest in the same cemetary.

On December 4, the FBI arrests and charges 19 suspects (and, incidentally, demonstrates what everyone has always known, that the FBI does, in fact, have the power to make arrests in civil rights cases). The charges against all of them are dismissed six days later.

On January 15, 1965, most of the first group are rearrested. A total of 18 men are charged with conspiracy to deny the three their civil rights. But no one is charged with murder. Murder is a state crime that has to be prosecuted by Mississippi law enforcement officials who are themselves segregationists committed to white-supremacy. On October 20, 1967, seven of the defendants are convicted of federal conspiracy charges, the others are either acquitted outright or receive a mistrial. Among the convicted are Klan Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers and Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Sentences range from 3 to 10 years. Sheriff Rainey is among those acquitted.

After exhausting their appeals, the seven begin serving their sentences in March of 1970. None serve more than six years for lynching three young men. Meanwhile, the other murderers who were acquitted or had mistrials go about their lives, though everyone knows who they are and what they did. Rainey continues in office as Sheriff until his term ends and acquitted defendant E.G. Barnett is elected in his place.

Thirty years pass. Across the South, white Southerners are eager to ignore and suppress all memory of lynchings, assassinations, and oppression. Most white politicians and law enforcement officials switch parties from Democrat to Republican, but regardless of party they show no interest at all in investigating or prosecuting murder cases involving Movement-related killings in Mississippi or anywhere else.

But Black communities in the South do not forget, they know who the murderers are. Voter registration rises, Blacks are elected to office and begin to gain a share of political power. In both North and South a new generation of young activists, attorneys, journalists, and community leaders begin to demand belated justice. Journalist Jerry Mitchell of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* plays a key role in reawakening public interest in cases long buried by political expediency — he finds witnesses, uncovers concealed evidence, and locates suspects. As the 20th Century fades into history and the new century begins, public pressure forces Southern politicians and prosecutors to reopen old cases. Byron De La Beckwith is convicted for assasinating Medgar Evers and dies in prison in 2001. Two of the Birmingham church bombers are also sent to prison.

In 2001, former Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price begins to cooperate with state authorities who have reopened the Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman case. He suddenly dies in a mysterious "accident." In June of 2005, a Neshoba County jury convicts Edgar Ray Killen for manslaughter in the lynching of the three civil rights workers. He is sentenced to 60 years in prison. But as of 2008, activists continue to demand that charges be brought against the other murderers who still remain free despite a finding by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court that:

> There is ample — in fact, overwhelming — untainted evidence that the defendants conspired together to have Price, a deputy sheriff, arrest Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, United States citizens; that Price would hold them in custody until such time that when released, Price, Arledge, Barnette, Roberts, Snowden, Jordan and Posey could and would intercept them, assault and kill them; and that each was present at and participated in the murder of the three men and the disposal of their bodies by burial fifteen feet beneath the top of an earthen dam deep in the woods. ... Specifically, we find ample proof of conspiracy and each appellant's complicity in a calculated, cold-blooded and merciless plot to murder the three men. [8]

Freedom Schools

Beginnings

Prior to Freedom Summer, most Movement education efforts are aimed at adults. To one degree or another, the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC are all involved in teaching adult literacy, political education, and how to pass the various so-called "literacy tests." The largest and most sustained effort comes from thousands of SCLC's Citizenship School teachers.

But as more and more young people become active in the Freedom Movement, youth-oriented educational activities begin to emerge and evolve. When more than a hundred Black high school students in McComb are expelled from school for Movement activities in 1961, SNCC briefly establishes "Nonviolent High" to carry on their education. In Greenwood, the SNCC office is just down the street from the Black high school and SNCC field secretaries begin teaching impromptu after-school classes in 1962 and '63.

The need is self-evident. On average state-wide, Mississippi spends four times as much educating whites ($81.66 per pupil per year) as Blacks ($21.77). In the rural counties with Black majorities,

the disparity is much greater. Mississippi does not have a mandatory education law. Plantation owners can work Black (and poor white) children in the fields whenever they wish. In many counties, the "Colored" schools close during the spring cotton chopping and fall picking seasons. And when Black students do manage to attend one of the dilapidated, so-called, "separate-but-equal" schools, the curriculum mandated by the state glorifies the *southern way of life*, ignores Black contributions to state and national history, distorts science and culture to justify segregation and exploitation, and instructs Afro-American children to be grateful, happy, and contented with "their place in life."

Mound Bayou, for example, is an all-Black town, yet the county school board requires that "Neither foreign languages nor civics shall be taught in Negro schools. Nor shall American history from 1860 to 1875 be taught" (those 15 years are the period of Reconstruction when Blacks were allowed to vote and had the same the legal and civil rights as whites). Afro teachers who courageously try to counter or subvert this racist socialization risk being fired, arrested on some trumped up charge, and physically attacked.

In the fall of 1963, SNCC field secretary Charlie Cobb proposes that Freedom Schools be set up:

> To fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions ... to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question ... to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives — ultimately new directions for action. — Charlie Cobb. [13]

In March of 1964, the National Council of Churches (NCC) sponsors a Freedom School conference in New York and Freedom Schools are incorporated into the Summer Project. Spelman College history professor Staughton Lynd is appointed director of the Freedom School program. But after years of struggle on the front lines, activists have no illusions. They know how tough it's going to be. At the Summer Project orientation in mid-June, Lynd warns volunteers assigned to teach in Freedom Schools:

> You'll arrive in Ruleville, in the Delta. It will be 100 degrees, and you'll be sweaty and dirty. You won't be able to bathe often or sleep well or eat good food. The first day of school, there may be four teachers and three students. And the local Negro minister will phone to say you can't use his church basement after all, because his life has been threatened. And the curriculum we've drawn up — Negro history and American government — may be something you know only a little about yourself. Well, you'll knock on doors all day in the hot sun to find students. You'll meet on someone's lawn under a tree. You'll tear up the curriculum and teach what you know. — Staughton Lynd. [9]

Freedom School Curriculum

The fundamental goal of SNCC organizing in Mississippi is to create Black political power to defend the interests of those at the bottom of society. But to built parties and organizations that

not only *represent* the disempowered, but are *led* and *controlled*, by them requires a long-term effort to develop political awareness, self-confidence, and organizational skills within the community — not just among adults but among young people too.

In Mississippi in 1964, the immediate goal is to build the MFDP as a Black- led party of the disenfranchised, and the Freedom School curriculum is directly linked to that effort. Said Rev. Edwin King, MFDP candidate for Lieutenant Governor: "*Our assumption was that the parents of the Freedom School children, when we met them at night, that the Freedom Democratic Party would be the PTA.*"

> I just loved going to talk about the movement or to conduct lessons in those classes. But I also saw something that has stayed with me all my political life. All real education is political. All politics is not necessarily educational, but good politics always is. You can have no serious organizing without serious education. And always, the people will teach you as much as you teach them — Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) [1]

Rather than being built around facts to be memorized for answers to standardized tests, Freedom Schools are based on asking and discussing questions. Questions whose answers are found within the lives and experiences of the students and their families, and which are crucial to building the Movement. The instructions given to Freedom School teachers makes it plain:

> In the matter of classroom procedure, questioning is the vital tool. It is meaningless to flood the student with information he cannot understand; questioning is the path to enlightenment... The value of the Freedom Schools will derive mainly from what the teachers are able to elicit from the students in terms of comprehension and expression of their experiences. [11]

The initial focus is on two related sets of questions:

- Why are we (teachers and students) in Freedom Schools?
- What is the Freedom Movement?
- What alternatives does the Freedom Movement offer us?

- What does the majority culture have that we want?
- What does the majority culture have that we don't want?
- What do we have that we want to keep?

To help students and teachers develop their answers to these questions, the curriculum includes seven question-oriented units of study.

A Different Kind of School

Freedom School planners hope for a thousdand students statewide. They get three thousand. There are 41 schools with students ranging in age from small children to the elderly. The average age is around 15. The teachers are summer volunteers, mostly college students themselves, and in most of the schools the older kids help teach the younger. Ever-present is police harassment and

the threat of violence from hostile whites. There is little money and less supplies, few blackboards, and even fewer desks. The public libraries won't admit Blacks, so books have to be sent by supporters in the North — so many that the Holly Springs project assignes two full-time volunteers to sort donated books and send them on to Freedom Schools and community centers.

Not surprisingly, the more active a community has been in the struggle, the more students want to participate in a Freedom School. In Hattiesburg they expect and plan for 100 students. More than 600 show up for class on the first morning, ranging in age from 8 to 82. More teachers are hurriedly dispatched from COFO headquarters in Jackson. In charge of the Hattiesburg effort, Mrs. Carolyn Reese explained, "*The Freedom Schools mean an exposure to a totally new field of learning, new attitudes about people, new attitudes about self, and about the right to be dissatisfied with the status quo.*"

In the (relative) cool of the morning session, the focus is usually on the questions of the core curriculum — particularly around Black history, citizenship, political power, and the Freedom Movement. Later, depending on the interests of the students, there are classes in academic subjects rarely offered in the segregated, "Colored," schools of Mississippi. French, for example, along with chemistry, algebra, journalism, and drama. Also practical courses in typing, health care, and other skills not normally available to Black students. In the evening after work, classes are held for adults who have come in from the fields and out of the kitchens — and for teenagers working full-time to support their families.

Freedom School teacher Pam Parker (today Chude Allen) describes the school in Holly Springs:

> The atmosphere in the class is unbelievable. It is what every teacher dreams about — real, honest enthusiasm and desire to learn anything and everything. The girls come to class of their own free will. They respond to everything that is said. They are excited about learning. They drain me of everything that I have to offer so that I go home at night completely exhausted but very happy in spirit. ... Every class is beautiful. The girls respond, respond, respond. And they disagree among themselves. I have no doubt that soon they will be disagreeing with me. At least this is one thing I keep working towards. They are a sharp group. But they are under-educated and starved for knowledge. They know that they have been cheated and they want anything and everything we can give them. — Chude Allen. [12]

The Freedom School in McComb

In the 1960s, American public schools are usually run as separate, self-contained realities, isolated from family, work, and community. For students, there's "school life" and "real life," and those in charge of the system see to it that never the twain shall meet. Freedom Schools operate on a different premise. Students are encouraged to bring back what they are learning and teach their parents. They are expected to attend — and participate in — the Movement mass meetings alongside the adults. What they learn in the morning, they put into practice in the afternoon as they help with voter registration and organizing the MFDP. And the grown-ups are just as involved in the school, hosting the volunteer teachers (and protecting them at night from the Klan), discussing the curriculum and what they want for their children's future, and preparing or

building (and when necessary, rebuilding) the school itself.

Nowhere is this interaction between Freedom School and community more dramatic than in McComb — site of SNCC's first voter registration project in 1961. The Klan is strong and vicious in the Pearl River region of Southwest Mississippi, the cops are brutal even by Mississippi standards, and after the assassinations of Herbert Lee and Louis Allen, the jailing of the SNCC staff, and the expulsion of the Black high school students in 1961, fear lies heavy on the land. Initial plans to establish projects in the area are put on hold because it's considered "too dangerous."

But memories of McComb's short-lived "Nonviolent High" have not died, and the young people of McComb want a Freedom School. A church courageously steps up, and a couple of weeks after the start of Freedom Summer, a small group of SNCC staff and volunteer teachers are sent in. The school opens with 108 students. The church is bombed by the Klan. No one else dares offer another space, so classes are held on the scorched earth next to the blown-out wall.

Joyce Brown, 16 years old, a teacher/student writes *The House of Liberty*, a poem about the school, the bombing, and the fear paralyzing the adults. Hand to hand it is passed through the community, inspiring courage, stirring hope. McComb Freedom School director Ralph Featherstone reports, "*Old people are looking to the young people and their courage is rubbing off.*"

Churches begin to open their doors, adults begin attending meetings and joining the MFDP, the project expands. Klan and cops retaliate, there are more bombings, more arrests, more beatings, more intimidation, but the Movement carries on. Staughton Lynd later cites McComb as a case where, "*The presence of a Freedom School helped to loosen the hard knot of fear and to organize the Negro community.*"

Impact

The Freedom Schools are a great success. In community after community enrollment exceeds expectations, and students of all ages experience a new and liberating form of education that directly relates to the imperatives of their lives, their communities, and the Freedom Movement that is so profoundly affecting them.

> I was fourteen during that summer. Attending Freedom School was a life changing event for me a poor, Black youngster. While I attended catholic school all my life, the first white adults, other than Catholic school nuns, to say a kind word to me were Freedom School teachers such as Gail Falk, Mark Levy and others. This experience awakened an abiding desire in me to become more knowledgable of the entire civil rights movement. — Jacqulyn Reed Cockfield [28]

> My favorite class was literature, because we had the opportunity to analyze the speeches of Malcolm X and other Black leaders. My saddest memory of those times was when our COFO School [in McComg] was bombed, with a direct hit to our school library. — Emily Rembert [28]

By the end of the summer, most schools are publishing mimeographed newspapers written and

edited by the students themselves. Holly Springs students write and perform a play. Students in Hattiesburg author a new "*Declaration of Independence*" that begins:

> In the course of human events, it has become necessary for the Negro people to break away from the customs which have made it very difficult for the Negro to get his God-given rights, ...

It goes on to enumerate the abuses Blacks have endured and the rights they have been denied, and ends:

> We, therefore, the Negroes of Mississippi assembled, appeal to the government of the State, that no man is free until all men are free. We do hereby declare independence from the unjust laws of Mississippi which conflict with the United States Constitution.

A statewide convention of Freedom School students in early August drafts and adopts resolutions on enforcement of the Civil Rights Act, the need for low-cost housing, urban renewal, free medical care, economic sanctions against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa, a federal jobs program, better employment opportunities, aboliton of House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and ending the poll tax (*see* Platform: Freedom School Convention).

And in the fall, when regular school resumes, Freedom School students carry the spirit forward. In Philadelphia MS, where Chaney, Schwerner & Goodman had been lynched, Black students show up on the first day of class wearing, "One Man, One Vote" buttons. And in Issaquena and Sharkey counties, students mount an 4-month school boycott when administrators try to stop them from wearing their SNCC buttons.

White Mississippi, however, does not approve of the Freedom Schools. The state legislature passes a law prohibiting schools not licensed by the county superintendent of education, and forbidding a license to any school that "Counsels and encourages disobedience to the laws of the state." Klan night riders burn and bomb churches and other buildings housing Freedom Schools, students are attacked on the way to class, teachers are harassed and arrested on phony charges, and parents are threatened. But their efforts fail — the Freedom Schools flourish.

> The Freedom Schools challenged not only Mississippi but the nation. There was, to begin with, the provocative suggestion that an entire school system can be created in any community outside the official order, and critical of its suppositions. The Schools raised serious questions about the role of education in society: Can teachers bypass the artificial sieve of certification and examination, and meet students on the basis of a common attraction to an exciting social goal? Is it possible to declare that the aim of education is to find solutions for poverty, for injustice, for racial and national hatred, and to turn all educational efforts into a national striving for these solutions? — Howard Zinn [9]

The Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR)

In 1964, there are roughly 50 Black medical doctors in Mississippi — but only a handful are willing to publicly support the Movement. Among them are three in Jackson — Drs. Robert Smith, A.B.

Britten, and James Anderson (who had supported the movement in McComb in 1961), along with Aaron Shirley in Vicksburg, Matthew Page in Starkville, Cyril Walwyn in Yazoo city, and Gilbert Mason in Biloxi. Of the remaining Black physicians, some are afraid to treat Movement activists under any circumstances at all, some will only do so for a cash in hand immediate payment, and some are afraid to violate the rigid customs of segregation by treating white activists — particularly white women. As for white MDs, with but a few exceptions they refuse to treat "outside agitators" at all.

A thousand Freedom Summer volunteers are scheduled to begin confronting the "closed society" of Mississippi at the end of June and the need for medical care is critical — not just to care for those injured by racist violence and brutality, but also for stress-related illnesses, and the normal ailments of suffocating heat, inadequate diet, and a strange environment. The few Black physicians willing to treat Freedom Movement activists are already overloaded — they cannot meet the needs of Freedom Summer without assistance.

Doctors Smith and Anderson meet with Summer Project Director Bob Moses to discuss the problem. On June 18, SNCC staff member Carol Rogoff writes to Dr. Tom Levin — who had formed the short-lived Committee of Conscience to support protests in Alabama and Mississippi the year before — asking him if he would mobilize northern health professionals to volunteer in Mississippi during Freedom Summer. He agrees. On June 24, just days after the disappearance of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, twelve doctors meet at Levin's home in New York City. Like Levin, most of them are Jewish, and some know the Schwerner and Goodman families. They agree to go down to Mississippi. At a larger meeting the next day, they elect a committee that includes Dr. Edward Barsky the medical director of the Lincoln Brigade during Spanish Civil War. The committee issues a call for doctors, nurses, medical technicians, and support staff to join them on the front lines of Freedom Summer. Shortly thereafter, they adopt the name Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR).

