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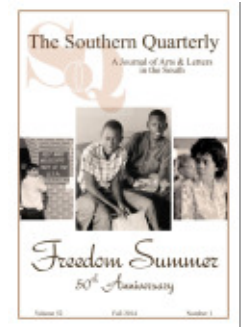
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The Southern Quarterly, Volume 52, Number 1, Fall 2014, pp. 155-172  
(Article)

Published by The University of Southern Mississippi, College of Arts  
and Sciences



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## Freedom Summer and Its Legacies in the Classroom

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LATASHA B. LEVY, and DEBORAH E. McDOWELL

In “Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States,” a report first issued in 2011 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the findings are bleak: students in the US are largely ignorant of the basic history of the civil rights movement. The report’s authors attribute this ignorance to the absence of comprehensive content standards at state levels for teaching about the movement and to a tendency to view the movement as a regional rather than national phenomenon. “Even the most experienced teachers of US history tend to rush to the finish line once their courses pass World War II,” the authors continue, and thus the civil rights movement drops out of the picture by and large, except in the form of broad brush strokes and passing references to iconic personalities (12). As Julian Bond put the matter in his foreword for the report, to the extent that the civil rights movement is taught at all, it is largely conveyed through “sanitized versions of the lives and struggles of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks” (5). And in a statement to the *New York Times*, upon the report’s release, Bond elaborated that his students, surprisingly, even those at the University of Virginia, had limited knowledge of the movement. They “knew that there used to be segregation until Martin Luther King came along, that he marched and protested, that he was killed, and that then everything was all right” (Dillon). Waldo Martin and Patricia Sullivan offer a similar assessment of the limitations of the now standard narrative of the civil rights movement. In their introduction to *Teaching the American Civil Rights Movement: Freedom’s Bittersweet Song*, they suggest that the movement is “often cast in a ‘Montgomery to Memphis’ frame that parallels the public life of Martin Luther King, Jr.” The civil rights movement, they continue,

... has taken on an air of inevitability in the popular imagination. Images and film footage have frozen the movement in time as an era when people risked their lives to end the crippling system of segregation in the South, and to secure the rights and privileges fundamental to American citizenship. For many young people, it looms as a shining moment in the distant past, with little relevance to contemporary issues concerning race, democracy, and social justice. (xi)

In planning the companion courses that we describe below—"Freedom Summer" and "Mapping Virginia in the Civil Rights Era"—we endeavored to bear the findings of the Southern Policy Law Center study in mind, as well as to confront critiques of the familiar narratives of the civil rights movement by introducing our students to its complexities in general, but particularly to the history and legacies of the dramatic moment that was the summer of 1964. Both courses are components of "50/5: Remembering the 'Modern' Movement for Civil Rights," a multi-year initiative sponsored by the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African American and African Studies at the University of Virginia to commemorate the sequence of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of activism and landmark legislation in the broad trajectory of that movement.<sup>1</sup> This initiative, which began with a colloquium marking the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, will unfold in annual installments over a five-year period from 2013-2018, and will feature a range of activities including films, concerts, plays, electronic exhibitions, lectures, and courses.

The first such course, "1963: Framing the Civil Rights Movement," a multi-disciplinary, multi-media course, also sponsored by the Carter G. Woodson Institute and offered by Deborah McDowell in the fall of 2013, was followed in the spring of 2014 by another, similarly structured course, but focused broadly on the various anniversaries of 1964, including, but not limited to, Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the abolition of the poll tax, the Harlem Riot, and the appearance of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention. "Freedom Summer" and "Mapping Virginia," the courses on which we focus here, drill down into the summer of 1964 and the legacies it spawned.

In planning these courses, taught by LaTasha Levy, Nicole Burrowes, and Laura Helton—all fellows of the Carter G. Woodson Institute—we sought to look beyond what Peter J. Ling terms the "media-spotlighted events of the 1960s," in order to "develop a richer account of the decade's struggles" (655). And specifically in "Mapping Virginia," we sought to take up Ling's

challenge by considering the “less widely known southern battlegrounds” on which the movement was also fought. We agree with Ling: “We may need to know more about less celebrated places, but equally we need to understand more fully the range of participants on the familiar battlegrounds” (655-56).

