



Episode 5 takes the viewer to Mississippi, a state notorious for the brutality of its citizens' responses to desegregation. In 1954, just weeks after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, segregationists in

the Mississippi Delta formed the first White Citizens' Council (WCC), an organization devoted to the preservation of white political power and to resisting all forms of integration. As the WCC was forming to thwart racial equality, civil rights activists were implementing a plan to register black voters in a bid to open "the closed society." Episode 5 focuses on the voter registration drive and the racist backlash of intimidation and violence that followed.

"Mississippi" opens with the murder of Medgar Evers, an officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)* who organized a boycott of downtown businesses in Jackson (Mississippi's capital) as part of the fight against segregation. Amidst escalating tensions between the NAACP and Jackson's white leadership, Evers was shot and killed in his own driveway. His assassination prompted Bob Moses, a math teacher turned field director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** to join local activists (including Amzie Moore and others) in a high-risk voter registration drive.

Moses's efforts attracted the attention of a number of white Northern students who sought to join the movement and work with black Mississippians to ensure their right to vote. The presence of college-educated whites—many of them from America's elite families—exposed internal tensions over the appropriate role of whites in the movement. While some welcomed the media attention white activists could attract, others feared their involvement would undermine efforts to develop a new generation of black leaders. In spite of the

concerns, Moses, along with activists from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)*** and SNCC, announced plans for an interracial "Freedom Summer" campaign to register black Mississippian

1962	
	The NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, and CORE form the Council of Federated Organizations and start a voter education and registration project in Mississippi
1963	
Jun. 12	In Jackson, Mississippi civil rights activist and NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers is murdered outside his home
1964	
Jan. 23	The 24th Amendment is ratified and eliminates the poll tax, which had been used to keep minority groups from voting
Summer	A coalition of civil rights groups launches the Mississippi Freedom Summer, a campaign that draws hundreds of black and white volunteers
Jun. 21	Freedom Summer volunteers Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner (both white) and James Chaney (a black man) disappear; during a national search their bodies are discovered buried near Philadelphia, Mississippi
Jul. 2	President Johnson signs into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bolsters the federal government's power to enforce equal voting rights and eliminate segregation and discrimination in public facilities
Aug.	The MFDP, an interracial group which challenged the all-white Mississippian delegation to the Democratic National Convention, is denied seats at that convention
Dec. 10	King is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

*The NAACP's goals include the promotion of equality and justice in America and the eradication of prejudices among all its citizens. Its charter calls for the protection of the interests and opportunities of citizens of color and for the promotion of progressive policies in the fields of education, housing, and employment. For more information see "NAACP," at Britannica.com, <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article-9372942> (accessed April 18, 2006).

**SNCC is an American political organization that played a central role in the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Begun as an interracial group advocating nonviolence, it adopted greater militancy late in the decade, reflecting nationwide trends in black activism, and in 1969 changed its name to the Student National Coordinating Committee. For more information see "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," at Britannica.com, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9399806> (accessed August 4, 2006).

voters. This segment describes the coalition’s careful preparations for confrontation with white segregationists in the Mississippi Delta, plans that included comprehensive plans to counter decades of white supremacy through law, education, and the ballot. One of the major innovations of the campaign was the establishment of 41 “Freedom Schools,” which educated blacks of all ages on history, literacy, and the principles of democracy. In the midst of this effort, the disappearance and murder of three student activists—two white, one black—near Philadelphia, Mississippi drew unprecedented national attention to Freedom Summer.

The episode concludes with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s (MFDP) struggle for official inclusion into the Democratic Party, which led to an open political confrontation with President Lyndon Johnson at the 1964 Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. At the height of the crisis, MFDP interracial representatives petitioned the credentials committee to replace Mississippi’s all-white delegation.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think this episode is titled “Mississippi: Is This America?” How were the challenges in Mississippi similar to those in other Southern states? How did the situation in Mississippi highlight the racial barriers and attitudes faced by the nation as a whole?
2. Why did activists focus on voter registration in their efforts to dismantle segregation in the South? What obstacles did blacks face as they tried to exercise this basic freedom?
3. What was the role of white activists in a movement that focused on black freedom? What leverage did they bring? Why did some activists challenge their participation? What do you think about their involvement?
4. What strategies were employed during Freedom Summer to reverse years of intimidation, segregation, and discrimination in Mississippi? How did the various components of the program connect?
5. What tensions and conflicts in the mid-twentieth century democratic process did the MFDP expose in its struggle for recognition by the Democratic Party?

Document 1: THE WHITE CITIZENS’ COUNCILS

In response to *Brown v. Board of Education* and other rulings against segregation in the South, a small group of whites met in the town of Indianola, Mississippi. In July 1954, they formed the first White Citizens’ Council (WCC)—a formal organization designed to defend white supremacy in the Delta. The WCC attained a degree of respectability and legitimacy when various business and community leaders joined its ranks. Within a few months, the organization had established branches in most towns in the Deep South.

The WCC maintained a civilized façade, and in contrast to the overt violence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK),**** it employed political means to maintain white supremacy. William Simmons was one of the founders of the WCC. Near the beginning of Episode 5, he explains his objections to integration:

*** CORE was established in 1941 by an interracial group that drew its inspiration from the philosophy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as well as religious traditions that espoused peaceful resolutions of social conflicts. They pioneered the application of Gandhi’s tactics in America and inspired King to adopt them. The first interracial bus rides were carried out by CORE. In 1947, CORE placed black and white volunteers on buses in a “Journey of Reconciliation” to challenge local authorities in the South to uphold the recent Supreme Court decision to desegregate interstate bus travel. For more information see “Congress of Racial Equality,” at Britannica.com, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9062372> (accessed August 4, 2006).

**** The KKK is a hate organization that seeks to assert the supremacy of Christian whites in the South through symbolic displays, which include ceremonial garb of white gowns and hoods, church and cross burning, intimidation campaigns, and ritualized killings known as lynchings. Such antisemitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-black organizations originated in the middle of the nineteenth century when members of the former Confederacy established branches of the KKK to resist the emancipation of slaves. A revival of the KKK was sparked with the release of D. W. Griffin’s racist silent film “Birth of a Nation” in 1915. For more information see “Ku Klux Klan,” at Britannica.com, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9046315> (accessed August 4, 2006).