On July 5th, Levin, Dr. Elliott Hurwitt (Chief of Surgery at Montefiore Hospital), and Dr. Leslie Falk (head of the United Mine Workers health program) arrive in Jackson to meet with COFO and the Black doctors who have been caring for the Freedom Movement for so long. An office is rented on Farish Street near the COFO headquarters, COFO appoints Lois Chafee as medical liaison, Claire Bradley becomes the MCHR office manager, and a four point program is agreed on:

1. Mobilize health professionals to come to Mississippi as volunteers.

2. Raise funds and pay for medical care for Freedom Movement activists (local folk, staff organizers, and summer volunteers).

3. Help obtain foundation and government grants for health care related projects in Mississippi.

4. Help address health-related segregation and discrimination in Mississippi.

Levin returns to New York to coordinate recruitment and fund-raising while Falk takes charge in Jackson.

Dr. Archie Gray, the head of the Mississippi Department of Health is a staunch segregationist. He makes it clear that no one who comes south to support Freedom Summer will be allowed to practice medicine in his state. Any doctor, nurse, or other licensed professional who does so risks arrest on felony charges. This means no prescriptions, no shots, no procedures. But any citizen — licensed professional or not — can give emergency first-aid to those in need, and in the months and years to come, MCHR medics stretch that concept as far as possible.

By mid-July, MCHR-staffed health centers are up and running in Jackson, Greenwood, Meridian, Canton, Hattiesburg, and McComb. Over the course of Freedom Summer, 57 doctors, 18 nurses, and 35 other health practioners volunteer in Mississippi. Reflecting the demographics of the health professions in 1964, only a few are Black, most are white, many of them are Jewish.

Some MCHR volunteers are experienced activists who have been supporting the Freedom Movement in the North for years, others are new to the struggle. Those who have staff positions use their vacation time to volunteer for two or three weeks. Some, like Dr. Martin Gettelman, work through the summer, and a few like MCHR leader Dr. June Finer and Dr. Alvin Poussaint, soldier on for years. Among those who work for MCHR are Drs. Vernal Cave (medical officer for the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II), Aaron Wells, Paul Cornely, Connie Freiss, Martin Gittleman, John Hollowman, Norton Lugar, Stanley Nelson (DDS), Henry Paul, and Benjamin Spock (of Baby Book and later Anti-Vietnam War fame). Among the nurses are Virginia Wells and Mary Holmon. MCHR officer and New York physician Alfred Moldovan who serves in Meridian and later Selma Alabama, recalled:

> I, like many of my colleagues who were in the MCHR, were solo practitioners. We had no vacation time. We did not have fancy practices. My practice was in East Harlem and remained in East Harlem until I retired. When the Movement needed us we came. We closed our practices, left our families without knowing when we would return, and lost all income for the period we were in the South. When I walked out the door, I kissed my wife and children and handed my wife a stack of cash to be used to bail me out of jail if I got arrested, which I expected would likely happen. I knew I was not going on vacation. — Alfred Moldovan. [16]

Inevitably, just as with other Freedom Summer volunteers, culture clashes, misunderstandings, and racial tensions sometimes rise between the mostly white MCHR volunteers and both local Afro-American health professionals and Black activists. While some MCHR volunteers are familiar with the Freedom Movement others are largely ignorant about the realities of Black life in Mississippi and the long struggle for respect and justice. Many MCHR doctors are from elite schools and hold prestigious appointments. Some are arrogant in their assumption of superior medical knowledge and experience. Sometimes, sparks of conflict are struck between doctors dressed in business suits used to the order, cleanliness, and strict hierarchical protocol of major urban hospitals and young, overall-wearing activists filled with spirits of rebellion and defiance who daily put their lives on the line in hard, risky work.

But these inevitable internal tensions exist in the shadow of shared threat from Klan terrorism, police brutality, and legal sanctions. MCHR doctors and nurses put their bodies on the line alongside everyone else, they face violence, jail, and abuse. Some are arrested, some are beaten. Out of several hundred thousand American doctors, and more than a million nurses, these are the

few — the very few — who come south to stand for justice. And though for most of them their sojourns are short, for that brief time they are embraced by Black communities as fellow soldiers in the freedom struggle.

As Freedom Summer progresses, MCHR volunteers engage in a wide range of activities as illustrated by excerpts from Dr. Lee Hoffman's report of a week in Clarksdale:

> Attended a COFO worker who was beaten over the head ... gave first aid ... accompanied him to the hospital ... Played football with the local high school boys ... Visited several sick local people with nurse ... Was arrested for being out after curfew ... Visited citizen of Marks in jail at request of COFO to give her reassurance (I could not have gotten in without positive identification as an MD) ... Repaired a dangerous electrical connection in a local home ... put a lock on window in Freedom House ... Attended funeral at request of family of a terminal patient I had seen earlier. — Lee Hoffman. [15]

Other MCHR volunteers conduct health-education and pre-natal classes at COFO community centers, provide a medical presence in Black communities (some of which have never had a visit from a doctor), document the health consequences of poverty and deprivation, and begin laying the groundwork for future struggles against the vast iniquity of the South's system of segregated health care. And late in the summer, MCHR doctors help expose the state's cover-up of the brutal torture inflicted on James Chaney before he was murdered by the Klan.

MCHR volunteers provide critical medical support for protests, marches, and political rallies. Like combat medics on wartime battlefields, they wear armbands displaying a prominent red-cross. Their presence reassures participants facing imminent violence and also inhibits attacks from cops and white mobs. Visits to jailed demonstrators by MCHR doctors deter jailhouse beatings, brutalities, and assaults. In the years to follow, MCHR volunteers with their canvass first-aid satchels become familiar sights at protests in southern hotspots like Selma Alabama, Bogalusa Louisiana, and the Meredith Mississippi March.

Except for wounds sustained from police clubs or inflicted by racist attacks and ambushes, most of the young COFO organizers and Freedom Summer volunteers are physically healthy, requiring little medical care. But some activists suffer from what psychologist Robert Coles terms "battle fatigue." SNCC and CORE's dedicated field secretaries have been on the front line for months and years — enduring arrests, beatings, the imminent threat of death, the agonizing betrayals of the federal government, and the broken promises of white liberals. Some COFO staff, local activists, and summer volunteers show symptoms of what we know today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) — insomnia, nightmares, anxiety, outbursts of rage, acting-out, loneliness, depression, anorexia, and alcoholism.

MCHR arranges for those in most need to be sent north for treatment, and a rest & rehabilitation center is established in Jackson where freedom fighters can temporarily relax and decompress from the struggle. In Greenwood and elsewhere, Martin Gettelman and others begin to experiment with group-therapy as a method of addressing psychological wounds inflicted by society on an individual. A collective approach which recognizes that social causes and shared experiences can underlie individual symptoms; and that treatments for psychic traumas inflicted

by political systems have to include social and political components.

Wednesdays in Mississippi

In the wake of the Birmingham Church Bombing in the fall of 1963, hundreds of Black students are arrested in Selma, AL for protesting segregation and supporting voting rights. During the same period, more than 300 Black women and men are harassed and denied when they attempt to register to vote. There are beatings, death threats, mass firings, and other forms of retaliation and intimidation. SNCC field-secretary Prathia Hall reaches out to sympathetic organizations across the country asking for their support. In response, Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and Polly Cowan of the New York Citizens Committee for Children lead a delegation of women to support the Movement in Selma.

Based on that experience, Height and Cowan organize a project to send integrated teams of politically well-connected northern women to civil rights hotspots for brief visits where they show outside support for Black communities in struggle. And also attempt to build bridges of understanding with local white women. They call it "Wednesdays in Mississippi" (WIM). Height and Cowan see WIM as a way to begin opening up "the closed society," and their literature expresses their goals as:

Build bridges of understanding
Be a ministry of presence
Bring hope
Open the eyes of northern women to conditions in Mississippi
Use women as catalysts for change.

Operating as a project of NCNW, Wednesdays in Mississippi involves women from the Young Womens Christian Association, Church Women United, League of Women Voters, American Association for University Women, National Council of Jewish Women, and the National Council of Catholic Women. In 1964, Doris Wilson and Susie Goodwillie are brought in to direct the project from Jackson Mississippi.

During Freedom Summer, WIM teams visit and send support to Freedom Schools, attend mass meetings, and report back to civil rights sympathizers in the North. Black women from WIM meet with local Black women, and white WIM participants reach out to local white women — with mixed success. Dr. Height later recalled, "*The Black women had a whole community to greet them; the white women [were] met with a lot of white community hostility, so we made sure there were enough of them to reinforce their courage and commitment.*"

The WIM program continues into 1965, focusing on building professional connections — teacher to teacher, social worker to social worker, and so on. In 1966, WIM renames itself Workshops in Mississippi and concentrates on assisting Black and poor-white women improve their economic situation.

The McGhees of Greenwood

Despite the posturing of urban centers like New Orleans and Atlanta, the South of the 1960s is still primarily a landscape of small towns and rural villages. It is in these small communities — far from the eyes of the media — that the Freedom Movement takes deep root. The cameras focus on Washington, Dr. King, and the dramatic marches and protests, but in a thousand country hamlets it is quiet acts of stubborn courage and revolutionary defiance that begin to fundamentally alter a *southern way of life* based on overt white-supremacy and terror-enforced Black subservience.

On July 2nd, President Johnson signs into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In some Movement battlegrounds, segregation of public facilities begins to collapse. The St. Augustine FL business community defies Klan threats by agreeing to end "white-only" policies. In Albany GA, Blacks are served instead of arrested, and SCLC holds its convention in Birmingham AL with Dr. King and other Black ministers staying at the brand-new Parliment House hotel. But in Selma AL, whites violently attack young Blacks who dare to defy the color-line. In Jackson MS, the Robert E. Lee hotel converts from a public facility to a "private club" rather than admit Blacks, and across the South, deeply entrenched customs of racial segregation remain in place until they are directly challenged. As the old saying goes: "*Where the broom don't sweep, the dirt don't move.*"

In many ways, Greenwood is the epicenter of Freedom Summer activity. It is the heart of the Delta where the majority of projects are located, and SNCC's national office is temporarily relocated there from Atlanta. Here, the strategic priorities are clear — voter registration, community organizing, and building the MFDP towards the challenge at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. Human and financial resources are stretched desperately thin. Sit-ins to test the new Civil Rights Act divert organizer time and attention, cost bail money, and inevitably result in activists languishing in jail. Mississippi whites are already enraged over the "invasion" of "race-mixers" and "agitators," to say nothing of Blacks socially interacting with white activists, particularly young white women. Movement leaders fear that direct-action protests for hamburgers and library cards will intensify both violent retaliation and police repression. But "freedom is in the air," courage is contagious, and the daily humiliations of "white-only/colored-only" cry out for defiance.

Silas McGhee, 21, is Chair of the Greenwood NAACP Youth Council's Testing Committee. His brother Jake is Assistant Chair. On July 5th, Silas walks three miles from his family's farm to the Leflore Theater in Greenwood. Defying a century of rigid segregation, he takes a seat on the "whites-only" main floor rather than the "Colored" balcony. He is attacked and harassed. The cops haul him home with a warning. When his brothers ask why he went by himself he tells them, "*Well, you wasn't nowhere around when I decided to go. I just went.*"

Greenwood is a small town and word of his attempt to break the color-line spreads through the Black community — and among whites as well. On July 16, Silas observes Freedom Day from across the street. He is not one of the 111 people arrested. As he walks home alone, three Klansmen ambush him and force him at gunpoint into their car. They beat him with clubs and try to lock him in a shed, but he manages break free. He evades their pursuit and reaches the FBI office Greenwood. Agents arrest the three attackers under the new civil rights law — the first case of its kind in Mississippi.

The McGhees are a tight-knit family and they're not known for backing down. Silas' mother and

brothers join him in action and the cops discover that arresting the McGhees just makes them more determined.

> The rest of July was a running battle between the McGhees, the theater, the mob, and the cops. ... Silas and his brother Jake kept going back to the theater. Five or six times. Each time when they tried to leave, a mob greeted them. ... Another night Jake and Silas went back to the movies, but this time when the mob formed, a towering (6'8"), linebacker-built paratrooper in full dress uniform appeared and faced down a member of the mob. Turned out it was their older brother, Clarence (Robinson), a decorated Korean War veteran on active duty at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. A trained American fighting man, taking leave to come defend freedom, democracy, the Constitution, and his younger brothers in his hometown. Then he got himself jailed for assault. — Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael). [1]

On Monday evening, August 15, after being released from jail, Silas is resting in a car outside of Lulu's Cafe on Avenue H in the Black community. Rain is pouring down and the night is dark. Two white men in a car drive slowly by, they shoot Silas in the head and speed off. SNCC field-secretary Bob Zellner and summer volunteer Mark Winter strip off their shirts to try to stop the bleeding. With volunteer Linda Whetmore Halpern, they rush Silas to the segregated Greenwood public hospital. Cops at the hospital won't let them in because they're using the "wrong" entrance. They drive around back to the other door, but the cops again bar them — this time because Bob and Mark are not wearing shirts. Linda has to go in alone, her blue dress drenched red with blood. She gets a stretcher and brings Silas inside.

The white doctors in this tax-financed hospital won't treat a wounded Black man, so Dr. Jackson — the only Black MD in Greenwood — is summoned. While he works to save Silas' life, officer Logan of the Greenwood police department tells another cop "*Well, they finally got that nigger Silas!*" Other cops make it clear that if Silas doesn't die on the operating table he'll be killed during the night. As soon as Silas is stabilized, Movement leaders arrange to have him transferred to a hospital in Jackson.

Greenwood's Black community is enraged. More than a dozen young Black men armed with rifles ask SNCC field-secretary Wazir Peacock about invading North Greenwood — a white neighborhood — and retaliating in kind. He tells them that it wouldn't be right to attack whites who had nothing to do with the shooting. He also understands that doing so would bring down a wave of violent repression against the entire Black community. The Klan is known to have been stockpiling military-type weapons, and it's possible that the shooting of Silas is intended to provoke just such a war. The young men agree to concentrate on defending the Black community from further KKK attack.

The shooting of Silas McGhee halts neither the McGhee family nor the work of the Freedom Movement. Voter registration and building the MFDP continue, as do efforts to implement the Civil Rights Act.

McComb — Breaking the Klan Siege

Back in the fall of 1961, the McComb voter-registration project — SNCC's first — was temporarily suppressed by Klan violence, the brutal murder of Herbert Lee, economic retaliation, the expulsion of more than 100 high-school student protesters, federal indifference, and the incarceration of the SNCC staff on trumped up charges. But SNCC has neither forgotten, nor abandoned McComb. In the fall of '63, SNCC workers briefly return to mobilize support for the Freedom Ballot, and again in January of '64 for voter-registration classes. But Klan repression is unrelenting, threats and intimidation are constant, night-riders shoot up Black homes and businesses, and on January 31st Louis Allen who witnessed Herbert Lee's murder is assassinated.

As they begin planning the Summer Project in early 1964, SNCC activists are determined to re-establish a permanent Freedom Movement presence in McComb. They know with dead certainty that doing so means a showdown with the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and the United Klans of America, the two KKK factions who have turned the Pearl River area of Southwest Mississippi into "Klan Nation."

The forces of white-supremacy are of the same opinion. Pike County sheriff R.R. Warren tells a meeting of Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR) that he expects a "*long hot summer*" and that he may need to recruit their assistance if law enforcement is unable to suppress the COFO "threat." Rumors swirl through the white community that Black men identified by white bandages on their throats have been specifically assigned to rape white women. Parents are warned to know where their small children are at all times. Sales of guns and ammunition spike upward, and Klan membership soars. The oilman who financially backs one of the Klan factions has easy access to dynamite, and on the night of June 22nd — 24 hours after the lynching of Chaney, Schwerner, & Goodman — explosions blast through the Black community, damaging the home of NAACP leader C.C. Bryant who grabs his rifle and fires back at the bomber's car.

Initially, COFO leaders judge Southwestern Mississippi too dangerous for the highly visible northern white students, so both the McComb and Natchez projects are put on temporary hold until the situation stabilizes. By early July, FBI agents have flooded into the state and the news media is providing extensive coverage of the search for Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman so COFO decides to risk restarting the McComb project. Led by SNCC organizer and former McComb activist Curtis Hayes (today, Curtis Muhammad), the first contingent of Freedom Summer workers arrive on July 5th.

They open a COFO freedom house on Wall Street in the Black community. Two nights later a dynamite bomb damages the house, injuring Curtis Hayes and volunteer Dennis Sweeney. The FBI "investigates." No one is arrested. Over the following days, Black churches are burned in Pike and Amite counties, SNCC field secretary Mendy Samstein is attacked and beaten on a McComb street, and the home of C.C. Bryant's brother is bombed. With no protection from police or the federal government, local Blacks active with the Movement stand armed guard each night against Klan bombers and night riders.

