

Freedom Summer Lesson Plan: Civil Rights

Grades Eleven, Twelve, University and College Levels

Susan Williams is a Graduate Student in the Department of History at Miami University

Materials

**Primary documents regarding the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project housed in the Western College for Women Memorial Archive are available in the

Freedom Summer Digital Collection.

<http://digital.lib.muohio.edu/fs/>

Western College Memorial Archives

<http://westernarchives.lib.muohio.edu/index.php>

1. Question and answer session for students:

• *Questions from teacher:*

- a. What were the goals of the civil rights movement?
- b. When did the civil rights movement begin?
- c. What do you know about Freedom Summer?
- d. What were the outcomes of the civil rights movement?

• *Possible answers from students and teacher:*

a. Desegregation of public facilities, freedom from racial discrimination in voting and in receiving public services (i.e. food service, public transportation, etc.), equality before the law, harmony between the races, freedom in the pursuit of happiness.

b. 1940s, with A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement; 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education* case; 1955 with Montgomery Bus Boycott; 1960 with student sit-in movement

c. Summer of 1964; black and white students from North and South traveled to Mississippi to teach impoverished black Mississippians in freedom schools and to register black voters; three volunteers, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, both white, and James Chaney, a black volunteer, were killed in the first week of activism in Mississippi; the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which gave critical support to the civil rights movement, was passed with support from those citizens and Congressmen who reacted to the deaths of the three activists in Mississippi.

d. End of segregation in the South; freedom to vote (by 1968 over 1 million African-Americans were registered to vote in the South); equality before the law; increased educational, business, and governmental opportunities for African-Americans.

2. Civil Rights Quiz for students

• *See Appendix A for Quiz*

3. Provide background information on the Mississippi Freedom Summer training at Western College in Oxford, Ohio

a. The Mississippi Freedom Summer was developed by the Council of Federated Organizations to enroll impoverished and disenfranchised black Mississippians in freedom schools and register them to vote.

b. The Council of Federated Organizations was comprised of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). This group of civil rights organizations was formed to "work together to improve conditions in Mississippi" (COFO Mississippi Freedom Summer pamphlet, Folder 13, Box 6, Item 1 Mississippi Freedom Summer Digital Collection)

c. With assistance from the National Council of Churches Commission on Race and Religion, Western College for Women was chosen as the site for a two-week orientation and training session to prepare both black and white student volunteers for service in Mississippi.

d. During the training, which was held from June 14 to June 27, students were taught the basic tenets of nonviolent confrontation, as well as self-defense mechanisms to use in case of attack from hostile Mississippians. The volunteers also learned local ordinances so that they could legally challenge the discrimination that impoverished black Mississippians were facing on a daily basis.

e. On June 21, during the second week of training, the volunteers learned that three trainees from the previous week, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, both white, and James Chaney, black, had disappeared after investigating a fire at one of the freedom school locations. Their bodies were not found until August of that summer.

f. Many Western College alumni responded either favorably or critically to Western's role in the Mississippi Freedom Summer project. Reading their letters to the Western College administration can provide keen insight into national sentiment about the Civil Rights Movement.

4. Student debate using Western alumni responses (Alumnae Correspondence, Folders 8 and 9, Box 1, Freedom Summer, Western College Memorial Archives, Oxford, OH).

• *See Appendix C for Alumni Debate*

- a. Divide students into four groups
 - i. Two groups are pro-Freedom Summer training, two groups are anti-Freedom Summer training
 - ii. Combine one of each pro- and anti-training groups to create debate group
 - b. Have students read alumni responses and begin debating the pros and cons, according to the alumni, of Western allowing the Freedom Summer training and encouraging the Civil Rights Movement
 - c. Teacher walks amongst the students, evaluating student participation and encouraging
-

debate amongst the four groups

5. Alumni Debate reflection session

- *Questions for students*

- a. How did you feel arguing against the Civil Rights Movement?
- b. What does this make you think about the struggle that the student activists were up against not only in Mississippi, but across the nation?
- c. Does this change your perception of the northern response to the Civil Rights Movement? If so, how, and why or why not?