### *Framing “Freedom Summer”*

The sheer number and range of participants on the battleground of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project, or Freedom Summer, as it is more commonly known, automatically demands that we shift our focus from narratives centered on iconic personalities to those focused on communities of grassroots activists building sometimes fragile—and friable—coalitions with members of other organizations to carry out the unglamorous work of social change. We borrow the word “unglamorous” from an Alice Walker essay, “The Unglamorous but Worthwhile Duties of the Black Revolutionary Artist, or of the Black Writer Who Simply Works and Writes.” There, in a passage that surely reflects her participation in Freedom Summer, she writes, “*The real revolution is always concerned with the least glamorous stuff.*” With raising a reading level from second grade to third. With simplifying history and writing it down (or reciting it) for the old folks” (135). Our charge, therefore, was to offer courses that would expose students to the intricacies of movement-building and consciousness-raising that have been rendered invisible in conventional historical narratives and public memory.

The history of the Mississippi Summer Project is certainly well known to scholars, but our students had little knowledge of this time and place or of the consortium of organizations from which this project emanated, a coalition that formed in 1961, well before the fabled Freedom Summer of 1964. Members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), the NAACP and local groups and fraternal organizations banded together to create the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to coordinate and fund multiple initiatives in Mississippi. COFO leaders such as Aaron Henry, Bob Moses, David Dennis, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Amzie Moore, played a central role in organizing the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. This campaign bolstered the Mississippi movement through mass voter registration and the establishment of community centers, Freedom Schools, and a progressive political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. While the primary work of this course was designed to examine the daily experiences of local Mississippians, civil rights workers and students, we also worked simultaneously to situate Freedom Summer within the larger

context of the black freedom movement in the United States, the Cold War, international human rights, and anti-colonial struggles.

Every weekday for four weeks, students immersed themselves in this history in a course co-taught by post-doctoral fellow, LaTasha Levy and pre-doctoral fellow, Nicole Burrowes, with special attention given to how these historical events continue to shape or speak to present realities. The course was organized around four themes: 1) Racial Terror and Black Resistance: Catalysts for Change in Mississippi; 2) Redefining Education: The Role of Freedom Schools; 3) Challenging the Political System: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party; and 4) Freedom Visions—a week dedicated to the aftermath of Freedom Summer and its legacies and impact. We worked to create a slice of the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, with special attention to the philosophy and pedagogy underlying the Freedom Schools, one of the project's most successful, yet understudied, programs. The curriculum of the Freedom Schools was designed to counter generations of perceived mis-education, as well as educational apartheid in the Jim Crow South and to provide a blueprint for a transformative educational experience based on a dynamic and collaborative classroom culture (Hale; Logue; Perlstein; Sturkey).

SNCC field secretary and Freedom School visionary Charles Cobb suggested that the pathway to freedom and the development of leadership began with interrogation, with asking questions. For Cobb, black schools in Mississippi were “intellectual wastelands” (“Prospectus”) that were “committed to a policy of non-think, and students to an attitude of no questions” (“Some Notes” 1). Questioning was, therefore, a form of resistance which Cobb believed would help youth see the connection between “a rotting shack and a rotting America” (“This is the Situation”). In this sense, he proposed the creation of Freedom Schools as “parallel institutions” that nurtured critical thought, relevant education, racial pride, and ownership over one’s education and self-determination over one’s community. A COFO document reiterates Cobb’s point: “The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives—ultimately new directions for action” (COFO “Overview” 1). Borrowing from Cobb’s proposal, our goal was to teach students to identify a variety of myths concerning American democracy and citizenship and to understand their political and social function in the maintenance of inequality and the abridgement of freedom for African Americans historically. Students also examined myths of the civil rights movement, civil rights leadership, and a frequently referenced “black community,” often understood in simplified and uncomplicated ways.

Through a variety of readings, we examined the challenges, victories, and set-backs of the black freedom movement and brought this dramatic moment in civil rights history to life for our students.<sup>2</sup>

### *Pedagogical Approach*

While questioning through the Socratic method is widely considered fundamental to college learning, students in our “Freedom Summer” course were engaged in a form of questioning that focused explicitly on race, ideology, and power. Our course objectives were threefold: 1) to engage students in radical questioning; 2) to challenge myths that shape attitudes, beliefs, policy and historical narratives; and 3) to link the past to present realities. This latter objective worked to underscore the “fierce urgency of now,” to borrow Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous phrasing (qtd. in Washington 217-18). Given the recent challenges facing voting rights, racial justice, and disparities in wealth and education, we wanted to demystify the frequently progressivist logics of the civil rights movement, particularly those which have led to uncritical claims about the current “post-civil rights” or “post-racial” eras. By urging our students to see in these recent challenges evidence that the work of the civil rights movement is far from done, we wanted them to recognize themselves as both beneficiaries of earlier social movements and simultaneously agents of social change.