Except for a core of dedicated and courageous activists like the Bryants, Aylene "Mama" Quin, Webb Owens, Willie Mae Cotton, Ernest Nobles, Joe Martin, and a handful of others, fear is pervasive in McComb's Black community. No churches are willing to open their doors for mass meetings, voter-registration classes, or Freedom Schools. The few Blacks who dare the trip to the

county courthouse in Magnolia on voter-registration days face threats of violence and economic retaliation. COFO canvassers are hard pressed to find any willing to take that risk.

But as it was back in '61, it's the Black youth who stand up and move forward. With no church or other building open to it, the McComb Freedom School meets in the dirt yard of the bombed freedom house. Joyce Brown (16), a Freedom School student-teacher, pens *The House of Liberty*, a poem addressed to the community's adults that reads in part:

> *I asked for your churches, and you turned me down,*
> *But I'll do my work if I have to do it on the ground,*
> *You will not speak for fear of being heard,*
> *So you crawl in your shell and say, "Do not disturb,"*
> *You think because you've turned me away,*
> *You've protected yourself for another day.*
> — Joyce Brown.

Young activists and COFO organizers circulate her poem throughout the Black community and the elders respond. A church opens its doors to the Freedom School and soon more than 100 students overflow the space — some of them the younger sisters and brothers of the those who had protested and been expelled from Burgland High three years before. "*The Freedom School is inspiring the people to lend a hand in the fight*," reports school director Ralph Featherstone. "*The older people are looking to the young people, and their courage is rubbing off.*"

Ten Black businessmen secretly gather in Aylene Quin's South of the Border cafe. Inspired by Joyce Brown's poem, they form a movement support committee and contribute $500 (equal to $3,700 in 2012) towards buying land and materials for a community center that will become a movement headquarters. Soon churches open their doors to mass meetings and attendance begins to grow. Local families contribute food and money to support the COFO staff and volunteers.

Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Council retaliation is not limited to Blacks and civil rights workers, they also target local whites suspected of being insufficiently committed to white-supremacy — the family of Albert and Malva Heffner, for example. He's a successful McComb insurance salesman and his daughter is the reigning "Miss Mississippi" beauty queen. Though they support racial segregation and are not involved in civil rights activity of any kind, they're concerned about the rising tide of Klan violence. As a gesture of conciliation, they invite the Rev. Don McCord of the Delta Ministry and summer volunteer Dennis Sweeney (both white) over for dinner. For this "crime" his insurance business is boycotted and destroyed and the entire family ostracized, they are subjected to threats of violence and death, their dog is poisoned, and they are soon forced to flee the county.

The McComb Movement calls for a mid-August "Freedom Day," an attempt to get as many people as possible to attempt to register at the courthouse in Magnolia. Klan opposition is fierce — crosses are burned, threats of violence and economic retaliation increase, and two dozen cops raid the freedom house in the middle of the night — looking for "illegal liquor" they claim [McComb is a "dry" city]. Back in 1961, the 2nd floor of the Black-owned Burgland Market was used for "Nonviolent High," the precursor freedom school for the expelled high-school students. On August 14, 1964, the building is bombed. Undeterred, several hundred Blacks attend a

Freedom Day rally in McComb, and on August 18th, 23 Black men and women manage to take the voter-test at the courthouse in Magnolia. Their applications are denied by registrar Glen Fortenberry. None are registerd to vote.

The following week, local activists, SNCC staff, and summer volunteers head north to Atlantic City for the MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention. On the night of August 27-28, as the betrayed MFDP delegates are bitterly making their way back to Mississippi, a bomb explodes near the home of Willie and Matti Dillon in McComb. She is active in the MFDP, two of their children attended the Freedom School, and Willie repaired a COFO car.

Sheriff Warren warns them, "*If you don't cooperate with us more than the COFOs, more than [the bombing] is going to happen to you.*" Warren and FBI agent Frank Ford accuse the Dillons of planting the bomb themselves, then arrest Willie Dillon for "operating a garage without a license" (for fixing the COFO car) and "stealing electricity" because he had rigged a temporary flood light in defense against Klan night riders. He is quickly tried without a lawyer and sentenced to a $600 fine (equal to $4,400 in 2012) and nine months in jail.

By the end of August, the Black community in McComb has endured more than a dozen bombings since the start of Freedom Summer in late June — people now call the small town of 12,000 the "Bombing capitol of the world." Chief FBI agent Frank Ford and his 15 assistant G-men have not solved a single case — perhaps because accuse the victims of bombing their own homes and churches. As August ends, most of the summer volunteers return to school and with their departure media interest declines. The FBI takes the opportunity to reduce their 16 agents to 4. This further emboldens the Ku Klux Klan who rest secure in the certainty that they are immune from arrest by both local and federal law enforcement.

But SNCC organizers Jesse Harris, Mendy Samstein, and Cephus Hughes, the Rev Harry Bowie from the Delta Ministry, and several summer volunteers remain in McComb. Along with local leaders like the Bryants and Aylene Quin, they are determined to keep the movement moving forward.

> Mama Quin is kind and good to everyone, but more than that, she is a towering figure of strength. She can't be intimidated. Three years ago she was one of the first to welcome Moses and lend him and the SNCC workers her support. Her cafe has always been open — despite the threats. And this summer, again she leads the community. She serves Black and white, night after night. — Mendy Samstein. [21]

On August 30, the cops plant illegal liquor in Mama Quin's cafe and then arrest her. The white landlord evicts her, and the cafe is closed. Violence and beatings continue. Unable to intimidate Movement leaders, the Klan expands their terror campaign to Blacks who have never been involved in civil rights activities, bombing their homes and businesses to turn them against the Freedom Movement. SNCC writes to Washington, pleading for federal intervention. The Justice Department does nothing.

On the night of September 20, a bomb shatters Aylene Quin's home injuring her children. A second dynamite blast destroys the wood-frame Society Hill Baptist Church which had opened its doors to freedom meetings (when the congregation reconstructs the church they build it with fire-

proof brick). Several hundred angry Blacks, many of them armed, pour into the streets, throwing rocks at the cops and threatening retaliatory violence. Only the desperate efforts of COFO organizers and local activists to calm the crowd avert a blood-bath as 100 heavily armed Mississippi State Trooper swarm into town.

Sheriff Warren accuses Mama Quin of planting the bomb that destroyed her home and almost killed her young son and daughter. Dozens of Black leaders, activists, and students are arrested. Many are charged with "criminal syndicalism" — a new state law that prohibits public speaking and political organizing by "subversive" groups. Almost 150 state troopers — one-third of the entire state force — are stationed in McComb. They are an occupying army sent to suppress the Black community. The number of Blacks arrested on various bogus and illegal charges tops 200. The number of Klansmen arrested for terrorism and bombings remains at zero.

With money from the National Council of Churches, SNCC/COFO sends Mama Quin, Matti Dillon, and Ora Bryant — all bombing victims — to Washington to meet with officials and the national press. The Justice Department brushes off the three women with their usual, "*doing all we can*," platitudes. But news reports and their meetings with members of Congress generate enough pressure that President Johnson meets with them privately. He's in the middle of his campaign against Goldwater and reluctant to take any action that might stir up more resentment among southern white voters, but he also fears that some dramatic escalation of violence in McComb — the assassination of civil rights workers or a violent confrontation between armed Blacks and the Klan/cops — could damage his reputation. He expresses his concern but makes no promises.

Meanwhile, more bombs explode at Black churches and homes in Pike County. The Delta Ministry mobilize clergymen from around the country to come to McComb. Over the next three months almost 100 ministers respond, and with them comes renewed attention from the national media. A dozen visiting ministers are among the 30 people arrested at a second Freedom Day at the courthouse in Magnolia and more are jailed for voter-registration efforts.

Back in McComb, the Black boycott of white businesses, the general sense of violence and tension, and renewed attention from the national media is depressing economic activity. The shopping district is deserted as both whites and Blacks avoid McComb stores. New industry won't consider investing in Pike County, and existing manufacturers ship their products from elsewhere so they won't identified as "made in McComb." *Enterprise-Journal* editor Oliver Emmerich warns of financial and political consequences. Business leaders begin meeting to discuss the economic importance of perhaps expanding their concepts of "law and order" beyond suppressing Black protests to include the radical idea of halting KKK bombings.

On September 29, a rumor flashes through the state's white power-structure that the federal government may be on the verge of declaring martial law in McComb. Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson immediately meets with local officials. He informs them that he is going to mobilize the state National Guard into McComb to forestall federal action. The McComb and Pike County leaders ask him to hold off for two days to give them a chance to end the violence. Within 24 hours, Klan members are being arrested for the bombings. Within a days, 11 of them are in jail and huge amounts of explosives, weapons, and ammunition have been seized. Obviously, local, state, and federal law enforcement knew all along who the bombers were.

As described by author John Dittmer in *Local People, the Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, a sweet-heart plea bargain is quickly granted to the terrorists:

> ... they pleaded either guilty or *nolo contendere* to charges ranging from attempted arson to bombing. Under Mississippi law the maximum penalty was death, yet the presiding judge, W.H. Watkins, gave the defendants suspended sentences and immediately released them on probation. In justifying his leniency, Judge Watkins stated that the men had been "unduly provoked" by civil rights workers, some of whom "are people of low morality and unhygienic." The bombers, on the other hand, were from "good families..." That afternoon, thirteen COFO staff members were jailed on charges of operating a food-handling establishment (the freedom house, where they lived) without a permit. On the same day Federal Judge Sidney Mize rejected Willie Dillon's appeal to have his trial removed to federal court. Judge Mize ruled as he did because "there is no hostility among the general public in Pike County to the Negro race." [21]

Despite "punishments" that don't even amount to the mildest slap on the wrist, the sudden arrest of the Klansmen does accomplish three things. First, it proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the authorities knew who the bombers were all along and could have stopped them at any time. Second, it puts the Klan on notice that the white power-structure wants the bombings to stop — and it does. The dynamiting of Black homes, churches, and businesses comes to an abrupt halt. Third, talk of martial law in McComb ceases. The press trumpets a great victory over the KKK.

But segregation, denial of voting rights, poverty, exploitation, and virulent racism still persist in McComb and Pike County and the Freedom Movement carries on. Dynamite has failed to break it, arrests haven't halted it. The struggle for justice in "Klan nation" continues. In November, McComb Blacks participate in another mock Freedom Vote to protest denial of voting rights and lay the foundation for a MFDP Congressional Challenge. In February and March of 1965, at the height of the Selma Voting Rights Campaign and the freedom battle in nearby Bogalusa Louisiana, Black high-school students organize and lead protests at the county courthouse in Magnolia against Voter Registrar Glen Fortenberry who continues to deny Black voting rights. More than 90 people are arrested. The Freedom Movement soldiers on.

MFDP Challenge to the Democratic Convention

The Plan

Despite years of bloody struggle, Mississippi's white power-structure still continues to deny Blacks their right to vote in 1964 — no more than 5% of the state's Black population have been able to place their names on the voter rolls. And the few Blacks voters who do exist are shut out of the political process. In many cases they face Klan violence, arrest by police on phony charges, and economic retaliation organized by the White Citizens Council if they actually try to cast ballots or participate in electoral politics.

Mississippi is a one-party state, all office holders and political power brokers are Democrats. The Democratic Party of Mississippi is all white, no Blacks are allowed to partipate. It is the party of delta plantation owner and U.S. Senator James Eastland who preaches that, "*Segregation is the law of nature, is the law of God*." It is the party of Governor Ross Barnett who incited whites to riot and kill when James Meredith desegregated 'Ole Miss. It is the party of state legislator E.H. Hurst who murdered Herbert Lee in 1961. They call themselves "Dixiecrats" — meaning that their true loyalty is to the southern traditions of slavery and segregation. They are loyal to the national Democratic Party only insofar as the national party accepts and accomodates white-supremacy in the South.

Historically, like other Deep-South states, Mississippi sends all-white (and male-only) delegations to the national Democratic conventions. Despite the fact that these delegates are members of the Democratic Party, in 1960 they refused to support party nominee John Kennedy — instead they voted for Robert Byrd the "Dixiecrat" candidate. Now in 1964, they oppose President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), their party's presumptive nominee, because they consider him a supporter of civil rights for Blacks. Instead, these Mississippi "Democrats" openly campaign for Goldwater the Republican.

With Black voter registration and political participation blocked, early in 1964 the Freedom Movement adopts a three-part strategy:

1. Continue trying to register Blacks through the official process, and continue pressuring the federal government to enforce the Constitution, federal law, and federal court decisions in defense of Black voting rights. Hopefully, the presence of 1,000 northern, mostly-white, summer volunteers will focus enough public attention to force Washington to act.

2. Build on the success of the Freedom Ballot by transforming the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) into a fully-structured, non-discriminatory, political organization so that Blacks have a party that encourages their participation and represents their interests.

3. Organize the MFDP in strict conformance with the rules and regulations of the national Democratic Party. Elect MFDP delegates to the national Democratic Convention in Atlantic City in August. Challenge the legitimacy of the all-white Dixiecrat delegation who support the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, and demand that the MFDP be seated and recognized as the official Democratic Party organization of Mississippi. Liberal party leaders and activists in the North and West have promised their support. If the convention rejects Mississippi's Dixiecrat delegates in favor of the MFDP it will strike a powerful blow against white-supremacy across the South.

The first step in challenging the Dixiecrat delegation is to build a case. In the first half of 1964, MFDP supporters attempt to participate in the official Democratic Party precinct, county, and state meetings, and the caucuses and elections for committees and delegates. They are excluded. In April, the MFDP nominates Fannie Lou Hamer to run in the Democratic primary for Senator, and Victoria Gray, John Houston, and Rev. John Cameron for three of Mississippi's five seats in the House of Representatives. With Blacks denied the vote, they are easily defeated. They file to run in the November general election as Independents. The all-white state Board of Elections rejects their petition. These outcomes are all expected, but they build a record of proof that Blacks

who try to participate in Democratic Party and general election activities are systematically blocked at every turn.

The MFDP challenge to the all-white official delegation rests on a firm foundation of four solid arguments:

- That Mississippi's systematic denial of Black voting rights and political participation is unconstitutional, a crime under federal law, and violates the principles that the national Democratic Party claims to stand for.

- That the top-down, good 'ole boy, delegate-selection process used by Mississippi's official all-white party is undemocratic to all voters regardless of race, and is in flagrant violation of party rules and procedures.

- That Mississippi's official party delegation is in rebellion against the national party because they refuse to support Johnson for President, and are instead campaigning for Barry Goldwater the Republican candidate.

- That unlike the Dixiecrats, the MFDP is "Double-D Democratic." Meaning that it's a democratic organization open to all and run according to the rules. And Democratic because it supports the Democratic ticket in opposition to the Republicans.

These are strong, powerful arguments. But arrayed against them is the political opportunism of the national Democratic leadership who fear alienating white segregationists — not just in Mississippi, but across the entire South. Goldwater and the Republicans are campaigning on a "states-rights" platform, meaning they support a state's "right" to discriminate against racial minorities. Johnson and his power-brokers worry that if the national party recognizes the MFDP, white Democrats throughout the South will bolt the party as they did during the Dixiecrat revolts of 1948 and 1960.

Within the Civil Rights Movement, SNCC, CORE, and SCLC all support the MFDP challenge, as do most of Mississippi's NAACP chapters. But the NAACP's national leaders oppose the idea. NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkens tells reporters, "*We're sitting this one out*." Some Movement activists attribute this opposition to Wilkens' close alliance with the Johnson administration — Wilkens calls for a moratorium on all civil rights protests so as not to stir up a "white-backlash" that might hurt LBJ's chances against Goldwater. Other activists see it as a continuation of the NAACP's long-standing hostility to the formation of any mass-membership organization in any Black community that might compete with them for dues-money and political influence. (SCLC, CORE, and SNCC are not mass-membership organizations in the way that the NAACP and MFDP are.)

Building the MFDP

On June 20th, the first wave of Freedom Summer volunteers arrive in Mississippi Black communities. The next day they begin canvassing door-to-door on two simultaneous voter registration campaigns — regular registration for the official voter rolls and "freedom registration"

to join the MFDP.

Over the course of Freedom Summer, 17,000 courageous Blacks don their Sunday-best to defy all threats and a century of repression by attempting to register. Most are denied. Only 1600 — 9% — manage to become voters. COFO had hoped that the presence of summer volunteers would pressure the federal government to finally enforce the Constitution, but — as usual — Washington takes no effective action to protect the voting rights of Blacks. By mid-July it is clear that even under the glare of national publicity the white registrars at the courthouse are determined to deny Black voting rights, so the Movement shifts its emphasis to concentrate on "freedom registration" to build the MFDP.

Registering to join the MFDP is much simpler and can be done anywhere at any time — in the privacy of a home, a barber shop, even a "jook joint." All it requires is filling out a short form that just asks name, citizenship, age, and residency (similar to the voter-registration cards used in most states today). But in the closed society of Mississippi even this is an act of defiance and a test of courage. Yet, by the end of summer, 80,000 have become MFDP members.