I was born in Mississippi in the United States. And I am the product of my heredity and education in which I was raised. And I have a vested interest in that society and I along with a million other White Mississippians will do everything in our power to protect that vested interest. It's just as simple as that.¹

In its pamphlet, the WCC laid out its principles and objectives:

FIVE POINT ACTION PROGRAM

1. *Prevent Race-Mixing.* Racial integrity is essential to civilization and liberty. The fate of the white man (and woman) in the Congo and other new African nations is a stern warning!

2. *Avoid Violence.* Experience has proved that where integration occurs, violence becomes inevitable. Peaceful operation of segregated schools in the South proves that social separation of the races is best for all concerned.

3. *Maintain and Restore Legal Segregation.* As growing disorder in Washington, D.C., shows, if segregation breaks down, the social structure breaks down. The Communists hope to achieve [this] in America!

4. *Defend States' Rights.* The states are the source of all governmental power, local and Federal. Under the Tenth Amendment, the states have the reserved power to decide questions of segregation. Federal usurpation of any such power is a violation of the Constitution.

5. *Reverse the "Black Monday" Decision.* The Supreme Court's school integration decision of May 17, 1954 is a patent perversion of the Constitution, based on false "science": If it stands, social segregation and laws against racial intermarriage will be subject to judicial condemnation. Such a prospect is intolerable!

JOIN THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL

Organization is the Key to Victory! WORK ... HOPE ... PRAY FOR WHITE MONDAY!²

CONNECTIONS

1. How does Simmons explain his objections to integration? Simmons begins by stating, "I was born in Mississippi." What does Simmons see as the relationship between his home, his culture, his values, and his actions?
2. What were the primary objectives of the WCC? How did they differ from those of the KKK?
3. What does the term "states' rights" mean? Why did the WCC seek to defend states' rights? What threats to states' rights did they perceive?
4. Why did the WCC refer to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as "Black Monday"?
5. How did groups like the WCC support a climate in which violence against civil rights activists was able to thrive?

6. After reading the objectives of the WCC, do you think they were a hate group? Should groups like the WCC be outlawed? Should advocating “white supremacy” be permitted in America? Does banning the expression of this ideology conflict with freedom of speech?

Document 2: TRYING TO VOTE IN MISSISSIPPI

At the center of Mississippi’s struggle for power was the black vote. Deprived of a political voice, blacks were subjected to the whims of the powerful white elite. In some counties, blacks outnumbered whites four to one, yet almost none of them were registered to vote. In a state known for its extreme segregationist tradition, black activists Moore, Evers, and Moses struggled to register black voters. They and other black activists hoped that under the leadership of President John F. Kennedy, the US Justice Department would force the state of Mississippi to protect the federally mandated rights of its black citizens. Yet, because Southern senators had dominated the federal judiciary committee for years, legal challenges to the state’s discriminatory policies were routinely blocked or ignored. Fearing any change to the Jim Crow system, these senators used their power to pressure the president to appoint segregationists to become federal court judges. One of the most notorious of those judges was Justice William Harold Cox of the Fifth Circuit.

In 1961, Gerald Stern, a young, white Southern Jewish lawyer from Memphis, Tennessee, joined the civil rights division of the Justice Department. He was assigned to investigate voter discrimination and intimidation in Mississippi. Stern interviewed activists about their attempts to register black citizens and worked with his colleagues to bring those cases to court. Stern described several of them in an essay called “Mississippi” from the book *Outside the Law: Narratives on Justice in America*:

[...] In Walthall County, John Hardy, a young black college student from Nashville, Tennessee, along with some other students set up a voter registration school to teach local blacks how to register. For three weeks they conducted classes for several hours a day, teaching from twenty-five to fifty Walthall County residents each evening how to fill out registration forms and explaining sections of the Mississippi Constitution. Finally, John Hardy accompanied the first five blacks to try and register to vote in Walthall County. At that time, none of the county’s 2,490 black persons of voting age were registered to vote, while a substantial majority of 4,536 voting age white persons were registered. The first five black applicants were rejected, as were the three who tried the next time, and the one who tried the next time. The next effort, by two blacks accompanied by John Hardy, marked the last time blacks would try and register in Walthall County for a long time.

An elderly black man, Mose McGee, had been in town on that last day and had seen what had happened to John Hardy and the two black applicants. I found Mose McGee way back in the hills, plowing his fields behind a mule with the plow lines hitched over his shoulders. He was embarrassed for me to see him like that. He did not utter a single word. He just unhitched himself from his plow, went into his shack, cleaned up, and then came out. He said, “It’s not right for anyone to be seen as an animal. I want you to see me as a human being.”

He wanted to tell me what he had seen in town that day. He wanted blacks to get the right to vote so they could force the county supervisors to pave his dirt road and the dirt roads that led to other black people’s homes like they paved the roads to white men’s property.

He said his dirt road became impassably muddy when the rains came. One day a black neighbor's baby got sick. No doctor could get up the road to them. And they couldn't drive out to get to the doctor. So he had bundled the baby up and walked over the hills, for miles and miles, to get to town. The baby died in his arms before he got there.

Mose McGee said John Hardy had accompanied Mrs. Edith Simmons Peters, a sixty-three-year-old black woman who owned an eighty-acre farm, and Lucius Wilson, a sixty-two-year-old black man who owned a seventy-acre farm, to register to vote. When they got to the registrar's office, he refused to allow them to apply. When the registrar saw John Hardy, he went into his office, got a gun from his desk, and ordered him to leave the office. As John Hardy turned to leave, the registrar followed him and struck him on the back of the head with his gun, saying, "Get out of here you damn son-of-a-bitch and don't come back in here."³

John Hardy, bleeding from the head, staggered out of the building, helped by Mrs. Peters and Lucius Wilson, where he was soon met by the sheriff. When he told the sheriff what had happened, the sheriff pointed to Lucius Wilson and said, "If that boy wants to register he know how to go down to that courthouse and he don't need you to escort him. You don't have a bit of business in the world down there." Then the sheriff arrested John Hardy "for disturbing the peace and bringing an uprising among the people."