The process of questioning, confrontation, identifying myths and linking the past to the present was inevitably transformative for both the instructors and the students. In discussions, our students repeated how the specificity of Freedom Summer broadened their understanding of the movement, especially the politics of gender, and forced them to confront uncritical assumptions about the movement’s cohesiveness. As one student acknowledged, “I didn’t realize that there were so many women who were actual leaders of the movement.” Breaking down the meaning of leadership and challenging its gendered dimensions created space for students to see themselves as potential leaders. Some students came importantly to question the very idea of “leadership,” inspired by Ella Baker’s assertion that “strong people don’t need strong leaders.” Finally, students developed a more nuanced understanding of the challenges of coalition-building. “I never knew there was so much conflict and debate within these organizations,” another student observed. “I thought everyone was united and always on the same page.” Taken at face value, such insights are far from startling, but they underscore one of the fundamental objectives of the Freedom Schools that proliferated across Mississippi during the summer of 1964: to begin with students where they are.

### *Using Primary Sources*

While we made effective use of recent, revisionist scholarship on the civil rights movement, and Freedom Summer specifically, we also encouraged our students to engage with the primary materials incorporated into the Freedom School curriculum of 1964, beginning with its emphasis on what it means to be free. While the organizers certainly saw voting rights and challenges to segregation as central to ideas of freedom, they also sought to instill in their students that freedom was predicated fundamentally on the quality of education, on economic opportunity, on the preservation of culture and institutions, and the ability to live without fear.

The *Civil Rights Movement Veterans* website was invaluable to the course due to its rich repository of primary source documents related to Freedom Summer and beyond. Students had the opportunity to work with actual materials distributed during Freedom Summer 1964, including brochures and volunteer forms. The Declaration of Independence, for example, drafted by the Freedom School at St. John's Methodist Church in Palmer's Crossing, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, provided an opportunity to examine how Mississippians defined freedom and framed their pursuit of "total freedom" within and beyond the framework of American ideals. Similarly, the website features a compilation of student responses to the burning of their Freedom School, which illustrated the profound impact that racism and white vigilante violence had on the young people of Mississippi. Given the history of anti-black racism in the US, our students used these primary sources to contemplate the coterminous relationship between racism, white supremacy, democracy and citizenship and the myriad of ways that blacks resisted racial oppression.

### *Film and Music*

A significant dimension of meeting students at their level required confronting the roots and sources of the knowledge of the civil rights movement they had acquired. Not surprisingly, much of this knowledge was acquired from visual media, particularly documentaries focused on the movement. Often students believe documentaries are statements of ultimate truth, missing the interpretive gestures made by filmmakers as they construct historical narratives. In the same ways that we encouraged students to think critically about secondary texts, primary sources, and music, we wanted them to utilize similar tools to conduct visual analysis and to begin to understand the delicate balance among visuals, sound, storytelling, accuracy, and documentation. Each week, we used clips from various documentaries—

including *Freedom Riders*; *Eyes on the Prize: Mississippi: Is this America?*; *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot*; *Freedom on My Mind*; and *Freedom Summer*. We used these films to introduce key movement events and actors unknown to most of our students and to highlight the importance of the relationship between film and history in representations of the past for popular audiences.

Many documentary films on the civil rights movement have made effective use of the music of the period, and thus we highlighted this music in and beyond the films we examined. As the lifeblood of the black freedom movement, music stirred a sense of connectedness among activists and had the power to diminish their fears. Singing was so critical to the movement that members of SNCC formed the Freedom Singers, making music an official arm of the movement. Celebrity artists used music as a form of protest, raising the national profile of the movement and expanding its circle of allies. Folk singers such as Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and Jane Baez expressed solidarity with the black freedom struggle by singing protest songs at concerts and at Freedom Summer workshops and schools. Jazz artists John Coltrane and Nina Simone released “Alabama” and “Mississippi Goddamn,” respectively, chronicling violence and white supremacy in the South. Just before every class, our students listened to freedom songs from the 1960s, and, on a few occasions, they had the opportunity to analyze lyrics, including Simone’s 1965 rendition of “Strange Fruit” and Kanye West’s 2013 sample of that iconic song entitled “Blood on the Leaves.”