In mid-July, Dr. King comes to Mississippi in support of the MFDP, speaking to mass meetings in Greenwood, Jackson, Tougaloo, Meridian, Vicksburg, and Philadelphia in Neshoba county where the three freedom workers were lynched. In pool halls and cafes, churches and Masonic temples, he tells audiences large and small that, "*America needs at least one party which is free of racism*," and he asks them to join the MFDP. Klan threats to assassinate him are numerous and credible. President Johnson forces J. Edgar Hoover to assign FBI agents to protect King, and armed Black men stand night-guard while sleeps.

But membership recruitment is just the first step in building the MFDP into a solid organization that can achieve a share of political power. Precinct meetings open to all MFDP members are held where members form ongoing precinct structures and elect delegates to the county meeting. While some Black churches "call" (elect) their pastors, for most Mississippi Blacks these precinct meetings are the first time they have ever voted or democratically chosen their leaders in a political context. In many areas, the precinct meetings take on the fervor and excitement of a social revolution.

The county delegates elected at the precinct level are a cross-section of the Black community — sharecroppers, farmers, housewives, teachers, maids, deacons & ministers, factory workers, and owners of small businesses — a far cry from the white-only regular Democrats whose delegates represent wealth and power, excluding not just Blacks but poor-whites as well. One Freedom Summer volunteer writes home from Vicksburg:

> Hundreds of people risked their lives and jobs to come. Representatives were elected after the election of a permanent chairman and secretary. Resolutions were introduced, minutes were kept ... The precinct meeting was one of the most exciting events of my life ... [12]

The MFDP holds county meetings in half of Mississippi's 82 counties. County Central Committees are elected, as are delegates to the Congressional district caucus. A volunteer writes from Moss

Point:

> The county convention was held here last Saturday. It was just amazing seeing these people, many, or rather most, of whom had never had any experience at all in politics running the meeting, electing the people and passing resolutions for a state platform. These people, housewives, unskilled workers, many, but not all, uneducated, are fantastic. People who have never spoken publicly before get up and make the greatest speeches... [12]

At the five Congressional district caucuses the process is repeated, and delegates are elected to the state-wide convention. On the eve of the state convention, Joseph Rauh arrives in Jackson. He's chief counsel for United Auto Workers (UAW), a leader of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) the liberal faction of the Democratic Party, and a personal friend and ally of Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN). He's also a member of the party's national Credentials Committee. As a member of that committee, he agrees to present, and argue, the MFDP's case for replacing the official Mississippi delegates. Along with Bill Kunstler (whose daughter Karen is a summer volunteer), Arthur Kinoy of the National Lawyers Guild, and ACLU attorneys, they review every party rule to make sure that the MFDP has correctly crossed every regulatory "t" and dotted every procedural "i."

On the morning of August 6, the MFDP's state convention comes to order in the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street in the heart of Jackson's Black community — the same hall from which Medgar Ever's massive funeral march issued just one year earlier. With state NAACP leader Aaron Henry of Clarksdale presiding, over 800 elected delegates and more than 1,000 supporters fill the building with energy and excitement.

> It was a beautifully-organized, crowded, singing assembly of laborers, farmers, housewives, from the farthest corners of Mississippi, and made the political process seem healthy for the first time in the state's history. It was probably as close to a grassroots political convention as this country has ever seen. Most delegates were Negroes, but there were a few whites: one was Edwin King, Mississippi-born white minister at Tougaloo College; another was a husky former fisherman from the Mississippi Gulf Coast. — Howard Zinn. [9]

Ella Baker gives the keynote address.

> Miss Baker talked about the way the rest of the country tacitly supported white-supremacy in Mississippi: "*At no point were the southern states denied their representation on the basis of the fact that they had denied other people the right to participate in the election of those who govern them.*" She warned the delegates that when they were able to elect their own representatives, that wouldn't be the end of their troubles; elected representatives had to be watched: "*Now this is not the kind of keynote speech, perhaps, you like. But I'm not trying to make you feel good.*" She urged them to spend less time watching television and more time reading about political and social issues; uninformed people cannot participate in a democracy. She reminded them that young people want some meaning in their lives, and they weren't going to get it from owning big cars and having a place in the power-structure. Echoing the theme of the summer project, she said, "*Until the killing of Black mothers' sons is as important as*

> *the killing of white mothers' sons, we must keep on.*" The delegates, one journalist observed, gave "Miss Baker, the party, themselves a traditional placard-waving march, the first in American political history that stepped off to the tune *Go Tell It On the Mountain* and *This Little Light of Mine*. — Charles Payne. [17]

SNCC field secretary Lawrence Guyot is elected MFDP state chairman, Fannie Lou Hamer is chosen vice-chair, and a full slate of 68 delegates and alternates (64 Black, 4 white) are democratically elected strictly according to the rules of the Democratic Party. Among the national delegates are Charles McLaurin of SNCC, Annie Devine from Canton, Hartman Turnbow from Holmes County, E.W. Steptoe from Amite County, Unita Blackwell from the heart of the Delta, and Victoria Jackson Gray of Hattiesburg and Palmer's Crossing. When Lawrence Guyot is jailed in Hattiesburg before the convention, Mrs. Hamer — the MFDP Vice-Chair — steps up to become the public voice for Mississippi's disenfranchised Blacks.

Showdown in Atlantic City

While the MFDP is preparing in Mississippi, John Lewis, Marion Barry, Ella Baker, and Friends of SNCC and CORE chapters in the North, begin contacting party officials, officeholders, and convention delegates. By the beginning of August, they report that 9 state delegations from the North and West, and 25 Democratic members of Congress, have promised to support the MFDP.

But others are also preparing. Segregationist Dixiecrats from Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and other southern states adamantly oppose seating the MFDP delegation in any way, shape, or form. Rejecting, or even questioning, the all-white, "good 'ole boy," process in Mississippi threatens the same practices across the South. The Dixiecrat delegates explicitly threaten to bolt the party as they did in 1948 against Truman. President Johnson knows that most of the white Mississippi delegates will end up supporting Goldwater in November, but he is determined to prevent a southern walkout, or any large-scale public break in party unity. All of the polls show him cruising to an easy victory over Goldwater even if the South deserts him, but a multi-state southern defection would be a slap in the face to him personally, and he yearns for a massive landslide victory that affirms his legitimacy as JFK's successor.

On August 19 — five days before the convention convenes in Atlantic City — Johnson meets with civil rights leaders in the White House. He refuses to even discuss seating the MFDP.

He doesn't inform the Freedom Movement leaders that he has ordered the FBI to illegally bug their rooms and offices, and tap their phones, so that he and his political operatives can spy on the MFDP's strategy discussions and list who their supporters are. When the convention gets under way, NBC helpfully provides FBI agents with press-passes allowing them to pose as reporters who trick unsuspecting MFDP delegates into giving them "off-the-record" information that goes straight to Johnson's hatchet men. Eventually, 27 FBI agents, two stenographers, a radio operator, and an unknown number of informants are assigned to secretly gather political intelligence for use by those who oppose the MFDP challenge.

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (HHH), the champion of the party's liberal wing, is idolized by the progressives who have promised to vote for the MFDP challenge. Johnson has yet to name his Vice-President, and HHH desperately wants the job as a stepping stone for his own presidential

ambitions. LBJ dangles the prize before him, but only if he influences liberal delegates to abandon the MFDP. Congresswoman and Credentials Committee member Edith Green later recalled:

> I am absolutely persuaded that the scenario was as follows: that LBJ said to Hubert Humphrey, "If you can prevent a floor fight over civil rights, you will be the next Vice President of the United States." And Hubert Humphrey said to the then-Attorney General of Minnesota [Walter Mondale], "If you can prevent a minority report from coming out of the credentials committee on civil rights, you will be the next senator from Minnesota. — Edith Green. [18]

On Friday, August 21st, chartered busses carrying the MFDP delegation pull up to the old, run-down, Gem hotel, the only lodgings they can afford. Three and four to a room, they bed down after their long journey. They are short of cash but high in hope.

On Saturday, August 22nd, the MFDP presents its case to the Credentials Committee. But Johnson and Humphrey have already begun to erode their support. The original hope that the committee will outright reject the all-white Mississippi delegates and seat the MFDP in their place quickly fades. But it only takes 10% of the Credentials Committee members (11 votes) to issue a "minority report" supporting the MFDP's challenge. If a minority report is issued, eight state delegations can then demand that it be debated and voted on by the entire convention before the eyes of the world. They know — as does LBJ — that the MFDP might very well win such a floor fight. So obtaining 11 votes for a minority report becomes the crux of the battle.

Pennsylvania party boss David Lawrence is Chair of the Credentials Committee. He tries to hold the MFDP hearing in a room too small for their supporters and any TV cameras, but Joseph Rauh manages to block him. In 1964, the networks still cover the entire convention proceedings which means that the MFDP supporters are able to testify before a national audience. Rauh, Aaron Henry, Rita Schwerner, James Farmer of CORE and even Roy Wilkins of the NAACP speak for seating the MFDP. Dr. King tells the committee: "*If you value your party, if you value your nation, if you value the democratic process, then you must recognize the Freedom Party delegation.*"

With MFDP Chairman Lawrence Guyot in a Mississippi jail cell, Vice-Chair Fannie Lou Hamer testifies for the disenfranchised Blacks of Mississippi, and by extension all those at the bottom of society who have been excluded from political power and full participation in civil society.

> It was Fannie Lou's testimony that everyone had been waiting for. Under the heat of the glaring television lights, with sweat rolling down her face, she began slowly ... Finally Fannie Lou detailed her own experiences — the savage beatings she had endured in pursuit of the vote, the cruel humiliations, the violent violations of her basic rights as a human being and as an American citizen. With tears welling in her eyes — with tears filling the eyes of almost everyone watching — she asked, in the unrehearsed, down-to-earth, plain language of an everyday American, the question we all wanted answered: — John Lewis. [2]

> > If the Freedom party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because

> we want to live as decent human beings, in America? — Fannie Lou Hamer.
>
> *See* Full Text of Mrs. Hamer's Testimony

Watching TV coverage of the hearings in the Oval Office, LBJ realizes how powerful Mrs. Hamer's testimony is. To divert the cameras, he calls a spur-of-the-moment live press conference to announce nothing of any great importance, and the networks cut away from the conclusion of her statement. But that evening the networks replay her words to a prime-time audience, and the next day the Sunday papers feature the story with photographs and quotes. Friends of SNCC and CORE chapters mobilize Movement supporters to flood the White House and convention headquarters with telegrams. Operators are swamped with phone calls.

With the convention set to convene in full session on Monday evening, Johnson's political operatives pressure MFDP supporters on Credentials Committee. He offers a "compromise," MFDP delegates can attend the convention and participate vocally (that is, they can be part of the crowd cheering Johnson), but with no right to vote. The MFDP delegates and their supporters reject this offer.

By Sunday afternoon, Rauh has promises from 17 committee members to vote for a pro-MFDP minority report in defiance of LBJ. But he's a close friend and ally of Humphrey, and he's under heavy pressure from the national Democratic Party leadership to abandon the challenge. Rauh is warned that if he sticks with the MFDP, Hubert won't be nominated as Vice-President.

Rauh offers a compromise which the MFDP is willing to accept — seat both the MFDP and the official Mississippi delegations as has been done in previous conventions where there were rival delegations. The White House refuses.

Movement supporters are puzzled by the president's rejection of a reasonable compromise that has been used to resolve similar disputes throughout party history. Some believe it's because such disputes in the past were between contending factions of power-brokers backing rival slates, but the MFDP delegation was elected by a grass-roots movement in open defiance of the established white power-structure as a whole. In their view, Johnson fears that recognizing rebellious Blacks as official Mississippi representatives might spark a widespread southern walk-out by white Dixiecrat officials who perceive it as threatening their political control if the MFDP idea should spread beyond Mississippi. So rather than risk losing the overwhelming electoral mandate he dreams of, LBJ sacrifices Black civil rights on the alter of his ambition.

Knowing that the MFDP has the votes for a minority report at the Sunday session, committee Chair Lawrence postpones the vote. Instead, he appoints a five-member subcommittee to study and resolve the issue. The subcommittee is chaired by Humphrey protege Walter Mondale who has been promised HHH's Senate seat if Humphrey becomes Vice-President. To stall for time, Mondale adjourns the subcommittee until Monday.

Outside the convention hall on Sunday night, Freedom Movement supporters begin a continuous protest in support of the MFDP challenge.

> On the boardwalk outside the convention hall, staff, local folk, and Northern supporters had set up a round-the-clock vigil. Volunteers on their way home from Mississippi detoured through Atlantic City, some bringing their parents. Occasionally the families of the murdered workers came by to stand with us. There were giant pictures of our three martyrs and the burned out shell of the station wagon from the Bogue Chitto swamp on display. The folks kept singing. Mrs. Hamer and Bernice Reagon came by to lead the singing, and members of the delegation came by to make speeches and thank the people. Visiting politicians came to pledge support. At times the crowd reached three, even four thousand people. — Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) [1]

On Monday afternoon, as the convention delegates begin gathering for the opening session, Mondale's subcommittee tries without success to find a way of satisfying southern segregationists, the White House, and the MFDP.

Hubert Humphrey meets with MFDP leaders, members of the Credentials Committee, Dr. King, and COFO Director Bob Moses. He urges the MFDP to abandon their demand to be seated as the Mississippi delegation in return for a promise that future conventions will prohibit all-white delegations. He tells them that the official Mississippi delegates will be required to pledge support for the party's candidate which most of them will refuse to do — so most of them won't be seated either. The MFDP leaders argue that if the official delegates are not seated because they refuse to support the party, then MFDP delegates should be seated in their place. HHH refuses any proposal that would result in anyone from the MFDP being recognized as a voting delegate representing the state of Mississippi. He tells them that his nomination for Vice-President depends on his ability to prevent a floor-fight over who should represent Mississippi. He begs them to give up their demand for recognition as voting delegates, he pleads with them to accept an invitation to be non-voting "guests" of the convention.

The MFDP leaders are not swayed, their delegation was elected in strict accordance to party rules while the official delegates were hand-picked in an illegal, undemocratic process that systematically excluded all Black voters. Mrs. Hamer tells him: "*Mr. Humphrey, I've been praying about you and I've been thinking about you, and you're a good man. But are you saying you think that your job as Vice-President is more important than the rights of our Black people in Mississippi? Senator Humphrey, the trouble is, you scared to do what you know is right. Senator, I'm going to pray for you some more.*"

On Tuesday, August 25, with the support of the MFDP, Congresswoman Edith Green [D-OR] makes a motion in the Credentials Committee to seat all members of both the official and MFDP delegations who are willing to sign a pledge of support for Johnson as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. She knows she doesn't have enough votes to pass her motion, but 15 committee members are still holding to their promises, and only 11 votes are needed to take it to the full convention floor as a minority report. The committee chair stalls the vote until the next day, giving the Johnson forces time to apply the screws.

Overnight, the pressure against MFDP supporters intensifies. It is vicious and unrelenting. A Black committee member from California is told that her husband will not be appointed a judge if she supports the MFDP, a small- business owner is informed that a crucial loan will be canceled

by his bank, the Secretary of the Army warns a delegate from the Canal Zone that he will be fired from his government job if he votes for Green's motion. UAW president Walter Reuther calls Rauh and orders him to convince the MFDP to accept Johnson's "guest" offer. If he doesn't, Reuther threatens to fire him as UAW counsel. Under this onslaught of brutal back-room politics, support for Green's motion withers. By Wednesday morning, only five still stand with the MFDP, and six votes are not enough to bring a minority report to the convention floor.

MFDP leaders, Dr. King, Bayard Rustin, and others are called to another meeting in Humphrey's hotel suite. They are told to accept a revised "compromise." The all-white slate will be recognized as the official Mississippi delegation, but they must pledge support for Johnson as the party's nominee or they won't be seated. Two MFDP delegates — Aaron Henry who is the NAACP head in Mississippi, and Ed King who is the white chaplain of Tougaloo — will be made "at-large" delegates, though whether they have a vote is unclear. Everyone else from the MFDP can attend the convention as non-voting guests. New party rules will be adopted to bar state delegations that discriminate against Blacks from participating in future conventions. (But there are no guarantees in the proposed new rules that Blacks will be able to register to vote, so Dixiecrat party leaders in the southern states can easily produce a few token Blacks to show compliance with the new rules without actually allowing any significant Black participation in the political process.)

Walter Reuther, who has been flown in from Detroit on a private aircraft, warns Dr. King point-blank, "*Your funding is on the line. The kind of money you got from us in Birmingham is there again for Mississippi, but you've got to help us and we've got to help Johnson.*"

Rev. Ed King says that if there can only be two at-large delegates he will withdraw in favor of one of the Black sharecroppers. But Humphrey rules out making Mrs. Hamer — who is the ranking MFDP officer in Atlantic City — a delegate, "*The President will not allow that illiterate woman to speak from the floor of the convention.*" Bob Moses challenges the racism of excluding Mrs. Hamer, and of Johnson naming who is to represent the MFDP. He and the others object that no one from the MFDP was either consulted or informed about this so-called "compromise." They tell Humphrey that the full MFDP delegation has to discuss and vote on any proposed agreement.

