

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER 1964

50TH ANNIVERSARY

"Where Do We Go From Here?"

**Quality Education and Voting Rights
Constitutional Personhood in Mississippi and in the Nation**

FREEDOM SCHOOLING
EDUCATION FOR CONSTITUTIONAL PERSONHOOD¹

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The purpose of education, [], is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.²

“This is the situation: You will be teaching young people who have lived in Mississippi all their lives. That means they have been deprived of decent education, from the first grade through high school. It means that they have been denied free expression and free thought. Most of all – it means that they have been denied the right to question. The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to help them begin to question.”³

¹ This document is intended as a provisional draft in preparation for the April 14, 2014 conference at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Because the conference is intended to be a collaborative exchange of ideas among, scholars, activists, practitioners and students, the authors intend to incorporate ideas and comments offered during the conference into a final draft.

² James Baldwin, A Talk to Teachers, collected in *The Price of the Ticket*

³ Kathy Emery, Sylvia Braselmann, and Linda Gold. *Freedom School Curriculum Mississippi Freedom Summer*, (Edited and Introduced)

I. INTRODUCTION

The narrative of the history of African American education in the United States usually begins and sometimes seems to end with the decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v Board of Education*, holding that in the matter of public school education state-enforced segregation was a *per se* violation of the equal protection clause of the Constitution. To the extent that the narrative looks further back into the past than *Brown*, it is typically to acknowledge the fact that during slavery, not only did white owners rarely see the need to educate their black slaves but indeed understood that education posed such a grave threat to the institution of slavery that owners made it a crime to teach slaves to read and write. To be sure, the constitutional significance of *Brown* in ending state-sponsored American racial apartheid cannot be overstated, nor can it be doubted that the history of black education during slavery serves as a crucial lens through which one may seek to understand the institution of slavery. However, there is a part of the history of African-American education that is all too often neglected: It is the history of resilience, organization and implementation by African-Americans in the struggle to exercise a right to education.

As public debate grows today on the issue of education as a civil rights, it serves us well to consider the periods of history where deprivation aside, African-Americans planned and executed ways to exercise their right to education. Out of the Freedom Movement of the Civil Rights Era, the Freedoms Schools were born and in the summer of 1964 a change came to Mississippi's education system. In the tradition of slave rebellions through literacy and African-Americans who risked their lives to teach in the south in the post-civil war era, Freedom Schools retell the narrative of African-American education from the perspective of a will to learn. In

many ways, the history and experience of Freedom schools in Mississippi serves as a counterpoint to the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*. If Brown's narrative was that African Americans should be afforded a quality education so that they may be integrated into American society, the Freedom School's counter narrative was that African-American wanted and needed to learn so as to fundamentally change a society that had never seen, much less treated them, as full constitutional persons.

II

THE HISTORY OF FREEDOM SCHOOLS: HOW AND WHY DID THEY COME ABOUT?

*"The Negroes in Mississippi are fed up with life here. We feel that it is time something was done to stop the killings or murders, the prejudice, the mistreatment of Negroes here. Freedom is a very precious thing to any race of people, but in a nation that is supposed to be free and where oppression still exists, something really has to be done."*⁴

Southern states and specifically the Delta cotton plantations in Mississippi relied on cheap, black labor during the 1960's. However, when the Freedom Movement grew, the White Citizens Council, in response to the *Brown v. Board* decision, sought to persuade plantation owners to replace black laborers with machines.⁵ Their purpose was to drive the black population out of Mississippi to ensure they did not achieve any political power.⁶ Voting rights thus became even more critical for blacks, though the Freedom Movement had already been fighting to register black voters against white opposition. By the end of 1963, despite the enormous efforts of the Movement, there was little achievement for black voting rights, violence was frequent and Black voters had no legal or political support.⁷

⁴ Editor C.T. The Freedom Carrier, *Greenwood Grumbles, Speaking of Freedom*. Examples of Student Work (July 16, 1964), www.educationanddemocracy.org.

⁵ Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. Mississippi Freedom Summer Events. *History & Timeline, 1964 (Freedom Summer)*, www.crmvet.org.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

In an attempt to change the conditions in the Deep South, exhausted and frustrated activists realized they needed to come together with COFO organizers and SNCC activists. Community organizers and volunteers collaborated and after much careful planning, the Freedom Summer emerged, creating the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.⁸ It became evident that black children were being educated by a system that shamed them and taught them to devalue themselves. There was a strong need for education and because young activists were becoming more involved in the Movement, the idea for an educational program was necessary.