6. The Legacy and the Aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement

- a. Discuss answers to Civil Rights Quiz
 - *See Appendix B for Answer Key*
- b. Read parts of Leonard Pitts, Jr., "Racism is alive, shaking hands," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 27, 2004.
- c. Inform students of the Philadelphia reconciliation in Neshoba County, Mississippi (where three volunteers were murdered)

- *Questions for students*

- a. What is your reaction to the answers from the quiz?
- b. Were you surprised or disappointed by the answers? Why?
- c. What do the quiz answers, the racism article, and the Philadelphia reconciliation say about the legacy and the aftermath about the Civil Rights Movement?
- d. Is the Civil Rights Movement, or at least its goals, dead in America?
- e. What can we take from the Mississippi Freedom Summer experience to continue the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 21st century?

7. Student Assignment: Community Activism

- a. Locate a community action group in your hometown (NAACP, Habitat for Humanity, American Literacy Council, food bank, etc)
 - b. Create a proposal for a week long service project that you could perform during spring break
 - I. Proposal must include:
 - name, address and contact number for the community action group
 - Immediate goal to be achieved by volunteering with the group
 - Method of achieving the planned goal
 - Benefit to the local community of this action
 - Benefit to the student of volunteering with the group
 - c. Proposals are due the following class period
 - d. Students who wish to complete this project may speak to the teacher regarding University support and recognition for the project
-

Appendix A
Civil Rights: Yesterday and Today

Adapted from Myth Busters Quiz
Written by David Levine and Jennifer Arrington
<http://civilrightsteaching.org/?q=node/40>

- 1. Which of the following is TRUE of Rosa Parks, the woman who helped spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 after being arrested for defying the city's bus segregation laws?** A. She refused to give up her seat to a white man because she was tired. B. Her refusal to give up her seat on December 1, 1955 was her first act of resistance against segregated buses. C. As Secretary of the local NAACP chapter and leader of its Youth Group, she had an important history of activism before her action that began the bus boycott. D. At the time of this incident, she was an elderly seamstress who had never been politically active.
- 2. During the 1960s a free breakfast program for children in Oakland, CA was sponsored by:** A. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) B. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense C. The Big Brother/Big Sister Organization D. The National Urban League
- 3. After Rosa Parks was arrested, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was first set in motion when:** A. The Women's Political Council, under the leadership of Jo Ann Robinson, distributed 35,000 leaflet urging 42,000 black residents of Montgomery to boycott public transportation. B. Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech to Montgomery's largest black congregation, urging that the buses be boycotted until the bus company agreed to integrate them. C. Civil rights lawyers from the Justice Department came to Montgomery and convinced prominent African American ministers to initiate the boycott. D. Leaders of Montgomery's black business community urged their employees not to ride the buses.
- 4. Which of the following states had the largest number of Ku Klux Klan membership during the 1920s?** A. Mississippi B. Georgia C. Oregon D. South Carolina
- 5. Which of the following was the overarching goal of the Civil Rights Movement?** A. Integration B. Full access to all bus seats C. Equality, empowerment, and democracy D. 40 acres and a mule
- 6. The crucial element enabling progress in winning civil rights was:** A. Grassroots activism and organizing B. The federal government C. The March on Washington D. National civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Roy Wilkins of the NAACP
- 7. According to the 2000 federal census, the most segregated city in the United States is:** A. Detroit, MI B. Birmingham, AL C. Houston, TX D. Macon, GA
- 8. During most of the 20th century, blacks were prevented from voting by:** A. Intimidation, economic retaliation, and violence B. "Poll taxes" that many poor people could not afford C. Legal devices like the "grandfather clause" D. Literacy tests E. All of the above
-

Appendix B
Civil Rights: Yesterday and Today
Answer Key

Adapted from Myth Busters Quiz
Written by David Levine and Jennifer Arrington
<http://civilrightsteaching.org/?q=node/41>

1. Which of the following is TRUE of Rosa Parks, the woman who helped spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 after being arrested for defying the city's bus segregation laws?

- A. She refused to give up her seat to a white man because she was tired.
- B. Her refusal to give up her seat on December 1, 1955 was her first act of resistance against segregated buses.
- C. as Secretary of the local NAACP chapter and leader of its Youth Group, she had an important history of activism before her action that began the bus boycott.
- D. At the time of this incident, she was an elderly seamstress who had never been politically active.