Suddenly someone bursts into the room shouting, "*It's over!*" Walter Mondale is on TV announcing to the world that the MFDP has accepted the compromise — even though no one from the MFDP has done any such thing. Furious, the MFDP leaders walk out and call a meeting of their delegation.

The MFDP and Movement leaders meet at Union Baptist Church. Tempers are hot, anger and frustration seethes through the hall. Rauh, Senator Wayne Morse [D-OR], Aaron Henry, and others urge them to accept the "compromise" as a victory. Bayard Rustin argues that they have to move from moral protest to pragmatic politics. Dr. King walks a fine line of neutrality, condemning Johnson's manipulation but acknowledging the promise of future party rules ending segregation. "*I am not going to counsel you to accept or reject,*" he tells them, "*that is your decision. ... Being a Negro leader, I want you to take this, but if I were a Mississippi Negro, I would vote against it.*"

SNCC field-secretary Willie (Wazir) Peacock recalls:

> Just about everybody that spoke, spoke for them to accept those seats. Bayard Rustin,

> he's the one that said "When you enter the arena of politics, you've entered the arena of compromise." Hartman [Turnbow] turned to him and said, "Uh-huh, but there ain't going to be no compromise." And then Jim Farmer of CORE spoke. Son of thunder. He got that big voice thundering out there. And he spoke, and he spoke beautifully, but it all came back down to the fact that it was sort of like, "We've come this far, and we've gotten through the door. We've got their attention. And maybe that's really a winner. They have offered us something. We should take it." That's what it boiled down to.
>
> And then Martin spoke, and he said everything that the other people said. And then, you know, he's poetic, and then he unsaid it. You didn't have to be listening too hard to know which side he was on, but in case there were people there to leak stuff to the press, he said what the establishment, what Johnson probably wanted him to say. But then he unsaid everything. And essentially, what King said was that, "You all have struggled and you've gotten this far. You apparently know what you're doing, and you know what you want, the reason why you came here. You know what you want, and you know what you deserve, so make your decision based on that."
>
> It sort of reminded me a little bit of what Bob Moses said when Fannie Lou Hamer came to him troubled, asking him what she should do. And essentially that's what Bob said, was that "You don't need anybody to tell you what to do. It's up to you all. This is your thing. You're the Mississippi Freedom Democratic delegation. You are Mississippians." He didn't say it like that, but in other words, "You are the grassroots people who have come to an understanding of what it means to have the vote and what it means to have representative government and how to do that, so you know what you need to do. So you don't need to ask me." — Wazir Peacock. [19]

After the speeches, everyone who is not an elected MFDP delegates leaves the building so that the delegation can debate and decide on their own. It doesn't take long. They vote to reject the so-called "compromise." Mrs. Hamer explained the decision with simple clarity: "*We didn't come all this way for no two seats, 'cause all of us is tired."*

> It's important to say here that we — the SNCC contingent there in Atlantic City — did not push our point of view on the MFDP delegates, and I think this is one place where we shined. We had a hands-off policy in terms of decision-making. We respected the fact that this was the Mississippi delegates' call, not ours. We stated what we thought were the pros and cons, then we stepped back and let people like Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Unita Blackwell, E. W. Steptoe, James Travis, Annie Devine and so many others speak for themselves, think for themselves and ultimately decide for themselves.
>
> Once everyone on the outside had had their say, the MFDP delegates themselves hashed out their decision. Aaron Henry and Ed King both wanted to accept the compromise, but they were just about alone. When the vote was taken, and it didn't take long, all 68 MFDP delegates unanimously rejected the President's offer. [NAACP leader] Wilkins, true to form, called them ignorant. Personally, I felt proud. If there's one thing I've believed in my entire life, it's taking a stand when it's time to take a stand. This was definitely one of those times. — John Lewis. [2]

As expected, almost all the white "official" Mississippi delegates refuse to support Johnson as the Democratic candidate. They depart the convention in an angry huff — leaving their convention seats empty. Pro-MFDP delegates use their convention passes to smuggle in MFDP members.

> That Tuesday night I watched from the convention hall gallery as the MFDP staged a sit-in on the convention floor. The white Mississippi regulars had already packed up and gone home rather than agree to a loyalty oath to Johnson. The MFDP's answer to Johnson's plan was to take the floor and fill those empty seats. It was a gesture of defiance, cut short by the security guards who arrived to remove them from the hall.
>
> The next night, Wednesday, the delegation again took the floor, only now there were no seats in the Mississippi section. The chairs had been removed. And so they stood there in that vacant space, this tiny group of men and women, forlorn and abandoned, watching silently as Lyndon Johnson was nominated for president by acclamation and Hubert Humphrey was announced as the Democratic Party's vice presidential candidate.
>
> The next morning, we all packed up and went home.
>
> As far as I'm concerned, this was the turning point of the civil rights movement. I'm absolutely convinced of that. Until then, despite every setback and disappointment and obstacle we had faced over the years, the belief still prevailed that the system would work, the system would listen, the system would respond. Now, for the first time, we had made our way to the very center of the system. We had played by the rules, done everything we were supposed to do, had played the game exactly as required, had arrived at the doorstep and found the door slammed in our face. — John Lewis. [2]

The Significance of the MFDP Challenge

In *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project*, Bob Moses and Charles Cobb later analyzed the meaning of the MFDP challenge and the Democratic Party's rejection:

> Today's commentary and analysis of the movement often miss the crucial point that, in addition to challenging the white power-structure, the movement also demanded that Black people challenge themselves. Small meetings and workshops became the spaces within the Black community where people could stand up and speak, or in groups outline their concerns. In them, folks were feeling themselves out, learning how to use words to articulate what they wanted and needed. In these meetings, they were taking the first step toward gaining control over their lives, and the decision making that affected their lives, by making demands on themselves. This important dimension of the movement has been almost completely lost in the imagery of hand-clapping, song-filled rallies for protest demonstrations that have come to define portrayals of 1960s civil rights meetings: dynamic individual leaders using their powerful voices to inspire listening crowds.

Our meetings were conducted so that sharecroppers, farmers, and ordinary working people could participate, so that Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Devine, Hartman Turnbow, all of them were empowered. They weren't just sitting there. It was the message of empowerment for grassroots people these meetings generated that was delivered to the entire country on national television at the 1964 convention by the sharecroppers, domestic workers, and farmers who formed the rank and file of the MFDP. They were asking the national Democratic Party whether it would be willing to empower people in their meetings in a similar way.

The answer was no. In Atlantic City, the credentials committee delayed making a decision about the MFDP and we went into a "negotiation" session in Hubert Humphrey's suite at the Pageant Motel. Walter Reuther and Bayard Rustin were there as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. Ed King, Aaron Henry, and Fannie Lou Hamer were there representing the MFDP. At the meeting we were told that the Democrats were willing to give the MFDP two symbolic seats at the convention and that Ed and Aaron had been chosen to fill those seats. No one from the MFDP had been consulted, not even Aaron and Ed. We rejected it right there in front of Humphrey and Reuther. We told them there was no way we ... could accept that decision without the delegation discussing it and deciding whether it was something that it could accept.

Bob Moses continues...

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door, leaned in, and shouted, "It's over!" and when we looked at the television, there was Walter Mondale announcing that the MFDP had accepted the "compromise." He hadn't approached anyone from the MFDP either. I stomped out of the room, slamming the door in Hubert Humphrey's face. Although Senator Humphrey was probably caught by surprise too, I was furious. I had doubted that our delegation would be seated, and even the pretense at negotiation was not wholly unexpected; but here the Democrats were saying we'll pick your leadership too.

In the years since that convention the MFDP has been attacked for being unwilling to accept the offer of two seats. They've been accused of ignorance, and if you think knowledge is book knowledge, they were. They hadn't been through the schools; they hadn't been processed in the ways in which most of the delegates to the convention were processed. Their knowledge was about life, not books, especially about life in Mississippi. And they understood the relationship of the politics they were trying to challenge to the life they wanted to lead. They were as cognizant of that as anyone needed to be. They were relying on this knowledge, plus the ability to speak directly to the truth, to qualify them for admission as the proper delegation.

The issue of seating them was also a moral one that challenged the political expediencies of the national Democratic Party. We were trying in part to bring morality into politics, not politics into our morality. The MFDP was raising an important question with this country, and with the Democratic Party, as one of its major political institutions: Generations of Black people had been denied access to the

political process; could they get it now?

> The sharecroppers and others who made up the constituency of the MFDP were the voice of the real "underclass" of this country and to this day I don't think the Democratic Party, which has primarily organized around the middle class, has confronted the issue of bringing poor people actively into its ranks. We were challenging them not only on racial grounds, obvious racial grounds. We were challenging them to recognize the existence of a whole group of people — white and Black and disenfranchised — who form the underclass of this country. Senator Humphrey was blunt about the party's unwillingness to face up to this when we "negotiated" at the Pageant Motel. Under no circumstances was Mrs. Hamer going to be part of any officially recognized Mississippi delegation. "*The President will not allow that illiterate woman to speak from the floor of the convention*," he said. No, they weren't prepared to hear her; it's not clear that they are now. — Bob Moses. [6]

The Political Fallout

In November, the Johnson-Humphrey ticket defeats Goldwater by an overwhelming majority:
- They win the popular vote 61% to 39%
- They win 44 of the 50 states
- They win 486 electoral votes to 52.

But for the first time since Reconstruction, the five Deep South states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina go Republican (Arizona is the only other state that Goldwater wins). Across the South, there is a "white backlash" against Black civil rights as white voters begin switching from Democrat to Republican, a trend that swells in subsequent elections until the southern states that were once the "solid south" for the Democrats become the foundation of the Republican Party's "southern strategy."

As expected, in Mississippi the white leaders of the Democratic Party support the Republican Barry Goldwater. The MFDP, though bitter and angry over their treatment by party leaders and the failure of liberal Democrats to honor their promises, loyally campaigns for Johnson and Humphrey. But with only a tiny fraction of African-Americans allowed to vote, they are unable to affect the outcome. Though 41% of the state's population is Black, none are elected to any office.

SNCC and CORE organizers are deeply embittered at the betrayal of liberals who had promised their support. Some feel betrayed by national leaders of the NAACP, CORE, and SCLC who pushed the MFDP to accept the so-called compromise. Many activists begin to reject as futile strategies of appealing to the federal government or the "conscience of the nation." Responding to liberals who condemn the MFDP for "irresponsibility" in not accepting the so-called "compromise," SNCC field-secretary and Southwest Georgia leader Charles Sherrod retorts that:

> [Accepting it] would have said to Blacks across the nation and the world that we share the power, and that is a lie! The 'liberals' would have felt great relief for a job well done. The Democrats would have laughed again at the segregationist Republicans and smiled that their own 'Negroes' were satisfied. That is a lie! We are a country of racists

> with a racist heritage, a racist economy, a racist language, a racist religion, a racist philosophy of living, and we need a naked confrontation with ourselves. — Charles Sherrod. [20]

Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) recalled:

> The Democratic Party leadership had a chance to reach out to embrace the future, and instead they reached back to try to preserve a shameful past. This backward-looking racist response was among the flat-out dumbest political miscalculations the Democratic Party leadership ever made, and that's saying a lot... — Kawme Ture. [1]

And John Lewis later wrote:

> The ramifications of not seating the MFDP were immeasurable. They permeated the political climate for years to come. The same questions that were asked by all of us that August are still echoing today.
> Can you trust the government?
> Can you trust your political leaders?
> Can you trust the President?
> Through Johnson, through Nixon and on through to today.
> Are we getting the truth?
> Are they lying to us?
> That was the turning point for the country, for the civil rights movement and certainly for SNCC.
>
> Those who chose to stay [in the Movement] were ready now to play by a different set of rules, their own rules. "Fuck it." You heard that phrase over and over among SNCC members that month. "We played by the rules, and look what it got us. So fuck the rules. — John Lewis. [2]

The summer volunteers are also profoundly influenced and radicalized by their experience in Mississippi and the liberal establishment's betrayal in Atlantic City. Most of them return to home or campus with an intense commitment to social justice and a deep distrust of authority. In Berkeley, Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio tells protesting students: "*Last summer I went to Mississippi to join the struggle there for civil rights. This fall I am engaged in another phase of the same struggle, this time in Berkeley ... In Mississippi an autocratic and powerful minority rules, through organized violence, to suppress the vast, virtually powerless majority. In California, the privileged minority manipulates the university bureaucracy to suppress the students' political expression.*" Like flaming embers scattered by a high wind, Freedom Summer volunteers from coast to coast spark protests and campaigns around racism, sexism, student rights, and the Vietnam War.

Many — but not all — Democratic Party liberals come away from the convention furious at the MFDP for rejecting the "compromise." In their eyes, the MFDP is "intransigent" and "irresponsible" for insisting that they be recognized as the legitimate Mississippi delegation. They condemn the MFDP for, "*going too fast and going too far,*" and they blame it for causing the defection of southern Democratic leaders and white voters in general. They accuse the MFDP of "sabotaging" Johnson and aiding Goldwater.

To some degree, their anger is also influenced by the Harlem Rebellion which had erupted in July four weeks before the convention. A barrage of media stories about Black violence and Black rage against *all* whites creates deep unease among many white-liberal delegates (particularly New Yorkers). Some come to believe that the Civil Rights Movement they have supported is being "taken over" by "Black radicals" bent on violence and anti-white retribution. In the years that follow — particularly after the cry for Black Power — some white liberals become increasingly antagonistic to an increasingly impatient and increasingly militant Freedom Movement.

Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) later noted:

> If we had gone into the convention as the little pets, the clients of the liberals, we came out as outcasts, sho-nuff political pariahs. Someone, I think Ivanhoe [Donaldson], said "*We're the new Communists.*" You know how whenever black folk got fed up and took to the streets, you always heard talk about "Communist" agitation? As though black people lack sense enough to know they're oppressed until and unless some Communist runs up to tell them? That, according to totalitarian liberal opinion, was our role with the Freedom Democrats at the convention. — Kwame Ture. [1]

At root, the issue between Johnson and the MFDP is one of political power. SNCC field-secretary Hardy Frye later observed:

> I think the question has to be asked somewhere: "What was at stake?" In Atlantic City and also in Washington in January [during the MFDP Congressional Challenge]. I guess what I think is that in some ways, it was, "Who is going to control the pace of change in the South?" The Kennedys were willing to work with certain Black people, the moderates and so on, so they weren't hostile. Johnson was prepared to do that also, and he was the one who, in '65, got up and said, "We shall overcome." So the question was not anti-civil rights, it was the question of who was going to control the agenda.
>
> And that was clearly what was at stake in Atlantic City, because there were people, those 68 MFDP delegates, the mass movement, folks who had lobbied all over the country that had gotten mainstream Democrats to support these poor Negroes. And from the standpoint of the keepers of the party, the establishment, they weren't in control, and that is the most threatening thing — beyond what the issue is — to any mainstream politician. So in some ways that was what they were trying to close down in Atlantic City.
>
> After they had closed it down and Johnson had gotten re-elected, it didn't mean that he was going to be anti-civil rights. I mean, he sponsored the Voting Rights Act and so on. And then later the War on Poverty. So in some ways he's still seen as, in terms of actual [civil rights] content, the major American President of the 20th century who has done stuff that supposedly helps poor people and Black people. But it was the question of who is going to control it? Was it going to be the Fannie Lou Hamers [and] those grassroots folks in the Delta who were symbolizing something different? — Hardy Frye. [19]

MFDP Challenge — Some Important Points:

Looking back today with the perspective of 50 years, several key points are clear:

The "Compromise" Lies

In the aftermath of Atlantic City, the MFDP was falsely accused of rejecting a reasonable compromise — a charge some still echo to this day. The truth is that Congresswoman Edith Green did propose a real compromise motion and the MFDP accepted it. For more than a century, when rival delegations claimed to represent a state's electorate, the traditional compromise was to seat both groups and split the vote between them. The MFDP agreed to that and asked their supporters on the Credentials Committee to vote for her motion. It was President Johnson who rejected the compromise, not the MFDP.

The so-called "compromise" offered by LBJ was not a compromise at all. It largely met the demands of the all-white, segregationist delegations from the southern states, but offered little of significance to the Freedom Movement. Humphrey touted the new party rules against future all-white delegations as a "great victory" for the Movement, but because those rules said nothing about voter registration they were no more than a cosmetic fig leaf. Party officials from states like Mississippi and Alabama could meet the new requirements by simply including in their delegations hand-picked, token Blacks with no electoral base or constituency of their own, while continuing massive systematic denial of voting rights to exclude the Black community as a whole from any fair share of actual political power. (It was this omission of voting rights from both the new party rules and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that necessitated the bloody Voting Rights campaign which re-erupted in Selma and the Black-Belt of Alabama just four months after the Atlantic City convention.)