A. *Why the Schools Were Created/Who Was Responsible*

The initial plans for Freedom Schools were developed by Charlie Cobb (Cobb), the field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).⁹ As a student at Howard University, he quickly became involved in the sit-in movement, eventually leading to his work with the SNCC.¹⁰ During the Freedom Movement, Cobb expressed that blacks often silenced themselves in order to survive in white America,¹¹ and this tremendously frustrated him because it was not only morally problematic, but he also knew there was great potential in his community and he wanted them to thrive. Cobb stated, “Here, an idea of your own is a subversion that must be squelched . . . Learning here means learning to stay in your place . . . to be satisfied – a “good nigger” . . . What if we showed what was possible in education?”¹² Traditional Mississippi schools expressed a message of racial inferiority, which motivated Cobb’s foundation for the Freedom Schools. He wanted black children to be educated, not only in subjects such as

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Emery, Kathy & Gold, Linda. *Introduction: Freedom Summer and the Freedom Schools* (2004), at 4.

¹⁰ Allen, Gavroche. *The Occupied Providence Journal. An Interview With Former Civil Rights Organizer, Charles Cobb, Jr.* (September 2, 2012).

¹¹ *Supra* note 2.

¹² *Id.*

English, mathematics, and science, but also internally, and politically – to become future activists and leaders who would create meaningful change.

Obtaining the right to vote for black people was certainly an important objective, but Cobb’s dream involved more revolutionary and deep-seeded change.¹³ Cobb chose the summer of 1964 to open the Schools because there would be volunteers during the summer and he wanted to utilize their skills and have them serve as teachers at the Freedom Schools. Their knowledge would be incredibly valuable to the black children (and the black community) in Mississippi who would otherwise not receive the same form of education.

Staughton Lynd, a former Chairman of the History Department at Spelman College, directed the Freedom School project in Mississippi.¹⁴ This came about after John O’Neal, a SNCC Mississippi organizer called Lynd and asked him to coordinate the Schools.¹⁵ Lynd said himself that he was unsure why he was chosen; but, as a famous peace activist and professor, Lynd was well known and respected.¹⁶ Accepting the role, he sought to incorporate a curriculum that would boost the children’s confidence, increase voter literacy, and offer political organizational and academic skills. Lynd knew that in order to “create a truly representative political party”,¹⁷ the black population needed to develop self-confidence and the necessary skills to positively influence their community.

Most of the Black population in Mississippi was disempowered because of the acute racism and stamp of inferiority that was placed upon them by whites. Segregation was rampant, but protests, sit-ins, marches, and boycotts were not as prevalent in Mississippi as they were in other

¹³ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1971. *Freedom School Data*, at 4. www.educationanddemocracy.org.

¹⁴ Mirra, Carl. History News Network. *Staughton Lynd: A Historian with a Place in History*.

¹⁵ Lynd, Staughton. *Solidarity. The Freedom Schools, An Informal History*, www.solidarity-us.org.

¹⁶ *Supra* note 4.

¹⁷ *Supra* note 3, at 1.

Southern States.¹⁸ Blacks were more systematically discriminated against and degraded than in any other state in the country.¹⁹ The injustices they suffered pushed Cobb and Lynd to create a program for the Freedom Schools that would change the distorted perception that Black people had of themselves and their place in America.

It was critical for the students to understand why they lived in the type of environment they did, and to question everything – questioning was the most important mechanism of the curriculum.²⁰ Cobb and Lynd believed that the tool of questioning would allow the students to understand their reality, understand themselves as human beings, challenge social myths, and most importantly, create new directions that would force social change.²¹ The Freedom Schools would be an integral part of the Freedom Summer, and they were determined to take advantage of the political climate.

B. *How the Schools Operated*

The founders knew they lacked the proper resources and materials for the Freedom Schools, but were optimistic that the strength of the curriculum would transcend their obstacles. Thus, to prepare for the opening of the Schools, 280 Freedom Summer volunteers were assigned to be teachers.²² They were responsible for their own travel costs and were expected to assist in fundraising.²³ However, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) provided as much funding as possible to pay for food for the students, rent, transportation, equipment, phone bills, and salaries for teachers. The various budgets depended on the resources of the community and the money that COFO organizations were able to raise, nationally. Ultimately, Freedom Schools

¹⁸ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972. *Citizenship Curriculum, The Movement*, at 9, www.educationanddemocracy.org.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972. *Freedom Schools in Mississippi, 1964*, at 2, www.educationanddemocracy.org.

²¹ *Supra* note 5, at 4.

²² *Id.* at 10.

²³ *Id.* at 12.

operated on a very limited budget. Lynd estimated that less than \$2,000 went through the Jackson office, as most of the money went to renting films for the classes.²⁴ Many supplies, specifically books, were collected before the summer began. A Jackson COFO memo was sent to everyone participating in the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project and asked each person to solicit libraries across the country for donations.²⁵

In June of 1964, Freedom School teachers attended a one-week long orientation at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio.²⁶ Those present at Oxford included various civil rights activists, local Mississippi students and activists, and the volunteers for the summer project.²⁷ They underwent an introduction to the political and economic conditions of Mississippi, the type of education their students were receiving in the state's segregated schools, and techniques that would likely help open the minds of their students to new ideas and possibilities.²⁸ The orientation was the only event that all activists and participants were together in one place because the project was statewide; this made it critical for them to develop group solidarity.²⁹ Additionally, "A Curriculum Guide for Freedom Schools" by Noel Day was given to each teacher. Day was a community activist and former junior high school teacher in Harlem, New York.³⁰ He formed the curriculum for Freedom Schools throughout the country, and based the lesson plans off of those he used as a teacher.³¹ The guide was created for volunteers whom Day knew would be unaware of Black history and inexperienced as teachers.³² It also included case studies and a case studies outline that explained how to use them in relation to civil rights,

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.* at 10.