After some legal wrangling, the case against Hardy was dropped. Stern then requested Judge Cox to order Whithall County to cease discriminating against black voters. Judge Cox rejected Stern's motion, arguing that the reason only two of the 2,490 blacks in the county were registered was due to the fact that blacks "have not been interested in registering to vote." He also summarily dismissed evidence that the sheriff's actions against Hardy had scared people who wanted to register: "that incident did not frighten or deter any Negro in the county from registering or attempting to register."⁴

Stern explained:

The Department of Justice continued to pursue these voter discrimination cases, county by county, case by case, but it was obvious that there had to be a quicker, more effective way than battling Judge Cox and the Mississippi legislature while they constantly erected new barriers to black voter registration.⁵

CONNECTIONS

1. How does Stern's story illustrate the enforcement of white supremacy in Mississippi?
2. What does Hardy's story suggest about the obstacles that prevented blacks from voting in Mississippi? In the United States, what resources could a civil rights lawyer contribute? What does this story suggest about the limits of their power?
3. Why did Mose McGee think it was so important for blacks in Walthall County to get the right to vote? For him, what was at stake?
4. How do you explain the sheriff's treatment of Hardy?

5. Allard Lowenstein, a political activist who helped to focus public attention on Mississippi, explained, “What we have discovered is that the people who run Mississippi today can only do so by force. They cannot allow free elections in Mississippi, because if they did, they wouldn't run Mississippi.”⁶ What did his comments reveal about the relationship between violence, politics, and the law in Mississippi?
6. How do you think voting rights cases like the one Stern described helped to build consensus that the country needed new protections to guarantee essential freedoms for black Americans in the South?

Document 3: FREEDOM SUMMER

As a result of the sit-ins in Nashville, SNCC's membership and organizational capabilities had grown extensively. Increasingly, SNCC adopted riskier projects in its campaign to raise awareness of the second-class status of black Americans. Early in 1964, SNCC announced the launch of its most ambitious project to date: a multipronged assault on racism in Mississippi. Led by project director Bob Moses, SNCC attempted to recruit students from Northern universities and enlist their skills and enthusiasm in the movement's activities. The following excerpts were taken from SNCC's recruitment pamphlet:

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSISSIPPI PROJECT

Although the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee has active projects in thirteen Southern states, it has achieved its most dynamic success in the state of Mississippi. A state where individual political life is non-existent, where the economic condition of a vast majority of the population is appalling, the home of white supremacy, Mississippi has become the main target of SNCC's staff and resources.

In August 1961, SNCC went into Mississippi under the leadership of Project Director Robert Moses.

Overcoming violence and hardship, SNCC workers have been able to expand their activity into all five of Mississippi's congressional districts. By fall 1963, SNCC had joined with CORE, SCLC, the NAACP and many voting and civic groups in forming a statewide organization, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and through COFO conducted a Freedom Vote campaign in which 80,000 disenfranchised Negroes cast ballots for Aaron Henry for Governor.

Preparation for real democracy calls for additional programs in the state. Literacy projects have been instituted, and food and clothing drives. But much more comprehensive programs are needed to combat the terrible cultural and economic deprivation of Negro communities in Mississippi.



SNCC Poster used in campaign to register blacks to vote during Freedom Summer in Mississippi.

One Man, One Vote Photograph, Elinor Freedom Summer Collection Posters, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi. Courtesy of Danny Lyon and Edwyn Houk Gallery, request permission of additional printings

This summer, SNCC, in cooperation with COFO, is launching a massive Peace Corps-type operation in Mississippi. Students, teachers, technicians, nurses, artists and legal advisors will be recruited to come to Mississippi to staff a wide range of programs that include voter registration, freedom schools, community centers and special projects.

VOTER REGISTRATION

The struggle for freedom in Mississippi can only be won by a combination of action within the state and a heightened awareness throughout the country of the need for massive federal intervention to ensure the voting rights of Negroes. This summer's program will work toward both objectives.

Voter registration workers will operate in every rural county and important urban area in the state. These workers will be involved in a summer-long drive to mobilize the Negro community of Mississippi and assist in developing local leadership and organization.

Forty thousand dollars must be raised for a Freedom Registration campaign. The registration campaign which was launched in February will be implemented by summer workers. Freedom Registrars will be established in every precinct, with registration books closely resembling the official books of the state. The Freedom Registration books will serve as a basis for challenging the official books and the validity of "official" federal elections this fall.

Finally, voter registration workers will assist in the summer campaigns of Freedom Candidates who will be running for congressional office.

FREEDOM SCHOOLS

An integral part of SNCC's voter registration work is the development of leadership for politically emerging communities. Freedom Schools will begin to supply the political education which the existing system does not provide for Negroes in Mississippi.

The summer project will establish ten daytime Freedom Schools and three resident schools. The daytime schools will be attended by 10th, 11th, and 12th grade pupils; the schools will operate five days a week in the students' home towns. Instruction will be highly individualized—each school will have about fifteen teachers and fifty students. The program will include remedial work in reading, math and basic grammar, as well as seminars in political science, the humanities, journalism and creative writing. Wherever possible, studies will be related to problems in the students' own society.

The three resident schools will be attended by more advanced students from throughout the state. The program will be essentially the same as that of the day schools, with emphasis on political studies.

The students who attend the schools will provide Mississippi with a nucleus of leadership committed to critical thought and social action.

COMMUNITY CENTERS

In addition to the Freedom Schools, Community Centers will provide services normally denied the Negro community in Mississippi. Staffed by experienced social workers, nurses, librarians and teachers in the arts and crafts, the centers will provide educational and cultural programs for the community. Instruction will be given in pre-natal and infant care, and general hygiene; programs will provide adult literacy and vocational training. The thirty thousand books now in SNCC's Greenwood office library will be distributed to these centers, and others will be obtained. The centers will serve as places of political education and organization, and will provide a structure to channel a wide range of programs into the Negro community in the future.