Answer: C. At the time of the boycott, the 43-year-old Ms. Parks already had several run-ins with bus drivers because she opposed the law requiring Blacks to enter the bus from the back, yet pay in the front. In fact, the driver on December 1, 1955 who called the police had previously thrown her off the bus for refusing to enter through the back door. In addition to her NAACP activities, Ms. Parks was involved in trying to desegregate Montgomery's schools and had attended an interracial meeting at Tennessee's Highlander Folk Center, a key adult education facility heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

2. during the 1960s a free breakfast program for children in Oakland, CA was sponsored by:

- A. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- B. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense
- C. The Big Brother/Big Sister Organization
- D. The National Urban League

Answer: B. During the 1960s, the Black Panther Party's provocative rhetoric of armed self-defense often led to demonized representations of them as a violent group. The BPP actually presented a progressive party platform, which quotes the Declaration of Independence and advocates free health care for the poor, full employment, decent housing, and an end to police brutality. Projects like the Free Breakfast Program reflected the Panthers' commitment to community service and organizing.

3. After Rosa Parks was arrested, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was first set in motion

when:

- A. The Women’s Political Council, under the leadership of Jo Ann Robinson, distributed 35,000 leaflet urging 42,000 black residents of Montgomery to boycott public transportation.
- B. Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech to Montgomery’s largest black congregation, urging that the buses be boycotted until the bus company agreed to integrate them.
- C. Civil rights lawyers from the Justice Department came to Montgomery and convinced prominent African American ministers to initiate the boycott.
- D. Leaders of Montgomery’s black business community urged their employees not to ride the buses.

Answer: A. The crucial roles of women, grassroots organizers, and rank-and-file citizens in the Civil Rights Movement are often minimized or left out of U.S. history books. Under the leadership of Jo Ann Robinson, a college English professor, the Montgomery Women’s Political Council began organizing against segregated buses in 1949. This lay the groundwork which enabled them to mobilize black citizens quickly after Rosa Parks was arrested. NAACP leader and labor organizer E.D. Nixon bailed Ms. Parks out of jail and convened a meeting of ministers the first night of the boycott to provide leadership. At that meeting, the ministers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association and elected the 27-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. as its leader. During the 381-day boycott, thousands of blacks walked to work. The movement depended on the many people who organized fundraising activities, car pools, and coordinated taxi service. King’s oratory and leadership helped sustain the movement, but its victory was built on the daily contributions of many unsung activists.

4. Which of the following states had the largest number of Ku Klux Klan membership during the 1920s?

- A. Mississippi
- B. Georgia
- C. Oregon
- D. South Carolina

Answer: C. Racism in regions beyond the South has often been overlooked. During the 1920s, the KKK flourished in many Northern states and enjoyed a surprisingly respectable status. Confederate veterans first established the Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee at the end of the Civil War. The Klan opposed Reconstruction initiatives that extended voting rights to Blacks, as well as other measures that protected black economic and political rights. The second, more widespread Klan was established during World War I, in the context of the glorification of the KKK in D.W. Griffith’s silent film, “The Birth of a Nation,” and such actions as Woodrow Wilson’s re-segregation of D.C. federal employees. The new Klan grew to 6 million members at its peak in the 1920s, spreading to several regions of the United States and even reaching Canada. It gained political respectability within mainstream political institutions, with many Klan members serving in state legislatures.

5. Which of the following was the overarching goal of the Civil Rights Movement?

- A. Integration
- B. Full access to all bus seats
- C. Equality, empowerment, and democracy
- D. 40 acres and a mule

Answer: C. Different leaders and activists often held differing views about both tactics and ultimate visions of a just society, and the evolution of the freedom struggle meant that people's perspectives changed over time. But leaders as diverse as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X realized that it would take fundamental economic, social, and political changes to create an America in which all people were truly free.