²⁷ Miami University, Oxford, OH. *50 Years After Freedom Summer: Understanding the Past, Building the Future.*

²⁸ *Supra* note 7.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Perlstein, Daniel. J Stor. *Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the Creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools* at 311, www.jstor.org.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* at 312.

political change, and teaching science, math, and remedial reading and writing. The Freedom Schools were designed to be flexible in its teachings in order to connect the material to the reality of the students' lives.³³

The following is an excerpt of the advice that was given to the volunteers prior to the opening of the 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 that 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.”³⁴

Those who agreed to teach at the Schools were warned about the dangers they would face due to the highly controversial nature of the material and heightened violence occurring in the state (and in the country). None of the summer volunteers or the students were required to participate, but the volunteers who chose to teach were asked to canvass for students.³⁵ They went door to door to speak with members of the black community, explained the purpose of the Freedom Schools, and encouraged them to participate. The volunteers typically canvassed alongside local teenage volunteers to help persuade people to attend the Schools, and also to show their ties with the community.³⁶

Due to the lack of resources and the potential threat of violence, the Freedom Schools were not located in secure buildings. Classes were held inside of churches, homes, on back porches,

³³ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1971. Part II: Citizenship Curriculum, www.educationanddemocracy.org.

³⁴ *Supra* note 7.

³⁵ Emery, Kathy & Gold, Linda. *Introduction: Freedom Summer and the Freedom Schools* (2004) at 10

³⁶ *Id.*

in basements, on store fronts, and under trees.³⁷ Initially, the idea was to have approximately one thousand students attend. However, soon after the schools opened, word quickly spread and the classes began to fill. Surpassing the estimated student attendance, enrollment grew to almost three thousand students.³⁸ Each School consisted of five to fifteen teachers who were mostly from the north, white, and were college students. The students, however, were all native Mississippians, and their average age was fifteen.³⁹ Younger children who had not yet started their public education also attended the Schools, as well as elderly individuals who had spent their lives working in the fields. The Schools ran for six weeks from morning until the afternoon, and during this time, the goals were to improve the students' reading, writing, and math skills, but the primary objective was to excite the students and help them find their personal interests and abilities.

In addition to the general academic materials, the Freedom Schools also incorporated dancing, arts and crafts, dramatics, music, and sports. The students were also encouraged to become involved with their local COFO project to help with Freedom Registration, voter registration, and other important issues within their community. COFO was a federation that encompassed all of the civil rights organizations active in Mississippi, as well as local action and political groups. Its purpose was to create unity and to offer a sense of continuity to Civil Rights efforts in the state. Further, it provided a sense of identity and purpose to the local groups to help cultivate leadership in various Mississippi communities. In addition to the Freedom School students, the teachers participated in these programs as much as possible, and they also met with

³⁷ *Id.* at 1.

³⁸ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1971. *Freedom School Data*, www.educationanddemocracy.org.

³⁹ *Supra* note 20, at 1.

COFO voter registration workers to determine how the students could effectively help the project.

Overall, the Schools' curriculum was meant to intensively develop the students' intellectual and practical experiences, to make them better potential leaders in their communities, and help them maximize their education when they return to their regular schools following the summer. In furtherance of this goal, the activities were divided into three areas: 1) academic work; 2) recreation and cultural activities; and 3) leadership development. It was important to the founders that these activities were integrated into one learning experience, rather than being fragmented like the typical educational curricula. Also unlike the traditional academic setting, weekly schedules and daily lesson plans were created by the teachers, but were based on what the students themselves wanted to learn or focus on. The teachers were encouraged to modify the curriculum as it applied to their individual classes and students.

Finally, the Freedom Schools were instructed to write regular reports and send them to the COFO office in Jackson to create regular press releases and profiles.