RESEARCH PROJECT

The program of voter registration and political organization will attempt to change the fundamental structure of political and economic activity in Mississippi. In order to accurately picture this structure, extensive research must be done into Mississippi's suppressive political and economic life. Skilled personnel are needed to carry out this program both from within and outside the state.

WHITE COMMUNITY PROJECT

The effort to organize and educate Mississippi whites in the direction of democracy and decency can no longer be delayed. About thirty students, Southern whites who have recently joined the civil rights movement, will begin pilot projects in white communities. An attempt will be made to organize poor white areas to make steps toward eliminating bigotry, poverty and ignorance.

LAW STUDENT PROJECT

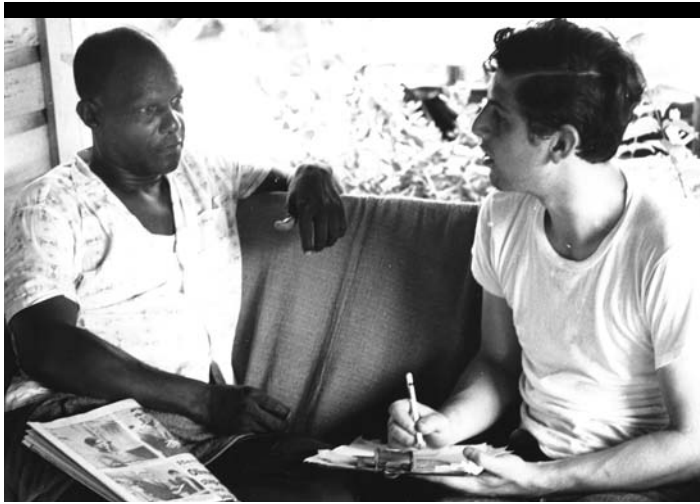
A large number of law students will come to Mississippi to launch a massive legal offensive against the official tyranny of the state. The time has come to challenge every Mississippi law which deprives Negroes of their rights, and to bring suit against every state and local official who commits crimes in the name of his office.⁷

CONNECTIONS

1. What were the main objectives and key principles of Freedom Summer? How did each component of the plan seek to address years of injustice?
2. If you participated in Freedom Summer, to which area would you lend your support? Write an application to the project organizers.
3. The SNCC brochure references the need for political education in Freedom Schools. What might their curriculum include? What was SNCC's educational vision? Whom did it seek to educate?
4. How was Freedom Summer designed to change the political structure of Mississippi?
5. Between 800 and 1,000 black and white college students from around the country participated in Freedom Summer. What do you think attracted them to such dangerous work?
6. What opportunities are available for people today who want to get involved in social justice projects?

Document 4: AN INTEGRATED MOVEMENT

Voter Registration Canvassing, Herbert Randall Freedom Summer Photographs, McCain Library Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi. Used with permission of Herbert Randall.



During Freedom Summer, white college students joined SNCC volunteers in a voting drive in the most neglected black communities in Mississippi.

As SNCC staff planned the Mississippi Summer Project, organizers repeatedly debated the role of white participants in the movement. Some argued that the media attention whites received would overshadow the efforts of black activists who had fought local authorities over voter rights for years. Others feared that Northern whites would be unaware of the local culture and the risks they would face—and that they might inadvertently endanger themselves and those they were trying to help.⁸ With the decision to intensify the voter registration campaign in Mississippi, this issue came to the fore. In the interview below, Bob Moses explained the process that resulted in the inclusion of whites in the campaign:

What was in the offing was whether SNCC could integrate itself, as it were, and live as a sort of island of integration in a sea of separation. And SNCC was trying to work itself out as an organization which was integrated in all levels. The question of white volunteers, or white SNCC staffers, came up in this context. Are they to be confined to the Atlanta office? And they're pushing, those that are there, to get out in the field. If they come over to Mississippi, are they to be confined to Jackson? Is there a way for them to work in the field? There was constant pressure about what the goals of the organization were.

I think it was January 1964, and we were in Hattiesburg having a demonstration, picketing the courthouse. Mrs. Hamer [a sharecropper turned activist from Hattiesburg, Mississippi] was there and staff from all around the state, and we were taking up the question again. We got a telephone call that Louis Allen [black witness to the 1961 shooting of Herbert Lee] had been murdered on his front lawn in Liberty. I went over there to speak to his wife, who then moved down to Baton Rouge, and in the process of helping her and thinking through this, I felt like I had to step in and make my weight felt in terms of this decision about the summer project. Because up to then I had just been letting the discussion go on. I guess what I felt was that, as we were going now, we couldn't guarantee the safety of the people we were working with. There were larger things that were happening in the country: there was the 1963 civil rights bill. Mississippi was reacting to that, and we were feeling the backlash that was growing in Mississippi against gains that were being made nationally but which were not having any immediate effect in Mississippi in terms of people being able to participate in some of those gains. But what they were feeling was the oppression, the backlash that was rising up in Mississippi—burning churches, the murder

of two boys from Alcorn State occurred at that same time, Louis Allen down there in Liberty. We felt that we had to do something. And I felt that in that context that I had to step in between this loggerhead between the staff on the one hand and the people that we were working with. And so that's how the decision was made to invite the students down for the summer of 1964.⁹