And Johnson's offer of two "at-large" seats for Aaron Henry and Ed King left the all-white delegation as the only Mississippi representatives (even though they boasted of their support for Goldwater, the Republican candidate). By denying the MFDP any standing as Mississippi delegates, LBJ's so-called "compromise" simultaneously legitimized the violence, economic-retaliation, and illegal procedures used to deny Black voting rights and Black participation in the electoral process, while de-legitimizing the democratic, grassroots process that the MFDP had used to select a broad-based delegation from all walks of life.

LBJ's offer was a lie, not a "compromise." The MFDP accepted the real compromise, but rejected the lie.

Issues of Class

Behind the issues of race lay issues of class. National Democratic leaders were willing to include Blacks and other racial groups in party political processes, but they were then, and still are today, largely unwilling to allow any widespread participation by those at the bottom of the economic pyramid — whether they be maids and sharecroppers from Mississippi or manual laborers and welfare mothers from the North. Hubert Humphrey made that explicit when he told Bob Moses, "*The President will not allow that illiterate woman* [Mrs. Hamer] *to speak from the floor of the*

convention." And in addition to the racist and sexist arrogance of Johnson and Humphrey presuming to name who should be the two MFDP representatives awarded the "at-large" seats, their choice of Aaron Henry (a businessman and pharmacist) and Ed King (a minister) makes clear their class and gender bias.

The MFDP believed that their democratic, grassroots delegate election process held in strict accordance with party rules was an argument in their favor, but to party leaders and power-brokers it was a threat to (and inherent indictment of) the procedures actually used across the nation — not just in Mississippi — to ensure that delegates come from the ranks of wealth, power, and the middle class rather than the bottom of society. To this day, few delegates to Democratic Party conventions, or voting members of other high-level party bodies, hold blue-collar, service sector, or agriculture labor jobs, nor is there any significant number of welfare mothers or the chronically unemployed or under- employed.

Today, party officials firmly deny class bias, citing both party rules requiring an open and democratic selection process and the extensive participation by union leaders as evidence that members from all walks of life are welcome at all levels of the party hierarchy. But without the kind of grassroots organizing and outreach done by the MFDP, the rules requiring a democratic process are form without content. And while it's true that unions are well represented in the party apparatus, the individuals involved are either from unionized middle-class occupations, or are salaried union officers whose personal positions make them members of the middle-class regardless of who their rank-and-file union members are.

Successful Movements Respond With Program Rather Than Rhetoric

When the MFDP's quest to be recognized as the legitimate Mississippi delegation was rejected by the Democratic establishment in Atlantic City, the Freedom Movement responded with strategic program rather than just angry rhetoric (although there was no shortage of that too). SNCC, CORE, and the MFDP began organizing the MFDP Congressional Challenge — an effort to unseat Mississippi's Representatives on the grounds that their election was illegal because Blacks were systematically prevented from voting or participating in the political process. And as soon as the election was over in November, SCLC began implementing the "Alabama Project" which evolved into the Selma Voting Rights Campaign & March to Montgomery. A campaign that provided the tipping point which resulted in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A law that finally, and eventually effectively, addressed race-based denial of voting rights in the South (and elsewhere).

The Human Cost of Freedom Summer

The human cost of Freedom Summer is high:

- **Deadly Violence.** At least six people are murdered by racist violence including Chaney, Schwerner & Goodman. Henry Hezekiah Dee, Charles Eddie Moore, and Herbert Oarsby are all also killed by the Klan. Volunteer Wayne Yancey is dead and Charlie Scales badly injured in a mysterious auto crash. The unidentified bodies of five Black men are pulled from Mississippi rivers, the motive and cause of their deaths unknown. There are at least 35 shootings, and four people are critically wounded.

- **Beatings.** At least 80 people active in Freedom Summer are beaten by white mobs or police.
- **Arrests.** More than 1,000 local Blacks, COFO staff, and summer volunteers are arrested on various trumped-up charges for trying to exercise their Constitutionally protected rights of free speech and assembly — their real crime is trying to change the *status quo* and defying the *southern way of life*.
- **Bombings and Arson**. At least 37 Black churches are bombed or burned. So too, are more than 30 Black homes and businesses.
- **Economic Terrorism.** The number of Mississippi Blacks who are fired from their jobs or evicted from their homes for attempting to register to vote or otherwise supporting the Freedom Movement will never be known. The number of Black-owned businesses that are boycotted by the White Citizens Council or endure other forms of economic retaliation are also unknown.
- **The emotional toll**. Writing late in the summer, volunteer Sally Belfrage acknowledges that, "*There are incipient nervous breakdowns walking all over Greenwood,*" and one volunteer later recalled "*...crying myself to bed at night. ... I was just seeing too much, feeling too much. Things weren't supposed to be like this. I was just a mess. I just remember feeling sad, guilty and angry all at the same time.*"

> [By the end of the summer] the staff, as Mrs. Hamer would say, 'was all wore out.' All of us were physically exhausted from the sheer burden of all the organizing work. Many more of us than we knew then were totally burned out. Emotionally scarred, spiritually drained from the constant tension, the moments of anger, grief, or fear in a pervading atmosphere of hostility and impending violence. — Kwame Ture [1]

Freedom Summer: The Results

Commenting later, Kwame Ture, (Stokely Carmichael) concluded:

> In many ways, the Mississippi Summer Project was a turning point for a whole generation of us. It was certainly the boldest, most dramatic, and traumatic single event of the entire movement. It certainly had the most far-reaching effect: for national party politics, for that activist college generation, for the state of Mississippi and the movement there, and especially for SNCC as an organization. After the summer, none of those would be the same. — Kwame Ture. [1]

Voter Registration. During the 10 weeks of the Summer Project, more than 17,000 Afro-Americans defiantly line up at their county courthouse to register. By doing so, they conclusively demonstrate that Black Mississippians do want to vote, and that assertions by the white power-structure claiming that low Afro registration numbers stem from Black apathy and laziness are simply hogwash. But only 1600 are actually added to the voter rolls (just 9% of those who apply), and most of them are in counties where whites comfortably outnumber Blacks. In counties with

large Afro populations, white resistance is even fiercer and almost no Blacks are registered. While 1600 is three or four times the number who have been registered over the preceding years of Movement struggle, it is still just a drop in the bucket. So if measured as a simple voter registration drive — as some media pundits do — the Summer Project fails. But Freedom Summer is not a traditional registration drive, it's a social revolution as discussed below. And the paltry rate of successful registrations makes clear to the nation that the fundamental issue is race-based denial of voting rights. An understanding that shapes and propels the fight for a voting rights bill that erupts in Selma Alabama just four months after the Summer Project ends.

Forcing the Federal Government to Act. No federal marshals are assigned to defend Black voting rights or enforce previous federal court rulings. Except in the case of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, the FBI fails to arrest, pursue, or even noticeably hinder those who commit violence against civil rights workers or Blacks trying to become registered voters. Nor do they make any significant effort to rein in or punish rampant police repression, or the economic terrorism of the White Citizens Council. The DOJ does continue to file lawsuits to wend their weary way through the courts, but the southern white power-structure is adept at circumventing rulings they do not wish to obey. In the short-run then, the Summer Project is unable to prod the federal government into effective action.

Focusing National Media Attention on the Denial of Black Voting Rights. As expected, the large number of white volunteers prompts a flood of media attention. But much of that attention is narrowly focused on the white students, and them alone. Persecution and retaliation against local Blacks who try to register is under-reported, as are attacks against Black civil rights workers and the local Afro-American activists they are working with. Still, its impossible to write stories about courageous volunteers without mentioning the underlying issues they are confronting, so Freedom Summer does succeed in generating reports in national (white) news media about the denial and suppression of Black voting and human rights. Summer volunteers are encouraged to write letters home for publication in local newspapers and church bulletins and these too have a positive effect.

Freedom Summer also results in increased coverage in the national Black press. Magazines such as *Jet* and *Ebony* expand the coverage they have already been giving to the freedom struggle in the South. As do the *Chicago Defender*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, and *Pittsburgh Courier* which have long had significant circulation beyond their home base through postal subscriptions and bundles delivered to railroad towns by Pullman porters.

Challenging the Democratic Party. The MFDP calls on the Democratic Party to honor its public promises of fair play and equal treatment and to enforce its own rules requiring democratic procedures. The MFDP's cry for justice is swept aside, and its appeal to law, conscience, and human decency is obliterated by the realities of power politics. If any of the MFDP delegates were granted any form of official recognition as legitimate representatives of their state, it would send a powerful message across the South. Rather than do that, Johnson, Humphrey, Mondale, and the other leaders of the party's liberal wing offer two at-large seats which confer no such recognition. They sacrifice Black civil rights for their own short-term political advantage — as white politicians of both parties have historically done.

MFDP delegates are bitterly disappointed. A few surrender to discouragement, but most are

determined to soldier on. Among SNCC and CORE organizers there is righteous anger. And for many of the young volunteers, the betrayal by liberal leaders strips away cherished illusions about America and its political parties and leaders. For American youth, the "Sixties" began as an era of exuberant hope in 1960 with the student sit-ins and the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy. But to the extent that the Sixties are later defined as an era of alienation from, distrust of, and rage against established institutions on the part of activist youth, for many young men and women that aspect begins on August 26, 1964, in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

National Political Effect. Though the mass media focuses mostly on the white volunteers, their stories do begin to raise national awareness of voting rights as an important issue. Just as the Freedom Rides, Birmingham Campaign, and St. Augustine Movement forced segregation onto the national agenda, media stories and personal letters from Freedom Summer volunteers begin doing the same for the denial of basic human rights in the South. Increasing numbers of northern voters — white as well as Black — call voting rights to the attention of Congress and the White House. As Freedom Summer ends, President Johnson is still telling Black leaders that new civil rights legislation is neither needed nor politically possible, but pressure is building. Pressure that in just four months will explode in Selma, Alabama.

MFDP. During the summer, 80,000 Mississippi Blacks (and a handful of whites) join the MFDP. Though that does not represent a great increase over the number who participated in the Freedom Ballot the previous fall, now there is a formal political party, with a solid membership base, a statewide structure, and an extensive network of activists. As a practical matter, MFDP largely supplants COFO as the primary vehicle for Black grassroots political action in Mississippi.

In Mississippi at this time, as with some other southern states, you cannot specify which party you belong to when you register to vote. It is left up to party officials in each county to determine who party members are, who can vote in their party primaries, participate in party meetings, and be party candidates for office. For the most part, the Democratic Party is run and controlled by a handful of political power brokers in each county. Blacks are almost entirely excluded, and except for voting at election time, the number of whites actually involved in party activities is quite small.

So by comparison, the 80,000 who affirmatively join the Freedom Democrats, and the large number who actively participate in MFDP meetings and other activities, represent a potentially formidable grassroots base. A base that could challenge not only the Mississippi power brokers, but those in other southern states if the MFDP idea spreads. Moreover, SNCC's organizing work elsewhere in the South is moving toward strategies that increasingly challenge and confront the Johnson administration. Such threats to the established order are not welcomed by LBJ or national Democratic Party leaders (to say nothing of the Mississippi power-structure). Organizations and individuals who are closely allied to Johnson and the Democrats reflect that hostility. The result is that many of those who have been supporting civil rights struggles in the South — the national NAACP, northern white liberals and Black office-holders, and some labor unions — become increasingly alienated from both SNCC and the MFDP.

As is the case with every political party, there are conflicts within the MFDP. Some urge a rapprochement with Johnson and the national Democratic Party leadership, others want nothing

more to do with LBJ or his liberal allies. Since the MFDP continues to consider itself the true Democratic Party of the state, it campaigns for LBJ in the general election while seeking to expand its mass grassroots base. But internal tensions over the future of the MFDP and its relationship with the national Democratic Party persist.

COFO. By the end of Freedom Summer, COFO as an organization has outlived its usefulness. There's no longer any VEP grant money to divide up, so that function is gone. And the MFDP has become the primary organizational structure for grassroots political activity and community organizing. This positive change shifts strategic leadership from an uneasy coalition of national organizations and non-profit agencies to a mass membership political party with a firm base in Mississippi's Black communities. After LBJ's election victory in the Fall, participation in COFO by Aaron Henry and other state-level NAACP leaders dwindles away as the gulf widens between increasingly radical young activists and the old guard leadership. While CORE is still active in the 4th Congressional District, most of its southern resources continue to be concentrated in Louisiana. SCLC is focusing more and more on Alabama, and SNCC's primary work in Mississippi is the MFDP. So COFO's importance as a coalition of national organizations in Mississippi diminishes.

SNCC & CORE Staff. Many SNCC and CORE field staff come out of Freedom Summer deeply embittered and fiercely radicalized. Among a number of contributing factors are: the persistent brutal violence; the injustice and hostility of local police and the FBI's continued complicity in official repression; the refusal of Washington to offend white segregationists by defending the civil rights of Afro-Americans; the stark contrast between the media's concern for the safety of white college kids and their indifference to violence and economic retaliation against Blacks; and above all the liberal establishment's betrayal of the MFDP at the Democratic Convention. After Atlantic City, integration as a goal and appealing to the conscience of the nation as a strategy of change are all called into question by an increasing number of the veteran organizers. SNCC Chair John Lewis later identified Atlantic City (and by extension, Freedom Summer) as "*the turning point*."

Back in the Spring, Freedom Summer planners simply assumed that northern volunteers would all return home at the end of summer. And the great majority of them — probably more than 90% — do leave Mississippi as expected. But some choose to stay in Mississippi, canceling their college plans or leaving their northern jobs to continue working with the local people they have come admire, either as new SNCC or CORE staff members, or as volunteers, or on their own independently. Others become activists in the broader struggle, moving from place to place as circumstances require. For the most part, those who stay are welcomed by local Black communities who value their dedication, their service, and their access to skills, resources, and outside political support that are greatly needed.

SNCC as an organization, however, is ill-prepared to absorb a large influx of activists — mostly northern, mostly white — into what had previously been an overwhelmingly Black and southern field staff. North-South, class-related, and cultural tensions between Blacks and whites escalate, causing internal friction and conflict. As do class and cultural conflicts between Black staff members from different backgrounds and political orientations.

Volunteers. The out-of-state volunteers, both Black and white, are profoundly affected by

Freedom Summer. Over and over, they report the same reactions:

> *It was the most intense moment of my life.*
> *[It was] the most creative and powerful time of my life.*
> *In many ways it set me on a path that continues to this day.*
> *[It] was a significantly defining experience in my life.*
> *[It] changed the course of my life. I became committed to working for a different and better world, one with racial equality, economic justice, and peace.* — [28]

The personal and political metamorphosis experienced by most volunteers is enormous (as is — in some cases — the effect on their parents). Most obvious are changes in awareness of poverty, systemic racism, widespread injustice, media bias, and government complicity in oppression and exploitation — not just by the state of Mississippi, but by the federal government as well. For many volunteers, both Black and white, Freedom Summer is the beginning of a lifetime commitment to social activism in a variety of forms. "*I became political in Mississippi. I began to see the world in strictly political terms*," later explained one volunteer.

For many, what they have experienced has affected them so deeply, the human cause has become so compelling, and their own work has been so meaningful, that they remain active in social justice causes and movements for the rest of their lives. The volunteers who leave Mississippi join protest movements, run for office, become community organizers, and engage in humanitarian work; many dedicate themselves to ongoing struggles against racism, colonialism, and the Vietnam War, for women's liberation, student rights on campus, the environment, economic justice, and a host of other causes great and small.

The Black Community & the White Volunteers. Movement supporters in the Afro-American community welcome the white volunteers and take them into their homes and hearts despite initial concerns by project organizers of culture-clash and unconscious racism. As feared, in some instances paternalism does characterize the behavior of some white northern volunteers, but those cases are the exception not the rule. And when it occurs, it is often fiercely challenged by COFO staff or other volunteers. Most of the white activists sincerely struggle to overcome the habits and assumptions of lives formed in white America. The Black community recognizes their effort and more often than not is forgiving when they sometimes fail. To all of the volunteers regardless of race — and also their own young freedom fighters of whom they are immensely proud — community members extend a surprising degree of patient tolerance when the rebellious certainties and eager impetuosities of youth run roughshod over traditional standards and norms of dress, belief, and comportment.

Looking back, Fannie Lou Hamer later tells an interviewer:

> It was these kids what broke a lot of this [racism and class distinctions] down. They treated us like we were special and we loved 'em. ... We didn't feel uneasy about our language might not be right or something. We just felt like we could talk to 'em. We trusted 'em, and I can tell the world [that] those kids done their share in Mississippi. — Fannie Lou Hamer. [22]

In some cases, familial relationships are formed between outside volunteers and the hosts with

whom they live and who guard them at night. Relationships that for a few still persist today, 50 years on. Some summer veterans remain in touch with the families they stayed with and others with whom they worked the Freedom Movement. Some still visit Mississippi to spend time with them, and to participate in reunions, weddings, and funerals.