6. The crucial element enabling progress in winning civil rights was:

- A. Grassroots activism and organizing
- B. The federal government
- C. The March on Washington
- D. National civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Roy Wilkins of the NAACP

Answer: A. Inspiring leaders, large mass demonstrations, and eventually federal civil rights legislation and enforcement all contributed to changes toward greater equality, but grassroots organizers laid the essential foundation of the movement. Largely unacknowledged in history books, they performed the unglamorous, painstaking, and often dangerous work of building trust, commitment, and collective action. Their example and leadership prompted local people to take the courageous steps to attend a rally, try to integrate a segregated facility, or walk down to the courthouse to attempt to register to vote. In cities and towns across America, it was these activities that brought about the Civil Rights revolution.

7. According to the 2000 federal census, the most segregated city in the United States is:

- A. Detroit, MI
- B. Birmingham, AL
- C. Houston, TX
- D. Macon, GA

Answer: A. Segregation has always been a national phenomenon rather than a purely Southern one, even when most African Americans lived in the South. Blacks started to move north at an accelerated rate during World War I in what came to be known as the Great Migration. Most settled in Northern ghettos, swelling these segregated enclaves in many cities. In 2000, the ten most segregated cities were Detroit, Gary, Milwaukee, Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, Newark, New York City, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.

8. During most of the 20th century, Blacks were prevented from voting by:

- A. Intimidation, economic retaliation, and violence
 - B. "Poll taxes" that many poor people could not afford
 - C. Legal devices like the "grandfather clause"
 - D. Literacy tests
 - E. All of the above
-

Answer: E. After the Civil War, many African Americans took grave risks to exercise the right to vote, encountering relentless and multifaceted white resistance. While there were important pockets of black voting strength in the South (primarily in urban areas), it was not until the mid-1960s that the Civil Rights Movement was able to decisively turn the tide against black disenfranchisement. One of the best ways to learn about the grassroots work of the Civil Rights Movement is to read the accounts of voter registration campaigns. Here one can learn about the incredible obstacles faced and the strength and determination of the people who literally risked their lives to exercise their legal right to vote.

Favorable Alumnae Responses

(Alumnae Correspondence, Folders 8 and 9, Box 1, Freedom Summer Digital Collection, Oxford, OH)
Appendix C

- "Congratulations on housing the Mississippi workers. Western at last is nearing the mainstream."
 - "I'm very proud that Western is playing a part in the Civil Rights educational progress."
 - "I like what the college is doing for Civil Rights."
 - "Your phone call prompted me to do something I'd resolved to do several days ago--commend Western for their participation in the Civil Rights Movement. All I know about it is the N.B.C. news coverage, but it seemed sound and an intelligent approach...My husband used to say the Civil War was fought to resolve the issue of states' rights, and one hundred years later we should be trying vigorously to make the victory count. Congratulations!"
 - "I do so want everyone at Western to know how thrilled I am as a former student to know what an important part the college is playing in the massive 'attack' on Mississippi. Just now I heard, via TV, a Los Angeles lawyer say that only 10 lawyers in Mississippi are Negro, and that no white lawyer would handle a civil rights defense. While Western may only be lending its facilities to the workshop, this is extremely important...I want you to know that I am prouder than ever of my school. Up until now I felt that whites' entering sit-in demonstrations perhaps were clouding the real issue, but I feel that white participation the way it is being done now is necessary and important. I would do this sort of thing myself, were I younger."
 - "Was very pleased to hear on Mike Wallace's program that Western is playing host to the young people who are trying to help integration...I think our college has taken a courageous step and hope there are no repercussions."
 - "I've hoped to find time to compose an adequate expression of my pride in
-

Western College for its part in training the Mississippi volunteers...Western College is known for acting on a concern. And that is good."

- "I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the administration of Western College on the courageous action taken in training the students for their work this summer, and also for the rare good fortune which would place Phyllis Hoyt [Dean of Students at Western] in a position where she could serve students in such a constructive manner. While I am not in a position to participate directly in the work of these students, I feel that they are in the front lines of a battle which could not be won without their dedication and courage. The small financial contribution which I was able to make to their cause seems microscopic when compared to their participation and the inspiration and leadership provided them by Western College, in making its facilities available, and by such persons as Phyllis Hoyt."

- "As a Western College alumna I have been most proud in recent weeks of my college. Its part in helping the Mississippi volunteers is a definite benefit to the most vital issue of our time--the freedom and dignity of man."
