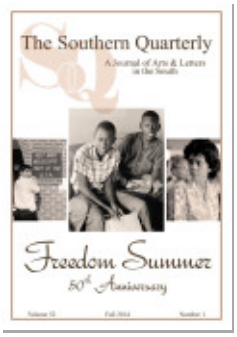
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The "Freedom Summer" Journalism Workshop at Southern Miss: Using Living History to Teach Multimedia Journalism to High School Students

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The "Freedom Summer" Journalism Workshop at Southern Miss: Using Living History to Teach Multimedia Journalism to High School Students*

CHRISTOPHER P. CAMPBELL and GINA MASULLO CHEN

Paul Terrell traveled to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for the first time in the summer of 1964 as part of a group of college students from across America who came to the state to battle the systematic abuse of its black residents. Terrell, who is white, was a senior at the University of California at Berkeley, and he came to Hattiesburg after attending training sessions for the Freedom Summer volunteers at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Terrell's second trip to Hattiesburg came fifty years later, when he and his wife Kathy traveled back to Hattiesburg to attend the Freedom Summer 1964-2014 Conference at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). In the intervening years, Terrell had completed a distinguished career as a professor of social welfare at UC-Berkeley.

He came back to Hattiesburg with a pocketful of Polaroid photographs that were taken in Hattiesburg during Freedom Summer, when he lived with the family of a local African American doctor as he worked along with community activists and other student volunteers to register African Americans to vote. Locals attending the 2014 USM conference were able to help Terrell identify the home where he had lived and many of the subjects in the fifty-year-old photographs. It was clearly an emotional return for Terrell, who, like other activists and volunteers of Freedom Summer, cited the experience as a transformational moment that had affected their entire careers.

Terrell's story was just one of the many that a group of sixteen high school students from across Mississippi were able to tell during the Remembering

* The workshop's website can be viewed at http://southernmisshsworkshop.weebly.com/. Student blog posts can be viewed at http://southernmisshsworkshop.weebly.com/blog.

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"Freedom Summer" Multimedia High School Journalism Workshop that we organized to coincide with the USM conference. This was the third time we had conducted a summer high school journalism workshop at Southern Miss, but the first in which the participants covered a specific story. We discovered that, by focusing on an event as significant as Freedom Summer, students became more engaged in learning the basics of multimedia journalism, and the opportunity to report and tell the extraordinary stories of the activists and volunteers who participated in Freedom Summer was itself a transformational experience.

The Southern Miss high school journalism workshops are similar to others held on college campuses around the country going back to the late 1960s, when the newspaper industry was attempting to rectify a situation in which newsrooms were almost entirely white and not effective at covering minority communities, especially large African American communities in urban areas. The National Commission on Civil Disorders (known as the Kerner Commission) recommended in its 1968 report that the journalism industry needed to create a pipeline to expand the pool of African Americans in journalism, including training at the secondary school level.



Workshop participants interview Paul Terrell, who in the summer of 1964 was one of hundreds of college students from across America who came to Mississippi to battle the state's systematic abuse of its black residents. Terrell returned to Mississippi 50 years later to attend a conference commemorating Freedom Summer that the workshop participants covered. Photograph by workshop participant. June 2014. Hattiesburg, MS. Used by permission of USM's School of Mass Communication and Journalism.

"Urban Journalism Workshops" sponsored by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, the Gannett Foundation, the National Association of Black Journalists, and other entities sprang up at American University, the University of Iowa, the University of Missouri, the University of Minnesota, and others. More than two dozen universities now sponsor summer high school journalism workshops. Once designed exclusively for minority students, many of the workshops now emphasize multiculturalism but accept applications from white students. That change was the result of a successful reverse discrimination lawsuit filed in 2006 by a conservative public interest law firm against Virginia Commonwealth University and its minority journalism workshop's sponsors, the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund and the *Richmond Times Dispatch* (Clark).

The "Freedom Summer" Journalism Workshop at Southern Miss

Applicants to the Remembering "Freedom Summer" Multimedia High School Journalism Workshop at The University of Southern Mississippi were required to submit their high school transcripts, a reference letter from a teacher, and an essay describing their "interest in journalism and the important role journalism plays in covering events such as Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Movement." Sixteen students were selected to participate, including twelve African Americans and four white students. They came from large and small towns across Mississippi. A few had worked for a high school newspaper and several had been on their high school yearbook staff, but very few had had any formal journalistic training, and none had received instruction in multimedia storytelling techniques, including photography, video production and social media.

The essay the students were required to compose as part of the application process gave us the opportunity to assess the applicants' writing skills. It also worked as a first step in the reporting process, as the students were required to do at least some research on Freedom Summer.

The first days of the workshop included a session in which students met with a group of local journalists, all of whom had grown up in Mississippi and studied journalism at The University of Southern Mississippi. The participants also attended a preview screening of a ninety-minute documentary, *American Experience: Freedom Summer*, which would air later in the month on PBS. In introducing the documentary, journalism professor Cheryl Jenkins discussed the importance of *context* in storytelling. The documentary included several of the civil rights activists from Hattiesburg whom the students would meet and interview later in the week.