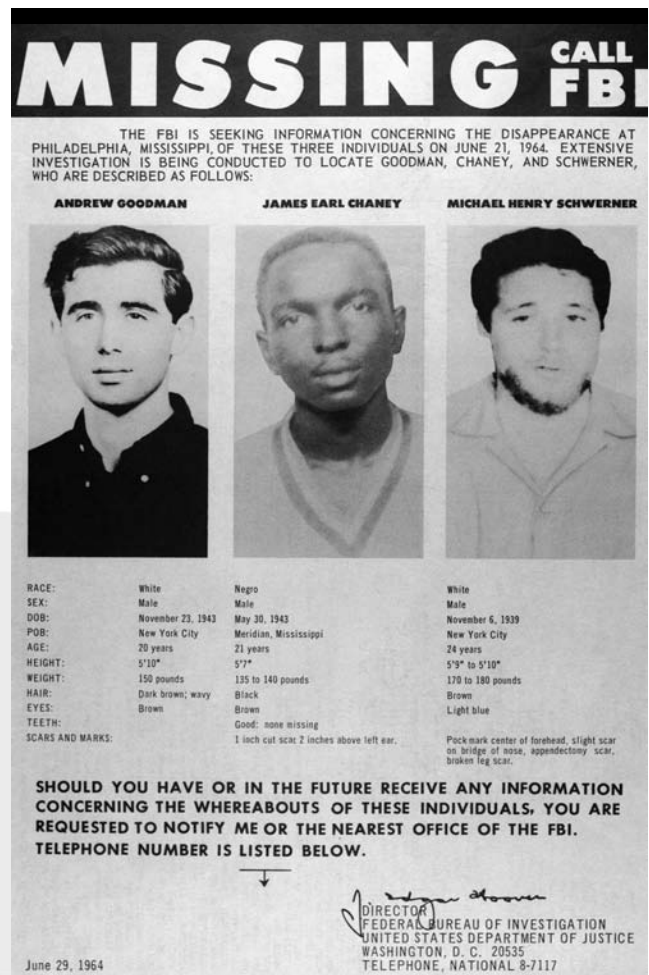
During Freedom Summer, SNCC volunteers worked in integrated teams—blacks and whites together—visiting churches, running schools, and trying to register voters. On June 21, three civil rights workers went missing: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner. Chaney was black; Goodman and Schwerner were white Northerners. Their disappearance quickly became national news.

Rita Schwerner, Mickey Schwerner's wife (and later widow), responded to the attention aroused by her husband's disappearance:

It's tragic as far as I am concerned that White Northerners have to be caught up in the machinery of injustice and indifference in the South before the American people register concern. I personally suspect that if Mr. Chaney [...] had been alone at the time of his disappearance, that this case, like so many others that have come before it, it would have gone completely unnoticed.¹⁰

On August 4, 1964, 44 days after their disappearance, the bodies of the three activists were found on a farm outside the town of Philadelphia, Mississippi. Reports revealed that James Chaney, the lone black victim, had been beaten. Chaney's and Schwerner's parents requested that their children be buried side by side in Meridian, Mississippi, but local laws prohibited it. Integration was illegal—even for the dead. Martha Honey, a white SNCC volunteer from Oberlin College who attended Chaney's funeral, reflected on the challenges outsiders experienced while working to reform Mississippi's social system. She expressed her confusion in a letter to a classmate:

There is such an overpowering task ahead of these kids that sometimes I can't do anything but cry for them. I hope they are up to the task, I'm not sure I would be if I were a



An FBI missing persons poster displaying the pictures of Freedom Summer volunteers Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner. The murder of white volunteers drew attention to this centuries old practice of racially motivated killing.

Mississippi Negro. As a white northerner I can get involved whenever I feel like it and run home whenever I get bored or frustrated or scared. I hate the attitude and position of the Northern whites and despise myself when I think that way.

Lately I've been feeling homesick and longing for pleasant old Westport and sailing and swimming and my friends. I don't quite know what to do because I can't ignore my desire to go home and yet I feel I am a much weaker person than I like to think I am because I do have these emotions. I've always tried to avoid situations which aren't so nice, like arguments and dirty houses and now maybe Mississippi. I asked my father if I could stay down here for a whole year and I was almost glad when he said "no" that we couldn't afford it because it would mean supporting me this year in addition to three more years of college. I have a desire to go home and to read a lot and go to Quaker meetings and be by myself so I can think about all this rather than being in the middle of it all the time. But I know if my emotions run like they have in the past, that I can only take that pacific sort of life for a little while and then I get the desire to be active again and get involved with knowing other people.

I guess this all sounds crazy and I seem to always think out my problems as I write to you. I am angry because I have a choice as to whether or not to work in the Movement and I am playing upon that choice and leaving here. I wish I could talk with you 'cause I'd like to know if you ever felt this way about anything. I mean have you ever despised yourself for your weak conviction or something. And what is making it worse is that all those damn northerners are thinking of me as a brave hero.¹¹

Unita Blackwell grew up as a sharecropper in Mississippi; she became involved in the civil rights movement shortly after SNCC activists first spoke in her town and was later one of the founding members of the MFDP. In an interview for the radio documentary *Oh Freedom Over Me* she recalled how white activists influenced her work:

[W]hen the whites came in, I think it was a reassurance that all white people was not like the ones that we were dealing with. That was, to me, that was an interesting situation, you know, to sit in a room and talk to white people, not they talking down to me or I'm talking up, looking up to them. We're trying to figure out some strategies for us to all stay alive and work out, you know, how we're going to get things done and registered and vote and all that.

I think we all have hang-ups on color—who's black, white, whatever. And I call that prejudice and hang-ups and so forth. And in communities and so forth to see white people, for our people it was a strategy, because we, we didn't want them to stay too long in some cases because their life was truly in danger because they was white, and because they call them nigger lovers and all these other kinds of things. But also it was a way for people to see that because we had been so isolated.¹²

CONNECTIONS

1. What were the challenges and dangers of organizing an integrated movement in an environment hostile to integration?
2. What influenced Moses's decision to invite the white students to participate in Freedom Summer?
3. What did the presence of white volunteers contribute to the Mississippi Freedom movement? What challenges did their participation create?
4. With what feelings and impulses was Honey struggling in the letter to her friend? How would you respond if you were her friend? Write a response.
5. How did Blackwell's experiences in working on integrated teams affect her? How did she assess the impact of whites on the Mississippi movement?

