



## *Freedom Summer* (JUNE 21, 1964)

On August 4, 1964, the bodies of three Civil Rights workers, Michael Schwerner, James E. Chaney and Andrew Goodman, were found in a dam on a farm near Philadelphia, Mississippi. The three young men had disappeared six weeks earlier on June 21, 1964. These murders shocked Americans as news reports of these cold blooded killings circulated throughout the nation. The men had been ambushed by the Ku Klux Klan in retaliation for their participation in a massive drive to register African American voters known as *Freedom Summer*. This moving one-hour documentary explores the events of that summer, including the disappearance and murder of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman, and the contributions of the brave men and women who stared down Jim Crow. The events of that summer marked a turning point in U.S. history and in the Civil Rights Movement, mobilizing American society and helping spur Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This special program provides educators and their students with a gripping depiction of the United States in this watershed era. *Freedom Summer* would be an outstanding introduction to the Civil Rights Movement, giving students a complex view of the violence and hope of these years, and the transformations one summer inspired throughout the nation and the world.

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will explore the role of Freedom Summer in the Civil Rights Movement. They will learn about the organized efforts of groups such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) and the role of young Americans in changing the country, despite the persistent threat of violence.

**CURRICULUM LINKS:**

*Freedom Summer* would be useful for classes on African American History, American History, American Studies and Legal History. It is appropriate for middle school and high school. **Due to sensitive subject matter, we recommend that teachers view this program in its entirety before sharing it with students.** . It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions, (2) Conflict and cooperation, and (3) Patterns of social and political interaction.

**VOCABULARY:**

Disenfranchised

Climax

Conspiracy

Literacy

Segregation

Eulogy

Painstaking

Rhetoric

Reputed

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Freedom Summer was part of the larger Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century. Why do you think this movement necessary?
2. Describe and define Freedom Summer. Why do you think activists decided to focus on registering voters? What other issues could they have chosen to highlight?
3. Mississippi was called the “last frontier” of the Civil Rights Movement. Why? Why do you think it was chosen as the focus of Freedom Summer?
4. One of the aims of the Civil Rights Movement was to overturn the Jim Crow system of the South. What was Jim Crow? Was segregation legal? Discuss.
5. Civil Rights workers tried to help African-Americans in the South register to vote. What were some of the obstacles African-Americans faced when trying to register to vote? Discuss the constitutionality of these obstacles.
6. Who was Medgar Evers? Why was he assassinated?
7. Although white students helped to bring media attention to the Civil Rights Movement, there were some complications. Discuss the pros and cons of white students going down South to be a part of Freedom Summer.
8. The Ku Klux Klan targeted Michael Schwerner for assassination. Why? What did Schwerner do to upset the Klan?

9. Lyndon B. Johnson was president of the United States during Freedom Summer. How did Johnson deal with the events of Freedom Summer?
10. Were you surprised by the violence the Civil Rights Movement provoked? Why do you think the KKK and others reacted so violently? Discuss.
11. Discuss the legacy of Freedom Summer. What were its consequences for American society overall?

### **ACTIVITIES:**

1. Follow this link ([http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/oh\\_freedom/](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/oh_freedom/)) to the American Radio Works website where you can listen to a three-part special on Freedom Summer and see a slideshow.
2. In small groups, research and review the major events of the Civil Rights Movement leading up to and including the summer of 1964. Create a timeline illustrating the events of Freedom Summer. These timelines can be in Powerpoint format, poster-board, or any other creative medium. Share these projects with the larger class or group.
3. What do your older relatives remember about Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Movement? Interview older members of your family or your community about their recollections and/or experiences of Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Movement.
4. Using a medium of your choice, design a memorial for Michael Schwerner, James E. Cheney and Andrew Goodman.

### **PRIMARY SOURCE EXPLORATIONS:**

#### ***Excerpt of the Voting Rights Act (1965)***

*In the wake of the tragic events of Freedom Summer, Congress signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965. After reading the excerpt below, ask students to consider the questions which follow.*

AN ACT To enforce the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act shall be known as the "Voting Rights Act of 1965."

SEC. 2. No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.

1. What does Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act argue? What kind of “qualifications” for or “prerequisites” to voting existed before this act was passed? How do you think it was enforced?
2. Why do you think the Voting Rights Act mentioned the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment? (Bonus research: read the text of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment and compare/contrast its provisions with that of the Voting Rights Act.)

Follow this link

(<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0621.html#article>) for the *New York Times* June 22, 1964 reporting on the disappearance of Michael Schwerner, James E. Cheney and Andrew Goodman.

Spirituals played a large role in the Civil Rights Movement. Follow this link ([http://otter.middlebury.edu:8080/ramgen/amcivmedia/civil\\_rights\\_music/sncc\\_WokeUp.rm](http://otter.middlebury.edu:8080/ramgen/amcivmedia/civil_rights_music/sncc_WokeUp.rm)) to listen to the members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) singing a spiritual.

Follow this link (<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=100>) to access the full text of the Voting Rights Act of 1865.

## WEBSITES

The History of CORE <http://www.core-online.org/history/history%20opening.htm>

Images of Hope and Hate <http://www.newseum.org/mississippi/>

Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive  
<http://www.lib.usm.edu/~spcol/crda/index.html>

The Mississippi Burning Trial  
<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/price&bowers/price&bowers.htm>

AfricanAmericans.Com: August 4, 1964: Three civil rights activists found dead  
<http://www.africanamericans.com/CivilRightsSlaying.htm>

## FURTHER READING

Steven Kasher, *Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68* (Abbeville Press, Incorporated, 1996) Age Range: Young Adult

Rosa Parks, James Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (Penguin Young Readers Group, 1998) Age Range: Young Adult

Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California, 1996). Age Range: Senior High School and Adult.

Ruby Bridges, Margo Lundell, *Through My Eyes* (Scholastic, Inc., 1999) Age Range: 8 to 12

Leon Walter Tillage, Susan L. Roth (Illustrator), *Leon's Story* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000) Age Range: 8 to 12

Mary Turck, *Civil Rights Movement for Kids: A History with 21 Activities* (Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2000) Age Range: 12 and up