After students had a basic foundation of the variety of materials incorporated into these documentaries—music, photographic stills, and archival footage, we created an assignment that required they write a storyline for a documentary on Freedom Summer 1964. Then they watched the first feature-length film on Freedom Summer, the 1994 film, *Freedom on My Mind*. As they watched the film, we asked them to pay attention to images, music, how filmmakers opened the story, and the central characters. They later compared this film to the most recent feature on the topic, produced twenty years later in 2014, *Freedom Summer*. Juxtaposing these two films and their own film proposals resulted in cogent observations about how a filmmaker’s choices shape a particular historical narrative. And because the filmic interpretation of historical events is inevitably connected to contemporary arrangements and power dynamics, we felt obliged to engage the relationship between past and present in films on the movement.

### ***Contemporary Connections: Service-Learning Project***

In the spirit of linking the past to present realities and identifying patterns of racial inequality, the “Freedom Summer” course required a service project



that addressed two core issues central to Freedom Summer 1964: voter registration and education. We divided students into two groups and set aside class time, one day each week, for students to meet with community leaders, brainstorm strategies, and execute action items. One group worked in consultation with the local chapter of the NAACP led by M. Rick Turner, President of the Albemarle/Charlottesville branch, and Vice President Janet Martin, to conduct voter education about the new Voter ID laws and to register voters. The second group worked with Sarad Davenport, executive director of a municipal program called City of Promise, to organize two workshops to teach K-12 youth enrolled in the program about the 1964 Mississippi Project.

The course also hosted a workshop entitled “Contemporary Freedom Summers” to demonstrate that, in the absence of a national movement, local communities have been organizing to address a wide range of problems, including unaffordable housing, low wages, police brutality and gun violence. Organized by Ditra Edwards, program director of the Praxis Project, the workshop exposed students to grassroots campaigns—often led by youth—designed to build leadership and implement visions for a healthy and just society (The Praxis Project, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing). Similar to their counterparts across the country, several students in both service project groups decided to continue the work they started this summer during the year: they will work to strengthen the youth arm of the local NAACP and help start a Saturday school for the City of Promise modeled after the Freedom Schools.

***Teaching Freedom Summer through Local History:  
“Mapping Virginia in the Civil Rights Era”***

“Mapping Virginia in the Civil Rights Era,” the second course in the “Freedom Summer” sequence taught by pre-doctoral fellow Laura Helton, focused on the legacies of that season, on the ways in which its ideas and objectives traveled beyond the environs of Mississippi while retaining the “local” emphasis of the initiative’s architects, who were also building a “national” story. Indeed, by design, Freedom Summer was a national story. The COFO members who proposed the idea understood that recruiting hundreds of college students to the state would, in the words of Bob Moses, “open Mississippi up to the country” (qtd. in *Freedom Summer*). As an iconic placard of that summer made clear, the idea of Freedom Summer was to “help make Mississippi part of the USA” (Randall). Responding to the unprecedented level of media attention the Mississippi movement received because of Yale and Stanford students’ involvement in the 1963 Freedom

Vote, organizers wagered that the overdue national action and federal protection would follow an even larger influx of white students (Payne, *I've Got the Light* 297-300). Historians and public commemorations have often followed this lead, emphasizing the national impact of Freedom Summer: how the summer volunteers became architects of other social movements of the 1960s (McAdam); or how the summer's defining moments—particularly the murder of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner and Fannie Lou Hamer's captivating televised testimony at the Democratic National Convention—built support for subsequent national legislative victories. As noted on the website for Freedom Summer 50<sup>th</sup>, an organization of civil rights veterans, "Success came in the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965" (Morris).

A countervailing narrative, then and now, has focused instead on local stories of Freedom Summer's meaning. Those in COFO who opposed bringing the mostly white, northern college students to Mississippi that summer feared their presence would undermine the movement's priority to support local organizers and to build indigenous leadership (Payne, *I've Got the Light* 297). Likewise focusing on the long arc of organizing in Mississippi—as opposed to the short narrative of Freedom Summer as a brief, iconic moment in the national movement—historian Charles Payne has argued forcefully that the impact of Freedom Summer lay not in the lessons that volunteers took with them from Mississippi, nor in whether it sped the passage of federal legislation, but rather in the "transformation in the local people themselves," for whom "defiance of white supremacy had been institutionalized" (316). Measuring the summer's legacy locally, John Dittmer has emphasized the Freedom Schools' impact on the local people who attended them and on the rebirth of the McComb movement (264-71).