Document 5: FREEDOM SONGS

Civil rights workers maintained their spirits by singing freedom songs which bolstered their courage and fostered a sense of community. Music had a deep and lasting effect on the hearts and minds of participants; in interviews, many civil rights activists still remembered the songs they sang, at mass meetings, before a march, or as they were taken to prison. Andrew Young remembered how James Bevel, Sam Block, and Willie Peacock used music to help them organize in Mississippi:

[T]hey often brought in singing groups to movement friendly churches as a first step in their efforts. They were natives of the Delta and they knew how little chance they stood of gaining the people's trust if they presented themselves as straight out organizers; people were too afraid to respond to that approach. So they organized gospel groups and hit the road. Both Peacock and Block were fine singers; under the cover of a musical group they sang and spoke their way through the black communities of the Delta, from Greenville to Greenwood.¹³

The radio documentary *Oh Freedom Over Me* discussed the role of music in the Mississippi movement:

Hollis Watkins often led the singing at Mississippi civil rights meetings. There's a recording of a 1963 rally in Jackson, for example, in which he leads in the singing of "Oh, Freedom Over Me." More than thirty years later, Watkins explains that most of the freedom songs were adapted from gospel, blues, and folk, as tools for organizing and mobilizing people.

"In the mass meetings you wanted to raise the interest, you wanted to raise the spirit," Watkins says. "And in doing that, it coincided with what would be going on in your daily activities." He sings: "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, turn me 'round, turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, I'm gonna keep on walkin', keep on talkin', fightin' for my equal rights.

"And as you sang the different songs getting the spirit and the momentum goin', you

could eventually get to the song where you sang the question that kind of locked people in. 'Will you register and vote?' 'Certainly Lord.' 'Will you march downtown?' 'Certainly Lord.'

"The late Fanny Lou Hamer," Watkins adds, "she was good about that. After we'd get people to singing certain songs, if they made certain commitments in songs, then she would hold them to that after the meeting."¹⁴

CONNECTIONS

1. How can music build community and bolster morale?
2. How do you think music was able to help civil rights activists gain the trust of people who were reluctant to follow community organizers?
3. How do you think singing about activism at a meeting or in a church encouraged people to make a commitment to march or to register to vote?

Document 6: **INCOMPLETE JUSTICE: FORTY YEARS LATER**

In 2005, 41 years after James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner were killed, Edgar Ray Killen, a Klansman and felon, was finally convicted for his role in their murder. After the trial, Rita Bender, a former CORE member and Mickey Schwerner's widow, told reporters, "I hope that this conviction helps to shed some light on what has happened in this state."¹⁵ Despite the conviction, Bender was troubled that Killen's conviction was for the lesser charge of manslaughter rather than murder. After the trial she sent an open letter to Governor Haley Barbour, challenging his suggestion that it was now time for "closure."

July 17, 2005

Dear Gov. Barbour:

I am writing this letter because of recent and past actions of yours which are impediments to racial justice in Mississippi and our nation.

Recently, after the verdict and sentencing in the Edgar Ray Killen trial in Neshoba County, you indicated your belief that this closed the books on the crimes of the civil rights years, and that we all should now have "closure."

A day or so earlier, when Ben Chaney, the brother of the murdered African American, James Earl Chaney, criticized you for wearing a Confederate battle flag pin on your lapel daily, you responded by saying it was the symbol of the Mississippi National Guard, and if anyone didn't like your wearing it, "tough."

Not long ago, you actively resisted the effort in Mississippi to remove that Confederate symbol from the state flag. The Confederate battle flag has long been the banner of segregation and racism, not to mention that it has been widely embraced by the Ku Klux Klan throughout the Klan's hateful history.

While chairman of the National Republican Party, you attended functions of the Council of Conservative Citizens [CCC], known as the successor to the White Citizens' Councils in the state of Mississippi. When called on your participation with the CCC, you publicly refused to apologize or disassociate yourself.

Nor, it must be said, have you acted alone. In the same week that the Neshoba jury returned its guilty verdicts, your two Republican colleagues, U.S. Senators Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, refused to join 92 other senators in a resolution of apology for the Senate's repeated failures to pass anti-lynching legislation. Had such federal legislation been passed, it is possible that many lives would have been saved.

Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings of any state in the country; The Clarion-Ledger counted 581, and presumably there were others never included in the count. The message to those who would continue to do harm is loud and clear: Murder of African Americans deserves no apology.

So long as such symbols and coded messages are conveyed by high public officials, your state continues to encourage racism, and the potential for violence which it spawns. The venom is spread, and hatred continues to flourish.

Restorative justice can only come with recognition of the past, acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and acceptance of responsibility in the present by government and individuals to ameliorate the harm done.

People in positions of public trust, such as you, must take the lead in opening the window upon the many years of criminal conduct in which the state, and its officials, engaged. Only with such acknowledgement will the present generation understand how these many terrible crimes occurred, and the responsibility which present officials, voters and, indeed, all citizens, have to each other to move forward.

It is unfortunate that it is not yet well known that the state of Mississippi funded the state Sovereignty Commission from 1957 through 1973. The funding came from taxes paid by the citizenry—which means that the African-American population of the state, some 40 percent of Mississippi's population, was forced to pay for the governmental entity which spied upon them; caused them to lose jobs and to be forced off the land they farmed; and participated in crimes of beatings, church burnings and murder.

The Sovereignty Commission funded the White Citizens['] Councils, which used this money to launch a campaign of disinformation both within the state and in the Northern states. The councils spread racist ideology which served to encourage violence.

The Sovereignty Commission used its funds to hire staff investigators and private detectives. It employed informants. Information gathered included license numbers and vehicle

descriptions for persons identified as civil rights activists, as well as physical descriptions of these persons and their day-to-day activities. Medgar Evers was spied upon in this manner for years before his death. So were Mickey Schwerner and I.

The information gathered was passed on to law enforcement officers around the state, many of whom were themselves members of the Ku Klux Klan. There was no secret that the Klan and the police, sheriffs' departments and state highway patrol officers were often one and the same.

Bankers were notified of the identity of African Americans who attempted to register to vote, and bankers then called in loans. The commission contacted employers and land owners about persons attempting to register, or who were otherwise engaged in civil rights activities, resulting in people losing jobs or being forced off land which they had share-cropped for generations.