III

THE FREEDOM SCHOOLS PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM

- A. *What the organizers seek to accomplish? How did they go about developing the curriculum? What was in the curriculum?*

The Freedom Schools were intended to be unlike any other educational project that had been implemented in the United States. The organizers wanted to create a space, where students could learn new material and at the same times use their life experiences in the south to learn

more about their society.⁴⁰ The curriculum was to serve as a flexible tool instead of a rigid guide in accomplishing the goals of Freedom Summer.⁴¹

In order to develop a successful curriculum, the National Council of Churches sponsored a conference in New York City.⁴² In March 1964, many civil rights leaders and educators came together to develop a plan for the schools, and they worked from a four part preliminary outline.⁴³

I. Leadership development

- a. to give students the perspective of being in a long line of protest and pressure for social and economic justice (i.e. to teach Negro history and the history of the movement.)
- b. to educate students in the general goals of the movement, give them wider perspectives (enlarged social objectives, nonviolence, etc.)
- c. to train students in the specific organizational skills that they need to develop Southern Negro communities:
 1. public speaking
 2. handling of press and publicity
 3. getting other people to work
 4. organizing mass meetings and workshops, getting speakers, etc.
 5. keeping financial records, affidavits, reports, etc.
 6. developing skill in dealing with people in the community
 7. canvassing
 8. duplicating techniques, typing, etc.
- d. to plan with each other further action of the student movement.

II. Remedial Academic Program

- a. to improve comprehension in reading, fluency and expressiveness in writing.
- b. to improve mathematical skill (general arithmetic and basic algebra and geometry.)
- c. to fill the gaps in knowledge of basic history and sociology, especially American.
- d. to give a general picture of the American economic and political system.
- e. to introduce students to art, music and literature of various classical periods, emphasizing

⁴⁰ Emery, Kathy & Gold, Linda. *Introduction: Freedom Summer and the Freedom Schools* (2004)

⁴¹ Perlstein, Daniel. *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3. *Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools* (1990).

⁴² Kathy Emery, Sylvia Braselmann, and Linda Gold. *Freedom School Curriculum Mississippi Freedom Summer*, (Edited and Introduced) (1964)

<http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf>

⁴³ *Id.*

distinctive features of each style.

f. to generate knowledge of and ability to use the scientific method.

III. Contemporary Issues

a. to give students more sophisticated views of some current issues.

b. to introduce students to thinking of local difficulties in a context of national problems.

c. to acquaint students with procedures of investigating a problem-rudimentary research.

IV. Non-academic Curriculum

a. to allow students to meet each other as completely as possible, in order to form a network of

student leaders who know each other.

b. to give students experience in organization and leadership

1. field work—voter registration

2. student publications

3. student government

c. to improve their ability to express themselves formally (through creative writing, drama, talent

shows, semi-spontaneous discussions, etc.)⁴⁴

The aim of the freedom school curriculum was to challenge “the student’s curiosity about the world” and to allow them to begin to consider the world in way they have never imagined. The organizers of the curriculum used the Highlander Method of Participatory Education when they began to develop the texts.⁴⁵ The Highlander folk school, later renamed the Highlander Research and Education Center served and still serves today as a catalyst for social change.⁴⁶ At it’s inception, “Highlander’s “central goal was to facilitate the empowerment of oppressed people at the bottom of society, so that they could wage the kind of struggle required for America to become a real democracy””⁴⁷ The Highlander model was based on the conviction that responses to oppression had to grow out of the experiences of the oppressed.⁴⁸ Using the

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Supra* note 38.

⁴⁶ Duncan, Joyce Denise, "Historical Study of the Highlander Method: Honing Leadership for Social Justice." (2005). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 996. <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/996>

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Supra* note 38.

Highlander model, the teachers were not to focus solely on dictating the right answers, but rather, to ask questions that would foster discussion and create an exchange of ideas.⁴⁹

The curriculum for the schools was based on a number of documents written specifically for Freedom Schools and some adapted from previous works.⁵⁰ The body of the curriculum consisted of an academic curriculum, a citizenship curriculum, several case studies and supplemental materials including the Guide to Negro History. All sections “were intended to promote the following principles: 1. The school is an agent of social change. 2. Students must know their own history. 3. The curriculum should be linked to the student’s experience. 4. Questions should be open-ended. 5. Developing academic skills is crucial.”⁵¹

B. *The Academic Curriculum*

Although discussion and self-learning were a critical part of the freedom school project, the organizers recognized that to be successful leaders, students would also have to have the basic academic knowledge to survive in society. Teachers were advised to begin the day with this curriculum when students were still “fresh.”⁵² The organizers knew that in order for the academic curriculum to be effective, teachers would have to “monitor the student’s engagement and adjust” the material based on their understanding.⁵³ The writers of the curriculum noted in the introduction to the academic curriculum: “the student's interest depended a great deal on his and her ability to understand and learn the material. This in turn would be dependent upon:

1. developing positive relationships between teacher and student as well as among students;
2. not overwhelming the students with more information than they can learn at a given time;
3. switching activities whenever one is not engaging the students; and

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Supra* note 37.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

4. as much as possible, using the students' own experiences as the content of the curriculum.”⁵⁴

As a guide to the teachers focusing on the Academic curriculum, Ruth Emerson noted

“My preference is for de-emphasizing the teaching of reading (spelling and grammar) as a separate skill unless a student, of his own volition, specially requests it. In general, a high school student will probably learn more from speaking, reading, and writing about his own thoughts or a particular subject he himself is interested in. Two students working together can often teach and learn more from each other than you can teach either of them separately. But you should always be available to answer questions (if you can) or act as umpire if needed.”⁵⁵

In a memorandum to Freedom School teachers from the Mississippi Summer Project Staff, teachers were briefed on the difficulty of teaching Academic subjects to the Mississippi students and steps they would have to take to supplement the learning process.