Students in "Mapping Virginia" integrated these two ways of understanding the significance of that summer's events by studying how local activists outside of Mississippi implemented the principles and tactics of Freedom Summer in their own states and communities. This approach retains Payne's emphasis on the organizing traditions of particular places while also tracking manifestations of Freedom Summer's legacy outside of Mississippi. It contributes to our understanding of the civil rights movement as a series of linked but distinctive local struggles, driven as much by the demands and knowledge of small communities as by national leaders or organizations. The scholarship on local iterations of the movement is rich and growing, and as demonstrated by the contributors to Emilye Crosby's edited volume, *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up*, these local histories have the power to reorient prevailing narratives of the movement that have arisen from a narrow focus on national organizations (Crosby 4). Additional work remains, however, to articulate the joints between these local movements, or as Crosby

argues, to “develop an interactive synthesis, one that seriously engages the collective insights of local studies, while simultaneously considering the full range of movement-related scholarship” (13).

To take up this challenge, students in “Mapping Virginia” collectively researched a little-known initiative, the Virginia Summer Project, which was organized a year after Freedom Summer by the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee (VSCRC).<sup>3</sup> Founded by black and white college students, the VSCRC grew out of a SNCC conference at the Hampton Institute in December 1964. Shortly thereafter, the VSCRC began planning its own summer project modeled on Mississippi. Anne Braden referred to the project as “very much like the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer in miniature” (qtd. in Hall 260) and field secretaries from COFO, CORE, and SNCC advised their Virginia counterparts in the months leading up to the summer of 1965. Carried out on a small scale, twenty students from Virginia colleges set up headquarters in a pool hall in Blackstone, Virginia, and fanned out across a set of southern counties in the state’s black belt: Amelia; Nottaway; Brunswick; Charlotte; Powhatan; and Prince Edward (Hall 260).

SCLC field secretary Herbert Coulton described this region as an “untouchable area” of Virginia, a characterization not unlike how many civil rights activists viewed Mississippi prior to 1961 (qtd. in Hall 256). Distinct from the industrial port cities of the Chesapeake Bay, the urban river capitol of Richmond, or the growing northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, these impoverished, rural Southside counties harbored the state’s “massive resistance” holdouts who, under the powerful influence of segregationist Senator Harry Byrd, Sr., tightly controlled schools, welfare agencies, and electoral boards to protect white supremacy (VSCRC, “Handbook”). Much of the region sat within the Fourth Congressional District, which had a higher percentage of African American residents (47.9%) than any of Virginia’s other congressional districts, but where black voter registration levels lagged some thirty percentage points or more behind white registration. In Brunswick County, only 16% of the non-white population had successfully registered to vote as compared to 80% of whites. In Amelia, Nottoway, and Prince Edward Counties, 30% of the black population had completed less than five years of formal schooling, as compared with about 8% of the white population.

As they developed an agenda for their own summer project, VSCRC members looked to SNCC’s experience in Mississippi. Encouraged by Stanley Wise to critically reflect on the role of organizer, they asked themselves, “what are we going to do when we get into a community this summer, and why are we in this community, i.e., what is our role here?” (Romaine 1-2). Citing the organizing model of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which outside volunteers buttressed but did not lead, the Virginia students sought to “meet the needs of the people as *they* see them” (qtd. in Hall 260).

The activities of the Virginia Summer Project varied from county to county—school integration in Nottoway, access to medical care in Charlotte County, educating black farmers about federal agricultural programs in Brunswick County—but, as in Mississippi, it focused particularly on rural voter registration and the establishment of freedom schools (Hall 260-61). VSCRC organizers taught political education classes, accompanied groups to register to vote, and intervened when local officials rebuffed eligible registrants—as, for instance, when one registrar refused to register a man who was unable to sign his name (VSCRC, “Report on Charlotte County” [2]). When the Voting Rights Act passed in August, students organized celebratory rallies that also highlighted remaining obstacles, such as the Virginia poll tax still in effect for state elections (VSCRC, Freedom Rally flyer).