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While all of the participants had come to the workshop with some understanding of Freedom Summer, the documentary worked to effectively frame the historical significance of the summer of 1964 and its place in the civil rights movement. Compelling for any audience, the documentary had a distinctive impact on the young Mississippians attending the workshop. Afterward, a few of the African American students contacted grandparents who for the first time discussed their lives in Jim Crow Mississippi.

The workshop participants also heard from photojournalist Jamie Bates, a Southern Miss alumnus who worked as a newspaper photographer while completing an ongoing, long-term project in which he is documenting the 21st-century Ku Klux Klan. Bates's work includes horrifying images of cross-burnings and hooded Klansmen spouting inflammatory racial rhetoric. As one of the participants blogged, "What shocked me most about the presentation was that the KKK were still even around" (Smith).

In other sessions over the first four days of the workshop, students learned reporting and interviewing skills and were trained to operate still and video cameras and produce radio stories. They honed these skills by interviewing three Hattiesburg residents who had participated in Freedom Summer: Peggy Connor, Anthony Harris, and Jeanette Smith, all of whom had appeared in the PBS documentary. The young people came up with questions to ask the



Workshop participant Destiny Farmer (left) holds microphones, as her fellow participants interview civil rights activist Peggy Jean Connor for a video story about Connor's experiences during Freedom Summer in 1964. Photograph by workshop participant. June 2014. Hattiesburg, MS. Used by permission of USM's School of Mass Communication and Journalism.



From left, workshop participants Raegan K. Johnson, Markel K. McBride and Bria Paige interview Anthony Harris, who was a child in Hattiesburg during Freedom Summer. Photograph by workshop participant. June 2014. Hattiesburg, MS. Used by permission of USM's School of Mass Communication and Journalism.

civil rights activists and told their stories in text, video, pictures and blogs posts. Hearing firsthand from the activists who were there in 1964 made history come alive for the workshop participants. "You cannot have separate (facilities). Separate is not equal," Smith told the young people in a quote that made it into their story about her. "It's hard to be a young person and not fight for your rights." Workshop participant Markel K. McBride wrote in a blog post that Connor urged African American young people to "wake up" and stand up for civil rights as Connor did in the 1960s. "Do not accept mediocrity. Go beyond what is expected of you," Harris said in a story the participants wrote about him. "I can't give up. Once I give up, I have lost everything" ("Freedom Summer").

On the fifth day, which was the first day of the 2014 Freedom Summer 1964-2014 Conference at The University of Southern Mississippi, the journalism workshop participants worked in groups to cover different sessions. They formed reporting teams with some students shooting pictures and video while others live-blogged and tweeted the event and others compiled information for text stories. The students attended sessions that focused on how Freedom Summer affected children, families, and women, as well as covered keynote addresses and interviewed participants and speakers in the hallway at the conference. Then they worked on deadline to put together a

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print newspaper—the *Freedom Summer Times*—that featured their stories and photographs. They also produced an online newspaper that featured photo galleries, video stories, broadcast packages, text stories and blog posts about the event.

One particularly poignant moment was when the participants covered a session on "Freedom Schools," which, during the summer of 1964, offered African American children in Mississippi lessons they could not get in segregated schools. They heard from adults who had been youngsters during that time. "My classmates and I just wrapped up our story on the 'Children of Freedom Summer' panel. It was a very inspiring morning," participant Zaria Bonds wrote in a blog post. "Every person in the room was engrossed in the panelists' every word. . . . This will forever be an experience I will remember."

Freedom Summer, Journalism, and Transformation

The families of the workshop participants joined us for a luncheon on the final day of the workshop, when they got a chance to see the students' work and experience some of the history in which their children had been immersed. They heard straight from their children what it was like to meet people who had been on the front lines of history during the racial strife of 1960's Mississippi.

Ultimately, the participants learned in a very short time to produce high-quality journalism about an important historical event. Whether or not the participants choose to pursue careers in journalism—as surely at least a few will—they learned about the significance and impact of Freedom Summer and the civil rights movement directly from activists and volunteers whose lives had been transformed during the summer of 1964. Participants covering the conference for the workshop newspaper quoted Terrell, the Berkeley professor, in the main story that ran on the front page of the workshop newspaper: "What was really wonderful, looking back on this, is this was a movement that really worked" ("Activists").

Looking back on our high school workshop, we can see that the surviving participants in Freedom Summer—now mostly in their 70s and 80s—continue to inspire transformational societal change. The students who participated in the workshop (not to mention the Southern Miss journalism faculty members and students who oversaw the project) left with a deeper sense of Mississippi's troubled history and the power of a social justice movement that changed the state. "All of the skills gained at this camp have made not only me, but my fellow peers, stronger journalists," workshop participant Raegan K. Johnson

wrote in a blog post on the last day of the workshop. "We definitely have a head start in the journalism world."

The University of Southern Mississippi

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