The Black Community. Though few voters are added to the rolls, the reign of terror, fear and isolation that have held generations in thrall is beginning to weaken. The signs are unmistakable. To take just one example, as an act of intimidation, local newspapers routinely publish the names of Blacks who try to register to vote — thereby alerting white employers, landlords, and businesses to fire, evict, boycott, and foreclose on those who defy the *southern way of life*. But as one volunteer deep in the Delta writes, "*In Panola County now the Negro citizens look with pride at their names in the Panolian, they point out the names of friends and neighbors and hurry to the courthouse to be enlisted on the honor roll.*" Where once it was a signal victory to find three courageous souls willing to go down to the courthouse, now Blacks in the dozens and hundreds are putting on their Sunday best to defiantly demand that they be allowed to vote.

In part, this increased willingness to defy white power is a direct result of the Movement's success in breaking down the isolation of Afro-American communities. For generations, white racists were confident they could do whatever they felt necessary to keep Blacks "*in their place.*" Local whites would either avert their eyes from — or outright condone — acts taken against "*uppity Nigrahs.*" A cocoon of complicit silence would smother any spread of unsavory information, and no outside pressure would ever be brought to bear on law-enforcement, political leaders, or economic interests.

Back in 1961, for example, when Representative E.H. Hurst of the Mississippi Legislature murdered voting rights activist Herbert Lee in cold blood in front of numerous witnesses, he had complete confidence in his immunity from any consequences. He could be certain that no state or local official would impose any sanction against him and that few, if any, in the world outside of Amite County would ever hear, or care about, Lee's death. Afro-American communities resisting white-supremacy in the rural South had to fight alone against unified white power-structures, with little, or no, outside resources or allies they could call upon for aid.

For years, local Black activists and organizations like SNCC and the NAACP struggled to break down those barriers of isolation. SNCC in particular publicized cases like Lee's murder, exposed official injustice and complicity, and decried federal indifference. As intended, Freedom Summer brings increased media attention on Mississippi and by extension the entire South. The letters volunteers write home are circulated in the North with powerful effect. What happens in Holmes County no longer stays in Holmes County.

Moreover, by summer's end there is now a greatly increased array of civil rights lawyers who will defend Black freedom fighters in court and bring cases against official malfeasance. There are now medical professionals who can be called on for aid, and people such as Quakers associated with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) who will help rebuild burned churches. And local activists now have new young friends in the North (and their parents) who they can call on for publicity and assistance. They are no longer entirely alone, and that creates a fundamental change in the tactical and strategic realities they face day-to-day in their local fights for equality and justice.

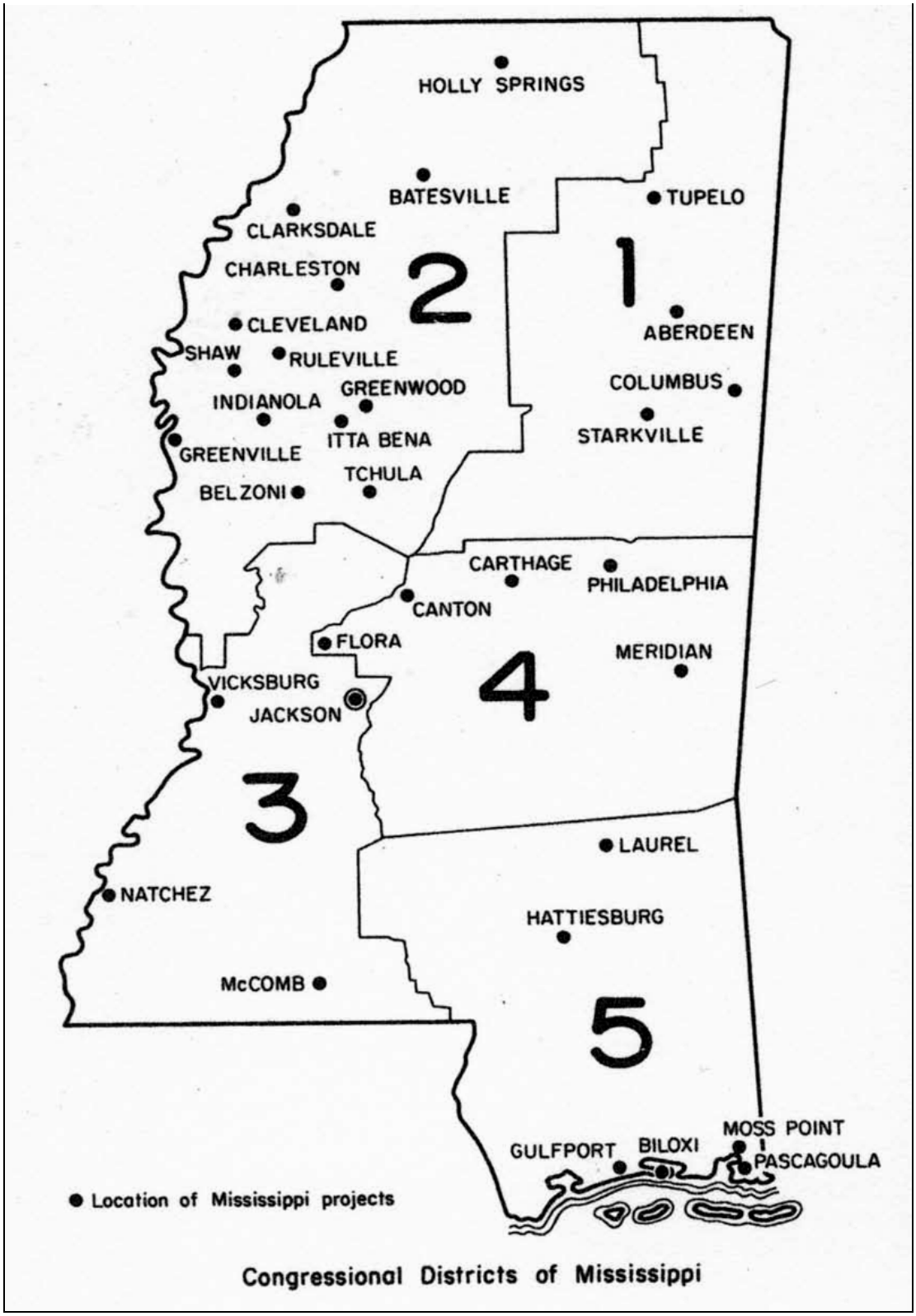
The Social Revolution. Led by local Black activists, resistance to white supremacy has been underway for decades — a social revolution at the grassroots against the *southern way of life*. This struggle to overthrow a system of brutally-enforced racial subservience neither began — nor ended — with Freedom Summer, but the large influx of outside volunteers, clergy, and legal support, significantly push it forward. In the long-run then, the greatest effect of Freedom Summer, and in many ways it's major achievement, is reinforcing and accelerating social change across the state and the South as a whole.

Organizing work in communities and increasing resistance at the local level to white-supremacy does not halt when the volunteers leave at the end of summer. In many counties, new leaders and activists emerge such as Unita Blackwell in Issaquena County and Rita Walker in Holly Springs. And in many areas a variety of post-summer activities are undertaken. The SNCC & CORE staff, and those volunteers who remain in the state, continue supporting the local people who are working on voter registration, building the MFDP, engaging in local political action, running freedom schools and establishing community centers. And going forward, new activities emerge including economic co-ops, school desegregation, ASCS elections, the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) which becomes the state's Headstart program, and a broad range of other efforts.

Ultimately, the complex "Jim Crow" system of white-supremacy, denial of voting rights, legally-enforced segregation, and white terrorism is ended. But the struggle against covert racial discrimination, exploitation and economic injustice continues to this day.

Appendices

Freedom Summer Project Map



(Many of the smaller projects are not shown on the map above.)

Organizational Structure of Freedom Summer

Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)

Structurally, the Mississippi Summer Project is organized and run by COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, a coalition of SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC, with SNCC's Bob Moses as Director and CORE's Dave Dennis as second in command.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

Some 75-80% of the Summer Project staff is provided by SNCC. At this time, SNCC has around 120 field secretaries working in a number of southern states. Roughly 80% of the staff are Black, 20% are white, with a few Latinos and Asians. For the Summer Project, four out of five SNCC staff are deployed to Mississippi leaving only skeleton crews keeping projects alive in Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, and Arkansas.

SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman later wrote of SNCC in this period:

> We were a band of sisters and brothers, a circle of trust. ...
> We were young.
> We had energy.
> We had brains.
> We had technical skills.
> We had a belief in people and their power to change their lives.
> We were willing to work with the most dispossessed — the sharecropper, the day laborer, the factory workers, and the mill hands.
> We were not afraid of death. [25]

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

Most of the Summer Project's remaining staff comes from CORE. For organizational identity and fundraising purposes, CORE takes responsibility for the 4th Congressional District which includes the existing CORE projects in Meridian and Canton, SNCC assumes responsibility for the other four districts, (*see* Freedom Summer Project Map above).

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

With only a small field staff, SCLC is stretched thin, its few organizers concentrated in St. Augustine, Florida and Tuscaloosa, Alabama. But their network of mostly unpaid local Citizenship School teachers — mostly women — has deep roots in the Black community. As local activists, the Citizenship teachers play key roles in many projects around the state. As do SCLC-affiliated churches who arrange housing for northern volunteers and open their doors to mass meetings and Freedom Schools.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

On the national-level, the NAACP is cold to the Summer Project, "*We're sitting this one out*,"

NAACP chief Roy Wilkins tells the press, but most local chapters in Mississippi actively support the effort. NAACP affiliated lawyers agree to provide legal services, and state NAACP Chair Aaron Henry is active with the MFDP.

Legal Support

With a thousand volunteers working across the state, a flood of arrests, free speech, voter registration, and other civil liberties cases is expected, far more than the few Black attorneys in Mississippi can possibly handle. So outside legal support for Freedom Summer is essential, and a number of different organizations participate. Each group has one or more staff lawyers who are licensed to practice in Mississippi, with much of the actual work done by out-of-state attorneys who volunteer to spend from one to several weeks — often their vacation time — supporting the Freedom Movement. The main legal groups are:

- **NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund Inc.**, known as "the Ink Fund" or LDF. Founded by Thurgood Marshall in 1940, it has played a central role in many of the Movement's most significant legal cases. It's office in Jackson is headed by Marian Wright (today Marian Wright Edelman) the first Black woman ever admited to the Mississippi Bar. By the end of the summer, they have worked on more than 120 Freedom Summer cases.
- **National Lawyers Guild** (NLG), known as "The Guild." The most radical and aggressive of the legal support groups. Founded in 1937 as the nation's first racially-integrated bar association, it has a long history of supporting unions, civil rights, and peace movements. NLG attorneys win a number of crucial cases such as *Dombrowski v. Pfister* which halts thousands of racially-motivated state court criminal prosecutions, and they also represent the families of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman. But the participation of the lefist NLG causes consternation and controversy. The national NAACP unsuccessfully attempts to bar the NLG from any Freedom Summer role, and FBI Director Hoover considers their involvement proof of "Communist subversion."
- **Lawyer's Constitutional Defense Committee** (LCDC), known as "the ACLU." Established by the national ACLU in 1964 to support civil rights activities in the South, starting with Freedom Summer. They handle much of the day-to-day legal work.
- **Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law** (LCCR), known as the "President's Committee." Created by the American Bar Association (ABA) at the request of President Kennedy in 1963 who hoped it could mitigate the negative images of racism and brutality that were undermining U.S. foreign policy in the emerging nations of Africa and Asia.
- **Law Students Civil Rights Research Council** (LSCRRC), "the students." Founded in 1963, it is the first inter-racial organization of law students. It provides legal research, case support, conducts interviews, and assists COFO organizers in the field.

As expected, there is no shortage of legal matters arising out of Freedom Summer and the different legal groups divide the work between them. As described by LCDC attorney Don

Jelinek, "*If [the case involved] a Movement leader, minister or other "important" person, the President's Committee would handle it. If it was a constitutional issue, the Ink Fund would do it. If it was a radical issue, the Guild would take it — and the ACLU covered everything else.*"

Clergy

Throughout most of Mississippi, the Black church is a cornerstone of the Freedom Movement. During Freedom Summer, Black churches in Mississippi host Freedom Schools, community centers, project offices, and voter registration mass meetings. They also play a key role in arranging housing for volunteers. In many communities, ministers are among the Movement's most important local leaders. Though a few of these churches and ministers are formally affiliated with SCLC, most are not. But in every community it is only a courageous minority of churches and ministers who dare to openly support the freedom struggle. And those that do support the Movement pay a fearsome price in burned-out buildings and financial retaliation.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) is an ecumenical association of 31 Protestant and Orthodox denominations with some 42 million members. Through its Commission on Religion and Race (CORR), it begins actively supporting the Freedom Movement in 1963 by participating in the March on Washington, lobbying Congress in support of the Civil Rights Act, and providing money to bail demonstrators out of southern jails. Early in 1964, clergy recruited by CORR arrive in Hattiesburg for Freedom Day and some remain to support the Movement in Forrest County and maintain the "perpetual picket" for voting rights at the courthouse.

When Freedom Summer begins, CORR dispatches clergy to support organizing projects across the state. Over the course of the summer, some 300 ministers and seminary students — mostly Protestants, some Catholics and Jews — spend their summer vacation in Mississippi. They describe themselves as "advisors" rather than "activists," but regardless of terminology they are present to support the Freedom Movement. Most come for one to two weeks and some for longer periods. (A few never return home and are still working for justice in Mississippi today.) In addition to offering traditional ministerial support to volunteers and organizers, these "advisors" picket at courthouses, recruit voter applicants and accompany them to register, teach in Freedom Schools, and perform office and other support functions. They endure the same dangers as everyone else, some are beaten, and some are arrested. At the end of Freedom Summer, the NCC establishes the Delta Ministry. By 1967 it is one of Mississippi's largest and most active civil rights organizations.

Mennonites and Quakers of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) form a "Mission to Mississippi," sending teams of volunteers to rebuild the many churches that have been bombed and destroyed. By the following year, they have rebuilt 33 of the 44 destroyed buildings. They also establish the "Madison County Freedom Center," in Canton.

Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR)

More than 100 northern doctors, nurses, med students, psychologists, and other health professionals — most of them white — are recruited, equipped, and deployed by MCHR for Freedom Summer. Though MCHR volunteers are not licensed to practice in Mississippi, they can offer emergency first-aid to civil rights workers, community activists, and summer volunteers. They care for wounded protesters and victims of police and Klan violence, assist the ill, visit jailed demonstrators, and provide a medical presence in Black communities, some of which have never had a visit from a doctor. They establish and teach health information and pre-natal programs in COFO community centers and document the health consequences of poverty and deprivation. Appalled at the separate and unequal care provided to Blacks by Mississippi's segregated system, they soon involve themselves in political struggles to open up and improve Mississippi's health care system for all.

Meeting the Freedom Workers
by Rita Walker, 1964

I always wanted to work for my freedom, but I didn't know how to go about it. I often heard about the freedom riders on TV and read about them in the newspapers. And I would wonder if they would ever come to Holly Springs [Mississippi].

Then the people began to say, they will be here before long — but before long seemed like forty years. I always pictured them coming in a bus with "FREEDOM" written on it. I would meet with some of my friends, and we would go up to the bus station and wait for them so that we could welcome them in. The time would grow old, and no bus told of freedom riders. So we would go home sad and wonder what day we should go back and start looking again.

That went on and on for quite a while, and one day a friend of mine told me, "*I seen them!*" I said, "*Slow down a while and tell me what you are talking about.*" And he said that the freedom riders are here.

I asked if they came on a bus, and he said, "*I don't know and don't care just so long as they are here.*" And I asked, "*Well, how can I tell them when I see them?*" He told me that the girls have shoulder bags and the boys have SNCC pins on their clothes and papers in their hands, asking people to sign some papers.

After that I hardly got anything done for watching the door and window to make sure they wouldn't miss my house. Finally one day I saw two boys coming down the road, and I ran to the road and said, "*Hey fellows, come here for a minute.*"

They moved slowly towards my door, and I said, "*Come in and have a seat.*" And they said, "*No, because we are all wet from the rain.*" And I said, "*If it's all right with you to sit, it's fine with me because water won't hurt the couch.*"

One of the boys said, "*This is my friend Dave Kendall, and my name is Hardy Frye, and we work for COFO, and we have some freedom registration forms, and you could read them if you would like.*"

I said, "*Never mind reading. If you are a freedom rider, just let me sign.*" Dave was white and Hardy was Negro.

Hardy told me it was too good to be true, and I said, "*What do you mean?*" And he answered, "*Usually when we go to people's houses, they say, 'My white peoples told us not to fool with you all, and all that stuff.'*" Those that didn't say that would shut the door in their faces.

Then Hardy asked me if I would go down to the courthouse in two or three days and register, and I said, "*I will stick with you all like a stamp sticks to a letter.*"

[Rita Walker and her husband Sid went on to become SNCC organizers.]