“3. Papers on the teaching of science, math and remedial reading and writing (also short papers on teaching arts and crafts, dramatics, etc.) Science will not relate directly to the subject matter of the curriculum guide, but it is important that students receive both a feeling for what real science is (which they do not receive in school) and tutorial help in specific scientific areas of study if they show interest....Math is an area of real difficulty for many students. Try to secure 11th and 12th (and earlier) math texts for use in tutoring. It will be difficult to develop class sessions around this subject, since students' abilities will vary greatly. The paper on teaching this subject will help you see an approach for a classroom situation. Remedial reading and writing work will be needed by nearly all students. Reading aloud is suggested in the Curriculum Guide as are some theme topics....”⁵⁶

C. *The Citizenship Curriculum*

The citizenship curriculum was the core lesson of the Freedom Schools. The curriculum was written by Noel Day, a former junior high school teacher from New York.⁵⁷ Day's methodology for teaching was unconventional and he was the perfect candidate to structure the

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Supra* note 39.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Supra* note 38.

learning process for the Freedom Schools. In an overview of the Freedom Schools and the citizenship curriculum, the COFO noted, “In these sections, the students will be encouraged to form opinions about the various social phenomena which touch him, to learn about his own particular heritage as a Negro, and to explore possible avenues for his future. Special attention at the end of the unit will be devoted to the civil rights Movement—the historical development to this point, the philosophical assumptions underlying pressure for social change, and the issues which are currently before the civil rights Movement.”⁵⁸ Noel Day suggested that the Freedom School teachers consider certain points as they interacted with the students.

TEACHING HINTS:

1. Material should be related whenever possible to the experience of students.
2. No expression of feelings (hostility, aggression, submission, etc.) should ever be passed over, no matter how uncomfortable the subject or the situation is. Both the students and the teacher can learn something about themselves and each other if it is dealt with honestly and with compassion.
3. The classroom atmosphere should not be formal (it is not a public school). Ways of accomplishing an informal atmosphere might be arrangement of seats in a circle, discussions with individuals or small groups before and after sessions, use of first names between teachers and students, shared field-work experiences, letting students lead occasionally, etc.
4. Prepare ahead of time for each session.
5. When using visual materials, make certain they are easily visible to all students and large enough to be seen. (When smaller materials must be used, pass them around after pointing out significant details.)⁵⁹
6. Let students help develop visual materials wherever possible (perhaps after class for the next session).
7. At the end of each session, summarize what has been covered and indicate briefly what will be done in the next session.
8. At the beginning of each session, summarize the material that was covered the day before (or

⁵⁸ *Supra* note 39.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

ask a student to do it).

9. Keep language simple.

10. Don't be too critical at first; hold criticism until a sound rapport has been established. Praise

accomplishments wherever possible.

11. Give individual help to small groups, or when students are reading aloud or drawing.

12. A limit of one hour (an hour and a half at most) is probably desirable for any one session.

This limit can be extended, however, by changing activities and methods within a session.⁶⁰

The citizenship curriculum was divided into seven units.

Unit I: The Negro in Mississippi

Students were encouraged to ask questions about their daily lives. They questioned, why they were in freedom schools and why they were learning about voting rights. They also questioned their housing conditions, medical care and employment opportunities compared to the White citizens. The goal of this unit was to allow students see that the differences between living conditions among blacks and Whites could be change politically, and that they were not merely a permanent physical condition.⁶¹

Unit II: The Negro in the North

This unit “compared life of southern Blacks with that of blacks in the North.” It emphasized that conditions of Blacks were practically the same in the North and South.⁶²

Unit III: Myths about the Negro (examining the apparent reality)

Unit IV: The Power Structure

Unit V: Poor whites, poor Negroes, and their fears

Units (III-V) focused on teaching students that “power structures created racial stereotypes and instilled irrational fear in poor Whites in order to maintain its power.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Supra* note 37.

⁶² *Id.*

Unit VI: Soul Things and Material Things

This unit focused on a discussion on “non-violence and what a new society might look like.”