At the request of the defense, the commission investigated the jury panel in the first trial of Byron De La Beckwith for the murder of Medgar Evers in 1964. The commission reported back to the defense its findings as to which members of the panel were not expected to be favorable to Beckwith.

The defense was then in a position to eliminate these jurors from the panel. An arm of the state was assisting the defense in a case the state was supposed to be prosecuting. This is a grotesque perversion of the criminal justice system.

The commission provided its investigative reports to The Clarion-Ledger and other newspapers in the state until 1967, and those reports were then used by the newspapers to distort and defame the civil rights movement. (The Clarion-Ledger has apologized for its activities.)

The commission requested newspapers to suppress the reporting of violence against black persons. For example, the commission succeeded in preventing the reporting of the beatings and church burning in Philadelphia on June 16, 1964. This coverage was omitted from news reports to accommodate the request of a Philadelphia banker, who was seeking to convince an out-of-state investor to bring his business to Mississippi.

Each successive governor served as the Sovereignty Commission chairman. He was sent the investigative reports of the commission. Each governor had knowledge of the full range of shameful, illegal, and often violent activities encouraged or directly engaged in by the commission staff.

Why else can there not yet be closure? There were many acts of brutality, and far too many murders, which were never acknowledged. There are many violent criminals, living their lives among their neighbors in communities throughout the state, who have never been

charged or punished for their crimes.

After 41 years, the state brought murder charges against one man, Edgar Ray Killen, for the Neshoba murders. However, some seven other men known to be involved in those murders are still alive but have never been charged. The bodies of at least four other young men were found during the search for Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. Their killers have never been brought to justice. The men who burned the Mt. Zion Church in Philadelphia and the scores of other black churches throughout the state were never charged with those crimes.

Certainly, as the present governor, you must be aware of this history. This history must be known and understood by everyone.

I spoke with many people in Neshoba County who are striving to understand the truth, and who are burdened by the responsibility they carry with them for the actions of their community and their state.

But, there are still too many people who see only what they are comfortable recognizing. Just as some members of the jury in Philadelphia could refuse to acknowledge the premeditation in Edgar Ray Killen's acts, some of the people I met are unable to acknowledge any responsibility for the many horrors which occurred. Until individuals and their government understand why they do have responsibility, they cannot ensure racial justice and equality.

So, please do not assume that the book is closed. There is yet much work to be done. As the governor of Mississippi, you have a unique opportunity to acknowledge the past and to participate in ensuring a meaningful future for your state.

Please don't squander this moment by proclaiming that the past does not inform the present and the future.

Respectfully,

Rita L. Bender (formerly Rita L. Schwerner)

Seattle, Washington¹⁶

CONNECTIONS

1. Is justice still possible 41 years after the brutal murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner? What would constitute justice?
2. Why do you think it took 41 years to finally convict someone for the murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner?
3. Why did Bender address her letter to Governor Barbour? What does she want him to consider? How did the conditions she described—impunity, spying, etc.—undermine the foundation of a democratic society?

4. What does the Confederate flag represent according to Bender? What does the Council of Conservative Citizens represent? The Sovereignty Commission?
5. According to Bender, what are the signs that Mississippi's government has not fully addressed the legacy of segregation? What do these symbols, attitudes, and other vestiges of segregation suggest about the relationship between history and contemporary culture?

Document 7: TAKING IT FOR OURSELVES

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Fannie Lou Hamer speaking at a Credential Committee meeting during the DNC in 1964. She and other members of the MFDP were elected by voters newly registered during the Mississippi Freedom Summer. The MFDP was denied seats at the DNC.

Due to the severity of segregation in Mississippi, black residents could not register to vote through normal channels. In their efforts to increase black voter registration, local and national civil rights leaders formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as an alternative to the official, but all-white Mississippi Democratic Party. The MFDP adhered to all the rules and guidelines of the Democratic Party in the hopes that they would be officially accepted at the Democratic National Convention (DNC).

The COFO, SNCC, and Freedom Summer volunteers registered tens of thousands of black Mississippians through the MFDP. The MFDP then selected delegates to attend the 1964 DNC in Atlantic City, New Jersey and pleaded their case as the true democratic representatives of

Mississippi's voters to the DNC's Credential Committee. Fannie Lou Hamer was among the MFDP delegates. In the following excerpt she describes her journey from sharecropper to MFDP delegate:

I was born October sixth, nineteen and seventeen in Montgomery County, Mississippi. My parents moved to Sunflower County when I was two years old, to a plantation about four and a half miles from here, Mr. E. W. Brandon's plantation.

[...] My parents were sharecroppers and they had a big family. Twenty children. Fourteen boys and six girls. I'm the twentieth child. All of us worked in the fields, of course, but we never did get anything out of sharecropping. [...]

My life has been almost like my mother's was, because I married a man who sharecropped. We didn't have it easy and the only way we could ever make it through the winter was because Pap had a little juke joint and we made liquor. That was the only way we made it. I married in 1944 and stayed on the plantation until 1962 when I went down to the courthouse in Indianola to register to vote. That happened because I went to a mass meeting one night.

Until then I'd never heard of no mass meeting and I didn't know that a Negro could register and vote. Bob Moses, Reggie Robinson, Jim Bevel and James Forman were some of the SNCC workers who ran that meeting. When they asked for those to raise their hands

who'd go down to the courthouse the next day, I raised mine. Had it up as high as I could get it. I guess if I'd had any sense I'd a-been a little scared, but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do to me was kill me and it seemed like they'd been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember.

Well, there was eighteen of us who went down to the courthouse that day and all of us were arrested. Police said the bus was painted the wrong color—said it was too yellow. After I got bailed out I went back to the plantation where Pap and I had lived for eighteen years. My oldest girl met me and told me that Mr. Marlow, the plantation owner, was mad and raising sand. He had heard that I had tried to register. That night he called on us and said, “We’re not going to have this in Mississippi and you will have to withdraw. I am looking for your answer, yea or nay?” I just looked. He said, “I will give you until tomorrow morning. And if you don’t withdraw you will have to leave. If you do go withdraw, it’s only how I feel, you might still have to leave.” So I left that same night. Pap had to stay on till work on the plantation was through. Ten days later they fired into Mrs. Tucker’s house where I was staying. They also shot two girls at Mr. Sissel’s.