The House of Liberty

by Joyce Brown, 16 year old Freedom School teacher/student McComb, Mississippi, 1964

I come not for fortune, nor for fame,
I seek not to add glory to an unknown name,
I did not come under the shadow of night,
I came by day to fight for what's right,
I shan't let fear, my monstrous foe,
Conquer my soul with threat and woe,
Here I have come and here I will stay,
And no amount of fear my determination can sway.

I asked for your churches, and you turned me down,
But I'll do my work if I have to do it on the ground,
You will not speak for fear of being heard,
So you crawl in your shell and say, "Do not disturb,"
You think because you've turned me away,
You've protected yourself for another day.

But tomorrow surely will come,
And your enemy will still be there with the rising sun,
He'll be there tomorrow as all tomorrows in the past,
And he'll follow you into the future if you let him pass.

You've turned me down to humor him,
Ah! Your fate is sad and grim,
For even though your help I ask,
Even without it, I'll finish my task.

In a bombed house I have to teach school
Because I believe all men should live by the Golden Rule.
To a bombed house your children must come,
Because of your fear of a bomb.

And because you've let your fear conquer your soul,
In this bombed house these minds I must try to mold.
I must try to teach them to stand tall and be a man,
When you their parents have cowered down and refused to take a stand.

[After the McComb Freedom School is bombed, no one was willing to provide a new home for it, so the teachers and students conduct classes on the scorched earth of the burned building. The poem above by 16-year-old Joyce Brown, a Freedom School teacher/student, inspires community adults to rise above their fear, reopen church doors to Movement activity, begin donating money and food to freedom fighters, and participate in voter registration.]

Freedom School Curriculum Units

Rather than being built around facts to be memorized and answered on standardized tests, the original Freedom School plan called for a curriculum based on asking questions. (As it turned out in reality, the actual subjects and curriculum of Freedom Schools varied widely from one project to another depending on local needs and circumstances.)

The basic set of questions are:

- Why are we (teachers and students) in Freedom Schools?
- What is the Freedom Movement?
- What alternatives does the Freedom Movement offer us?

And the secondary set of questions are:

- What does the majority culture have that we want?
- What does the majority culture have that we don't want?
- What do we have that we want to keep?

To help students and teachers develop their answers to these questions, they study seven units:

Unit 1: Comparison of the students' reality with that of others.

Purpose: To create an awareness that there are alternatives.

Unit 2: North to freedom? (the Negro in the North).

Purpose: To help students see the conditions of Negros in the North, and that migration to the North is not a real solution.

Unit 3: Examining the apparent reality (the "better life" that whites have).

Purpose: To find out what the whites' "better life" is really like, and what it costs them.

Unit 4: Introducing the power structure.

Purposes:
To see that some people profit by the pain of others or by misleading them.
To see that some people make decisions that profoundly affects others.
To develop the concept of "political power."

Unit 5: The poor Negro, the poor white, and their fears.

Purposes:
To see that the "power structure" derives its power by playing upon the fears of the people—Negro and white
To come to an understanding of these fears—what has helped them to produce them and what they, in turn, have produced, namely, the myths, the lies, the system
To grasp the deeper effects of the system we have produced and have allowed to continue, the deep psychological damage to Negroes and whites

Unit 6: Material things and soul things.

Purposes:
To develop insights about the inadequacies of pure materialism
To develop some elementary concepts of a new society

Unit 7: The Freedom Movement

Purpose: To grasp the significance of direct action and political action as instruments of social change

Platform of the Mississippi Freedom School Convention August 7-9, 1964. Meridian, Mississippi

[On August 6, 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) holds a state-wide convention in Jackson to elect delegates for the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. Two days later, student delegates from Freedom Schools across Mississippi convene their own state-wide convention in Meridian. The MFDP convention in Jackson focuses mainly on electing party officers and delegates and the stratery for challenging Mississippi's all-white segregationist delegation. The students focus mainly on issues and program. To answer the question, "When we elect people to government office, what do we want them to do?" they adopt the platform below.]

PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

1. We resolve that the Public Accommodations and Public Facilities sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 be enforced.

2. We demand new and better recreation facilities for all.

3. We support the right of the Negro people and their white supporters to test the Civil Rights

Act via demonstrations such as sit-ins. We are not urging a blood-bath through this means; we are simply demanding our Constitutional right to public assembly and seeking to test the federal government's position.

4. Conversion of public accommodations into private clubs should be treated as a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

HOUSING

The home, being the center of a child's life as well as the center of a family's, must have certain facilities in order for it to be a home and not just a building in which one eats, sleeps, and prepares to leave for the rest of the day. Therefore, be it resolved:

1. That there be an equal-opportunity-to-buy-law which permits all persons to purchase a home in any section of town in which he can afford to live.

2. That a rent control law be passed and that one should pay according to the condition of the house.

3. That a building code for home construction be established which includes the following minimum housing requirements:
    a. A complete bathroom unit
    b. A kitchen sink
    c. A central heating system
    d. Insulated walls and ceiling
    e. A laundry room and pantry space
    f. An adequate wiring system providing for at least three electrical outlets in the living room and kitchen, and at least two such outlets in the bedroom and bath
    g. At least a quarter of an acre of land per building lot
    h. A basement and attic.

4. That zoning regulations be enacted and enforced to keep undesirable and unsightly industries and commercial operations away from residential neighborhoods.

5. That slums be cleared, and a low cost federal housing project be established to house these people.

6. That federal aid be given for the improvement of houses, with long term low interest loans.

7. That the federal government provide money for new housing developments in the state. Anyone could buy these houses with a down payment and low monthly rate. There must be absolutely no discrimination. The federal government should take action if this law is not complied with.

8. That a federal law make sure that the projects are integrated and that they are run fairly.

9. That there be lower taxes on improvements in the houses so that more people will fix up their house.

10. That the federal government buy and sell land at low rates to people who want to build there.

EDUCATION

In an age where machines are rapidly replacing manual labor, job opportunities and economic security increasingly require higher levels of education. We therefore demand:

1. Better facilities in all schools. These would include textbooks, laboratories, air conditioning, heating, recreation, and lunch rooms.
2. A broader curriculum including vocational subjects and foreign languages.
3. Low fee adult classes for better jobs.
4. That the school year consist of nine (9) consecutive months.
5. Exchange programs and public kindergarten.
6. Better qualified teachers with salaries according to qualification.
7. Forced retirement (women 62, men 65).
8. Special schools for mentally retarded and treatment and care of cerebral palsy victims.
9. That taxpayers' money not be used to provide private schools.
10. That all schools be integrated and equal throughout the country.
11. Academic freedom for teachers and students.
12. That teachers be able to join any political organization to fight for Civil Rights without fear of being fired.
13. That teacher brutality be eliminated.

HEALTH

1. Each school should have fully developed health, first aid, and physical education programs. These programs should be assisted by at least one registered nurse.
2. Mobile units, chest x-rays semi-annually and a check-up at least once a year by licensed doctors, the local health department or a clinic should be provided by the local or state government.
3. All medical facilities should have both integrated staff and integrated facilities for all patients.

4. Mental health facilities should be integrated and better staffed.
5. Homes for the aged should be created.
6. Free medical care should be provided for all those who are not able to pay the cost of hospital bills.
7. We demand state and local government inspection of all health facilities.
8. All doctors should be paid by skill, not by race.
9. Titles should be given to the staff.
10. The federal government should help the organization pay the salaries of workers.
11. All patients should be addressed properly.
12. We actively seek the abolition of any sterilization act which serves as punishment, voluntary or involuntary, for any offense.
13. In a reasonable time we seek the establishment of a center for the treatment and care of cerebral palsy victims.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. The United States should stop supporting dictatorships in other countries and should support that government which the majority of the people want.
2. Whereas the policy of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa is detrimental to all the people of that country and against the concepts of equality and justice, we ask that the United States impose economic sanctions in order to end this policy.
3. We ask that there be an equitable balance between the domestic and foreign economic and social support provided by our country.

FEDERAL AID

1. We demand that a Public Works Program be set up by the federal government to create jobs for the unemployed.
2. Because of discrimination in the past, we demand preferential treatment for the Negro in the granting of federal aid in education and training programs until integration is accomplished.
3. To help fight unemployment, we demand that federal funds be lent communities to set up industries and whole towns which shall be publicly owned by the communities, for example: textile and paper mills, stores, schools, job relocation programs for those put out of work by automation, job retraining, recreational facilities, banks, hospitals.
4. We demand that social security benefits should be given according to need, and not

according to how much one earned previously. In addition, we demand guaranteed income of at least $3,000.00 annually for every citizen.

5. The federal government should give aid to students who wish to study for the professions and who do not have the necessary funds.

6. We feel that federal aid in Mississippi is not being distributed equally among the people. Therefore we adopt Title VI of the Civil Rights Law which deals with federal aid. We demand federal agents appointed to Mississippi expressly for this purpose. We demand that action be taken against the state of Mississippi so that this aid may be distributed fairly.

7. We demand that the federal government divert part of the funds now used for defense into additional federal aid appropriations.

8. We demand that the federal government refuse to contract with corporations that employ non-union labor, engage in unfair labor practices, or practice racial discrimination.

JOB DISCRIMINATION

1. We demand that the federal government immediately open to Negroes all employment opportunities and recruitment programs under their auspices, such as in post offices, Veterans Hospitals, and defense bases.

2. The fair employment section (Title VII) of the 1964 Civil Rights law be immediately and fully enforced.

3. The guarantee of fair employment be extended fully to all aspects of labor, particularly training programs.

4. We encourage the establishment of more unions in Mississippi, to attract more industry to the state.

5. We will encourage and support more strikes for better jobs and adequate pay. During the strikes the employers should be enjoined from having others replace the striking workers.

6. Vocational institutions must be established for high school graduates and dropouts.

7. The federal Minimum Wage law be extended to include all workers especially agriculture and domestic workers.

8. Cotton planting allotments to be made on the basis of family size.

9. We want an extension of the Manpower Retraining Program.

10. Whenever a factory is automated, management must find new jobs for the workers.

11. Workers should be paid in accordance with their qualifications and the type of work done.

THE PLANTATION SYSTEM

1. The federal government should force plantation owners to build and maintain fair tenant housing.

2. In cases where the plantation farmers are not being adequately paid according to the Minimum Wage Law, the government should intervene on behalf of the farmers in suit against the plantation owner.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

1. Citizens of Mississippi should be entitled to employ out-of-state lawyers.

2. Section Two of the Fourteenth Amendment should be enforced, specifically in Mississippi and other Southern States, until the voter registration practices are changed.

3. The citizens should have the privilege of exercising their Constitutional rights
   a. to assemble,
   b. to petition,
      to freedom of the press,
   c. to freedom of speech

   in such ways as picketing, passing out leaflets and demonstrations. We oppose all laws that deprive citizens of the above rights.

4. We want the abolition of the House Unamerican Activities Committee because it deprives citizens of their Constitutional rights.

5. We resolve that the Freedom Movement should accept people regardless of religion, race, political views or national origin if they comply with the rules of the movement.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

1. We want qualified Negroes appointed to the police force in large numbers. We want them to be able to arrest anyone breaking the law, regardless of race, creed of color.

2. All police must possess warrants when they demand to enter a house and search the premises. In the absence of a search warrant, the police must give a reasonable explanation of what they are looking for. In any case, with or without a warrant, no damage should be done unnecessarily to property, and if damage is done, it should be paid for.

3. A national committee should be set up to check police procedures, to insure the safety of people in jail: their food, sleeping and health facilities; to protect them from mobs, and to see that no violence is done to them.

4. All cases against law enforcement agencies or involving civil rights should be tried in federal courts.

5. Law enforcement officers should provide protection against such hate groups as the KKK.

Police and public officials should not belong to any group that encourages or practices violence.

CITY MAINTENANCE

1. The city should finance paving and widening of the streets and installing of drain systems in them.
2. Sidewalks must be placed along all streets.
3. A better system of garbage disposal, including more frequent pickups, must be devised.
4. Streets should be adequately lighted.
5. We oppose nuclear testing in residential areas.

VOTING

1. The poll tax must be eliminated.
2. Writing and interpreting of the Constitution is to be eliminated.
3. We demand further that registration procedures be administered without discrimination, and that all intimidation of prospective voters be ended through federal supervision and investigation by the FBI and Justice Department.
4. We want guards posted at ballot boxes during counting of votes.
5. The minimum age for voting should be lowered to 18 years.
6. We seek for legislation to require the county registrar or one of his deputies to keep the voter registration books open five days a week except during holidays, and open noon hours and early evening so that they would be accessible to day workers. Registrars should be required by law to treat all people seeking to register equally.

DIRECT ACTION

1. To support Ruleville, we call for a state-wide school demonstration, urging teachers to vote, and asking for better, integrated schools.
2. We support nonviolence, picketing and demonstrations.

Testimony of Fannie Lou Hamer
Credentials Committee, National Democratic Convention
Atlantic City, NJ. August 22, 1964

Mr. Chairman, and the Credentials Committee, my name is Mrs. Fanny Lou Hamer, and I live at

626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County, the home of Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator Stennis.

It was the 31st of August in 1962 that 18 of us traveled 26 miles to the country courthouse in Indianola to try to register to try to become first- class citizens. We was met in Indianola by policemen, Highway Patrolmens and they only allowed two of us in to take the literacy test at the time.

After we had taken this test and started back to Ruleville, we was held up by the City Police and the State Highway Patrolmen and carried back to Indianola where the bus driver was charged that day with driving a bus the wrong color.

After we paid the fine among us, we continued on to Ruleville, and Reverend Jeff Sunny carried me four miles in the rural area to where I had worked as a timekeeper and sharecropper for 18 years. I was met there by my children, who told me that the plantation owner was angry because I had gone down to try to register. After they told me, my husband came, and said that the plantation owner was raising cain because I had tired to register, and before he quit talking the plantation owner came, and said, "*Fanny Lou, do you know — did Pap tell you what I said?*"

And I said, "*Yes, sir.*"

He said, "*I mean that*" He said, "*If you don't go down and withdraw your registration, you will have to leave.*" [He] said, " Then if you go down and withdraw," he said, "*you still might have to go because we are not ready for that in Mississippi.*"

And I addressed him and told him and said, "*I didn't try to register for you. I tried to register for myself.*" I had to leave that same night.

On the 10th of September 1962, 16 bullets was fired into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker for me. That same night two girls were shot in Ruleville, Mississippi. Also Mr. Joe McDonald's house was shot in.

And June the 9th, 1963, I had attended a voter registration workshop; was returning back to Mississippi. Ten of us was traveling by the Continental Trailway bus. When we got to Winona, Mississippi, which is Montgomery County, four of the people got off to use the washroom, and two of the people — to use the restaurant — two of the people wanted to use the washroom.

The four people that had gone in to use the restaurant was ordered out. During this time I was on the bus. But when I looked through the window and saw they had rushed out I got off of the bus to see what had happened. And one of the ladies said, "*It was a State Highway Patrolman and a Chief of Police ordered us out.*"

I got back on the bus and one of the persons had used the washroom got back on the bus, too. As soon as I was seated on the bus, I saw when they began to get the five people in a Highway Patrolman's car. I stepped off of the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed from the car that the five workers was in, and said, "*Get that one there.*" When I went to get in the car, when the man told me I was under arrest, he kicked me.

I was carried to the county jail and put in the booking room. They left some of the people in the booking room and began to place us in cells. I was placed in a cell with a young woman called Miss Euvester Simpson. After I was placed in the cell I began to hear sounds of licks and screams, I could hear the sounds of licks and horrible screams. And I could hear somebody say, "*Can you say, 'yes, sir,' nigger? Can you say 'yes, sir'?*" And they would say other horrible names.

She would say, "*Yes, I can say 'yes, sir.'*"

"*So, well, say it.*"

She said, "*I don't know you well enough.*"

They beat her, I don't know how long. And after a while she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on those people.

And it wasn't too long before three white men came to my cell. One of these men was a State Highway Patrolman and he asked me where I was from. I told him Ruleville and he said, "*We are going to check this.*"

They left my cell and it wasn't too long before they came back. He said, "*You are from Ruleville all right,*" and he used a curse word. And he said, "*We are going to make you wish you was dead.*"

I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. The State Highway Patrolmen ordered the first Negro to take the blackjack. The first Negro prisoner ordered me, by orders from the State Highway Patrolman, for me to lay down on a bunk bed on my face. I laid on my face and the first Negro began to beat. I was beat by the first Negro until he was exhausted. I was holding my hands behind me at that time on my left side, because I suffered from polio when I was six years old.

After the first Negro had beat until he was exhausted, the State Highway Patrolman ordered the second Negro to take the blackjack. The second Negro began to beat and I began to work my feet, and the State Highway Patrolman ordered the first Negro who had beat me to sit on my feet — to keep me from working my feet. I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat me in my head and tell me to hush.

One white man — my dress had worked up high — he walked over and pulled my dress — I pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back up.

I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered.

All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

Thank you.

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