Students were also asked to consider the notion of freedom as truth.⁶⁴

Unit VII: The Movement:

The final unit was not written by Day. It focused on the means by which a new society could be achieved and it encouraged students to become active in the civil rights movement.⁶⁵

Case Studies

Originally, the curriculum conference had planned to implement 14 case studies for the Freedom Schools, which were to initiate problem-solving ideas among the students.⁶⁶ “The purpose of the case studies was to provide the teachers and students with documents and data supporting the content of the curriculum, and to provide lesson plans where possible.”⁶⁷ Only seven case studies were eventually used in the Freedom schools, but they were nevertheless “substantial” in subject matter.⁶⁸ The studies included “Jack Minnis’s description of Mississippi’s “power structure,” and a discussion of how the German power structure and the unwillingness of Jews to face reality contributed to the Holocaust.”⁶⁹ Other studies also looked at the civil rights movement, civil rights legislature and the judicial system’s effect on Black people.⁷⁰ The studies also sought to relate the narrative of Black oppression in the United States with struggles around the world, by comparing the anti-civil rights laws in Mississippi with the new laws in Apartheid South Africa, “in which Bayard Rustin and Al Lowenstein were to

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Supra* note 37.

⁶⁸ *Supra* note 38.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

include an evaluation of the practicality of non-violence in both settings.”⁷¹ When using these case studies, “Teachers were to focus not on teaching facts but on teaching students to draw upon their own experiences, to relate the case studies to current situations in Mississippi, and to derive suggestions to solving problems in their own area.”⁷²

Guide to Negro History

The guide was authored by historian Staughon Lynd and it was based on the study of the Amistad slave revolt by Bea Young and on a “Negro History outline” by Barbara Jones from the SNCC office in New York.⁷³ Students were introduced to the slave revolt aboard the Amistad and in Haiti. Students learned about the Supreme Court ruling in the Amistad case, where it ruled that the captive slaves were to be returned to Africa. “The Amistad incident was intended to elicit students’ interest and pride in the Afro-American heritage to introduce many of the topics to be studied during the summer, including African culture and history, the slave trade, slave revolts, abolitionism, and the role of the courts in enforcing civil rights.”⁷⁴ Overall, the Guide to Negro History incited discussion among students, and it supplemented the citizenship as well as the academic curriculum.

IV

FREEDOM SCHOOLS – WHAT WAS THE LASTING IMPACT ON MISSISSIPPI'S CITIZENS? WERE THE GOALS ACCOMPLISHED? HOW WERE THESE SCHOOLS RECEIVED BY BOTH THE BLACK AND WHITE COMMUNITIES IN MISSISSIPPI?

- A. *How were the Freedom Schools received by both black and white communities in Mississippi?*

⁷¹ *Supra* note 38.

⁷² *Supra* note 37.

⁷³ *Supra* note 38.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

In the summer of 1964, about 700 Northern students descended on Mississippi to participate in the Freedom Summer. Many of the volunteer students worked to set up and run the “Freedom Schools.”⁷⁵ But these students were not well received by the White community, and were generally viewed with skepticism by the Black community.

The White response was uniformly hostile, and at times nasty, violent, and virulent. White Mississippi residents were thoroughly disturbed by what they perceived as attempts of outsiders to disrupt southern societal norms. They were also tremendously fearful of the potential unrest that could be generated by extending meaningful education to the Black population. Segregationists were especially troubled by the presence or appearance of “race mixing” amongst civil rights volunteers. For traditional southerners, who operated by a strict social code that forbid the interaction of Black males and White females, seeing Blacks and Whites working side-by-side in collaboration signaled the arrival of the apocalypse.⁷⁶

Because of this, segregationists spoke out in embittered terms about the impending collapse of their society, attempted to instill fear in Northern volunteers, and hoped to stir up White racial resentment and rage in local residents.⁷⁷ As the summer wore on and civil rights groups continued to engage in a mass campaign, many Mississippi Whites began to lose patience, and felt that official opposition to the movement had not been effective enough. Those who had previously supported legal opposition watched in frustration as the politics of resistance had failed to thwart the “invasion” of civil rights workers despite the widespread use of violence,

⁷⁵ Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* 13 (Carlson Publishing Inc., 2nd ed., 1989).

⁷⁶ Steve Estes, *I am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* 62 (Univ. North Carolina Press 2005).

⁷⁷ Id.

harassment, and intimidation.⁷⁸ In some regions of Mississippi, frustrations among Whites led to a reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan and the creation of a Klan newsletter called “the Freedom Fighter,” originally published in December of 1963.⁷⁹ For other areas, it meant utilizing every political resource at their disposal to halt the steady influx of civil rights volunteers, and progress of their movements. Anti-integration resistance efforts included: increasing the number of Sherriff deputies in each locality; passing new legislation, including anti-leaving laws, anti-picketing laws, “laws to restrain movements of individuals under certain circumstances,” and curfews; sharing municipal personnel (including police) among various towns to increase numbers, enlarging highway patrol powers, appropriating money to fight the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, introducing a bill to invalidate the twenty-fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections, introducing a bill to outlaw passive resistance in civil rights demonstrations, and introducing a bill that would have made Freedom Schools illegal. Whites also relied on more archaic tactics, including assaults, bombings, and other forms of violence. Many Freedom School locations were shot at or bombed.⁸⁰

Black Mississippians, however, viewed the arrival of Northern volunteers not with scorn, but with skepticism and concern. Many were fearful that the presence of civil rights workers and their involvement in a civil rights movement would cause local residents to lose their homes, jobs, and even their lives.⁸¹ Adults were initially reluctant to get involved, and were slow to shed the restraints placed upon them by southern White society. Young people, however, did not share this view. With little to lose, young people instinctively gravitated towards the movement,

⁷⁸ Id. at 77.