That was a rough winter. I hadn’t a chance to do any canning before I got kicked off, so didn’t have hardly anything. I always can more than my family can use ’cause there’s always people who don’t have enough. That winter was bad, though. Pap couldn’t get a job nowhere ’cause everybody knew he was my husband. We made it on through, though, and since then I just been trying to work and get our people organized.

I reckon the most horrible experience I’ve had was in June of 1963. I was arrested along with several others in Winona, Mississippi. That’s in Montgomery County, the county where I was born. I was carried to a cell and locked up with Euvester Simpson. I began to hear the sound of licks, and I could hear people screaming. [...]

After then, the State Highway patrolmen came and carried me out of the cell into another cell where there were two Negro prisoners. The patrolman gave the first Negro a long blackjack that was heavy. It was loaded with something and they had me lay down on the bunk with my face down, and I was beat. I was beat by the first Negro till he gave out. Then the patrolman ordered the other man to take the blackjack and he began to beat. [...]

After I got out of jail, half dead, I found out that Medgar Evers had been shot down in his own yard.

I’ve worked on voter registration here ever since I went to that first mass meeting. In 1964 we registered 63,000 black people from Mississippi into the Freedom Democratic Party. We formed our own party because the whites wouldn’t even let us register. We decided to challenge the white Mississippi Democratic Party at the National Convention. We followed all the laws that the white people themselves made. We tried to attend the precinct meetings

and they locked the doors on us or moved the meetings and that's against the laws they made for their own selves. So we were the ones that held the real precinct meetings. At all these meetings across the state we elected our representatives, to go to the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. But we learned the hard way that even though we had all the law and all the righteousness on our side—that white man is not going to give up his power to us.

We have to build our own power. We have to win every single political office we can, where we have a majority of black people.

The question for black people is not, when is the white man going to give us our rights, or when is he going to give us good education for our children, or when is he going to give us jobs—if the white man gives you anything just remember when he gets ready he will take it right back. We have to take for ourselves.¹⁷

The DNC nominated Lyndon B. Johnson (who had assumed office after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963). Under pressure from Johnson, the Credential Committee rejected an appeal for an open vote on the MFDP petition, and offered, instead, to seat two of the MFDP delegates. Disappointed, the MFDP delegation returned to Mississippi.

John Lewis, the onetime head of SNCC, believed, as did many others, “that had the decision to seat the MFDP delegates reached a floor vote, especially after Fannie Lou Hamer’s testimony, the Mississippi regulars would have been ousted and replaced.” Many activists saw the MFDP delegation to the DNC as the culmination of many years of hard work, and the refusal of the Democratic Party even to vote on the issue shook their confidence in the US political process as a whole. Lewis recalled the devastating impact the dismissal of the MFDP had on SNCC and many other civil rights activists:

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. [...] That loss of faith would spread through Lyndon Johnson’s term in office, from civil rights and into the issue of Vietnam. [...] That crisis of confidence, the spirit of cynicism and suspicion and mistrust that infects the attitude of many Americans toward their government today, began, I firmly believe, that week in Atlantic City. Something was set in motion that week that would never go away.¹⁸

CONNECTIONS

1. Create an identity chart (an example of an identity chart can be found in Episode 3) for Fannie Lou Hamer. How did her identity change over time?

2. Politics is often considered to be the art of compromise. Although the Credential Committee did not allow MFDP's delegates to replace Mississippi's all-white representatives, it did offer to compromise and give them two seats at the convention. The MFDP refused to accept this offer. What do you think about its decision?
3. What does Hamer's story suggest about the difficulties in changing an unjust system?
4. Why did Lewis think that the failure of the DNC to recognize the MFDP caused such widespread despair among black and white activists? Why does he trace contemporary indifference and cynicism regarding the democratic process back to that convention?
5. Despite the immediate setback to the MFDP, many people in America and around the world were inspired by the values and actions of the Freedom Summer, and the Democratic Party never seated a segregated delegation after the 1964 convention. How would you evaluate the success of the MFDP? How would you assess the legacy of the Freedom Summer?

¹ "Mississippi: Is This America?" (1962–64), *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*, VHS, Produced by Henry Hampton (Boston, MA: Blackside, 1986).

² E. David Cronon (ed.), *Twentieth Century America Selected Readings* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1965), 460–61.

³ Gerald Stern, "Mississippi," from *Outside The Law: Narratives on Justice in America*, edited by Susan Richard Shreve and Porter Shreve (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 164–65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 166–67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶ Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 228.

⁷ Cronon (ed.), *Twentieth Century America*, 460–61.

⁸ John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 249.

⁹ Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 183–84.

¹⁰ "Mississippi: Is This America?"

¹¹ Martha Honey, "Letter from Mississippi Freedom Summer," August 9, 1964, as quoted in Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove, *Voices of a People's History of the United States* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 402–3.

¹² John Blewen, "Oh Freedom Over Me—Selected Interviews: Unita Blackwell," *American Radio Works*, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/oh_freedom/interview_blackwell.html (accessed on May 1, 2006).

¹³ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 150–51.

¹⁴ John Blewen, "Oh Freedom Over Me," *American Radio Works*, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/oh_freedom/story9.html (accessed on May 5, 2006).

¹⁵ Junious Ricardo Stanton, "Justice Delayed, Justice Denied," *The Black World Today*, <http://www.tbwt.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=506&Itemid=41> (accessed on August 16, 2006).

¹⁶ Rita Schwerner Bender, "After trial, Bender challenges Barbour," *The Clarion-Ledger*, July 17, 2005, <http://www.clarionledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050717/OPINION/507170339/1002> (accessed August 4, 2006).

¹⁷ Fannie Lou Hamer, *To Praise Our Bridges: An Autobiography of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Jackson: KIPCO, 1967), as quoted in Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, *The Eyes on the Prize Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 176–79.

¹⁸ Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 291.