⁷⁹ Id.

⁸⁰ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 108 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁸¹ Id. at 115.

and knew that involvement would not only raise their collective consciousness, but would also serve to eradicate their ignorance, fear, and subordinate position in society.⁸²

B. *What were the goals of Freedom Schools and were they accomplished?*

Public education in Mississippi was separate and unequal in 1964.⁸³ School facilities were substandard, curriculum deficiencies were present, freedom of speech and thought were suppressed, and opportunities to advance in life were generally limited by the dominant white power structure.⁸⁴ The segregated school system in Mississippi favored white students over black students, and allocated funding accordingly. In 1964, on average \$81.66 were spent on a white student as compared to \$21.77 for a black student. Many black Mississippians grew up attending split-session school years, implemented by white planters to ensure that enough black child laborers were available to plant and harvest their crops.⁸⁵ The purpose of Freedom Schools was to make up for these educational deficits. Freedom Schools were part of an effort to rectify the deplorable conditions of public education in the South, and the education services available to Mississippi's African American students.⁸⁶

In terms of enrollment, Freedom Schools, which initially planned to provide schooling for 1,000 students, enjoyed enrollment numbers that far exceeded estimations.⁸⁷ Because of the widespread interest shown by Black families, the full-time staff of 175 teachers was

⁸² Id.

⁸³ Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965, 115 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁸⁴ James P. Marshall, Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965, 116-17 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁸⁵ Steve Estes, I am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement 74-75 (Univ. North Carolina Press 2005).

⁸⁶ James P. Marshall, Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965, 116-17 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁸⁷ Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965, 115 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

supplemented by an additional 50 to 100 staff members – many of whom were volunteers drawn from the local community.⁸⁸

Freedom Schools had both political and educational goals. At a basic level, the educational goals of Freedom Schools were to “overcome a state education system in which white teachers commonly subscribed to the idea that ‘ignorance is safer than inquiry.’”⁸⁹ Freedom Schools were intended to cover a wide array of curriculum materials, including: remedial work in reading, math, and basic grammar; seminars in political science and the humanities, journalism and creative writing; recreational program such as dramatics, music appreciation, arts and crafts, organized athletics, movies; and voter registration field work. In addition, students were encouraged to develop a school newspaper and organize a student government. On a daily basis, students were exposed to subjects not offered in Mississippi schools, and were encouraged to ask questions and use critical reasoning skills.⁹⁰ The adopted curriculum was divided into seven core areas that analyzed the social, political, and economic context of precarious race relations and the Civil Rights Movement. Leadership development was also encouraged, in addition to more traditional academic skills. The education at Freedom Schools was student-centered and culturally relevant. Curriculum and instruction was based on the needs of the students, discussion among students and teachers (rather than lecturing) was encouraged, and curriculum planners encouraged teachers to base instruction on the experiences

⁸⁸ Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965, 116 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁸⁹ Vanessa Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* 74 (Graham Hodges, ed., Routledge Group, 2006).

⁹⁰ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 117 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

of their students. At a deeper level, organizers hoped to raise broad questions that challenged the customs of the Deep South.⁹¹

The political goals of Freedom Schools were no less important. They included helping students to see clearly the conditions of the Negro in the North and the South, linking the realities of students' lives to the goals of social and economic justice for all, and utilizing the rhetoric of participatory democracy to create an inclusive, humanistic organizing strategy that welcomes both men and women into the leadership of the movement.⁹² Organizers wanted students to recognize, for example, that although they were taught democracy, they had been denied their rights ; including the right to vote, access to good school systems, and the opportunity to participate in the various branches of the local, state, and federal government.⁹³

In a tangible way, Freedom Schools created an independent, parallel network of institutions that would represent both a protest against the inherent inequality of educational opportunities available to African American children, and an effort to fill in the gaps left by an inept school system through meaningful education.⁹⁴

In addition to being a good supplement for education, Freedom Schools also became a training ground for future movement leaders.⁹⁵ Students could collectively learn about and discuss problems basic to the African American community, and students were encouraged to publicly advocate for integration of the school system, engage in local boycotts, and participate

⁹¹ Steve Estes, *I am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* 62 (Univ. North Carolina Press 2005).

⁹² Steve Estes, *I am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* 62 (Univ. North Carolina Press 2005).

⁹³ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 115 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁹⁴ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 116-17 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁹⁵ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 118 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

in organizing efforts.⁹⁶ Freedom School teachers carried the special responsibility of teaching elementary and high school students how to become social change agents that would participate in the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. Freedom Schools were designed to provide politically emerging communities with new young leadership, and constitute a real attack on the stifling system of education existing in the State. By the end of the summer, the goal was to establish a cadre of student leadership around the State of Mississippi, committed to critical thinking and social action.⁹⁷

C. *What was the lasting impact of Freedom Schools on Mississippi citizens? On others?*

In the short term, Freedom Schools had a dramatic impact on Mississippi residents. Freedom Schools “captured the imagination of Mississippi blacks” and enhanced their self-esteem and sense of dignity.”⁹⁸ The Freedom School’s curriculum raised individual and collective consciousness by exploring southern culture, learning about African American history, discussing the various components of the dominant power structures, unveiling the effects of fear, and grasping the significance of direct action and of political action as instruments of social change.⁹⁹ The experiment also provided a model for future educational programs.

However, Freedom Schools failed to meet some of their short-term objectives. Public education for African Americans in Mississippi improved little after the Freedom Summer. School completion rates remained below that of other southern states, student performance lagged, school segregation continued, and multicultural curriculums were ignored and dismissed. The effort to utilize Freedom Schools as an epicenter for fostering collective action also fell

⁹⁶ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 118 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁹⁷ Freedom Summer 1964, Zinn Education Project, (last viewed: April 5, 2014), available at: <http://zinnedproject.org/materials/freedom-summer-1964/>.

⁹⁸ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965*, 118 (Louisiana State Univ. Press 2003).

⁹⁹ "Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum - 1964," *Radical Teacher* 40 (1991), pp. 6-29.

somewhat short of expectation, as there were minimum immediate effects seen in voter registration. Freedom Schools, or rather the ideological underpinnings of the Freedom Summer movement, served to deepen the division between those in the civil rights movement who still believed in integration and nonviolence and others, especially young African Americans, who now doubted whether racial equality was achievable by peaceful means.¹⁰⁰

In terms of the Civil Rights Movement's long-term goals, one of the unexpected benefits that emerged from the organizing of Freedom Schools was the proactive development of new communication strategies.¹⁰¹ SNCC's use of a broad array of communication tools to form and sustain Freedom Schools, and the immediate success of Freedom Schools empowered black Mississippians and promoted the idea of extending voting and educational rights to black citizens throughout the South.¹⁰² Internally, SNCC learned how to better interact with national media members, and refined its public relations skills.¹⁰³ More importantly, the freedom summer made the southern campaign for civil rights a national campaign for human rights.¹⁰⁴

Utilizing the momentum of the Freedom School, local leadership continued with projects beyond the summer of 1964. These efforts contributed to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and subsequent rulings from the United States Supreme Court, and the increased political participation of African Americans in Mississippi politics in the 1980's and 1990's. Many youth leaders from the Freedom Schools have gone on to continue

¹⁰⁰ "Freedom Summer," History Channel (last viewed: April 5, 2014), available at: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/freedom-summer>.

¹⁰¹ Vanessa Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* 5 (Graham Hodges, ed., Routledge Group, 2006) (for example, between 1960-1970 the New York Times index alone indicates over 950 articles about SNCC).

¹⁰² Vanessa Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* 76 (Graham Hodges, ed., Routledge Group, 2006).

¹⁰³ Vanessa Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* 76 (Graham Hodges, ed., Routledge Group, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Vanessa Murphree, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* 76 (Graham Hodges, ed., Routledge Group, 2006).

advocating for equal rights through political office, and organizations like the SNCC Legacy Project, which aims to preserve and extend SNCC's legacy, organize strategic programs and activities that address critical issues in the Black community, and advocate for quality public education as a constitutional right.¹⁰⁵

Additionally, the Freedom School model can be seen in the dozens of schools that hold the “Freedom Schools” name today, including: Akwesasne Freedom School on a Mohawk Indian reservation; The Freedom Schools in St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois; Paulo Freire Freedom School in Tucson, Arizona; and Jane Addams School for Democracy, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Not to mention that the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) operates a nationwide modern Freedom School program. The program is coordinated through the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children initiative. The CDF Freedom Schools national program operates over 130 summer program sites in 24 states across the country serving nearly 9,000 children. Freedom Schools provided reading instruction; a humanities curriculum emphasizing English, foreign languages, art, and creative writing; and a general mathematics and science curriculum. These schools were structured to motivate young people to become critically engaged in their communities and to help them identify and design authentic solutions to local problems.¹⁰⁶ Each of the abovementioned schools cite to the 1964 Freedom Schools model as the principal influence on their mission statement.

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¹⁰⁵ The SNCC Legacy Project: Mission Statement (last viewed: April 5, 2014), available at: <http://sncclegacyproject.org/>.

¹⁰⁶ Children’s Defense Fund, Programs & Campaigns: Freedom Schools (last viewed: April 5, 2014), available at: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/about/history.html>.