To study the Virginia Summer Project, on which there is little secondary literature, students in “Mapping Virginia in the Civil Rights Era” visited the University of Virginia’s Special Collections Library, which holds several small manuscript collections documenting the project’s elusive history. Getting their first taste of archival spadework, students labored individually and collectively to locate flyers, handwritten reports, and mimeographed booklets created by the VSCRC. Before visiting the archives, they watched Stanley Nelson’s just-released documentary, *Freedom Summer*, and read VSCRC member Howard Romaine’s “The Role of the Community Organizer” as preserved on the *Civil Rights Movement Veterans* website. Having thus entered the archives with an overview of Mississippi Freedom Summer and a cursory understanding of how the VSCRC emulated it, students left the archives with a plethora of specific stories of how the Mississippi model unfolded in their own backyard as carried out by their predecessors at Virginia’s colleges. They mapped churches where political education classes took place; uncovered how VSCRC members worked in concert with local organizations like the NAACP and the Voters’ League; learned the myriad small forms of deceit through which local white officials stymied voter registration and school desegregation; and gained an understanding of how the passage of the Voting Rights Act both spurred an immediate increase in black registration and failed to prevent all forms of state-based disenfranchisement.

Studying the Virginia Summer Project concretized the goals of “Mapping Virginia in the Civil Rights Era” and of the Carter G. Woodson Institute’s 50/5 series more generally: to complicate prevailing narratives of Virginia’s civil rights history as a triumph of moderation over massive resistance; to understand how strategies and demands of the black freedom movement varied across space; and to connect students’ own geographies and experiences to movement history. Underscoring the importance of local stories within (and sometimes against) statewide trends, the Virginia Summer Project reflected linkages between Southside Virginia and the Deep South.

While Virginia as a whole was one of only a few states in the South with a relatively small gap between the percentages of eligible white and non-white residents registered to vote, voter registration in the counties targeted by the VSCRC reflected a disparity more closely resembling that of Alabama, Louisiana, or the Carolinas, and thus belying what Robert Pratt has called “the commonly held assumption that Virginia is not a ‘true’ southern state” (151). Indeed, the VSCRC recognized itself as fulfilling the need for “a new kind of organization for Virginia,” one akin to groups active in Mississippi (VSCRC, “Handbook” 27). The history of the VSCRC, then, challenges the idea of Virginia as a place where civil rights activism was marked more by legal strategy than direct action. By researching the Virginia Summer Project, students grasped both the complexity of movement history in Virginia and its relationship to more familiar storylines like Freedom Summer.

Importantly, students in the course also learned to connect civil rights history to contemporary concerns. One student linked research on the Virginia Summer Project’s battle against disenfranchisement in 1965 to Virginia’s newly-enacted Voter Photo ID law in 2014. Another studied the 1960s “urban renewal” of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood in Charlottesville to understand the racial politics of displacement and development in her hometown. Reflecting on the fact that the Charlottesville City Council belatedly apologized for the destruction of Vinegar Hill in 2011, nearly fifty years later, she questioned the sufficiency of that response given how urban renewal fed the racial wealth gap that continues to characterize the city. Still another student considered the lost radical potential of *School Board, City of Richmond v. State Board of Education* (1973)—a less famous precursor to *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974)—in which the Supreme Court, by quashing plans in Richmond to counter white flight with cross-county busing, fueled urban-suburban disparities that persist in public education. In each case, students balanced the stories of local strategies with the contours of national and statewide events, an approach that highlights the importance of linking watershed events like the Mississippi Summer Project to the terrain students inhabit geographically and politically today.

### ***A Moving Classroom: Respecting the Movement’s Emotional Vocabularies***

Students enrolled in “Mapping Virginia” and “Freedom Summer” were frequently on the move—in walking tours, in the archives, at local sites, including churches, community centers, and barbershops. In other words, true to the practices of Freedom Summer 1964, both courses fully embraced the idea of a “moving classroom.” It was important to us to offer courses that would connect students to the community outside of the University of

Virginia. We found instructive Howard Zinn's essay, "Changing People: Negro Civil Rights and the Colleges," stressing the importance of students perceiving themselves as "protagonists in the nation's great social crusade" played on landscapes beyond the formal classroom. According to Zinn, students should learn "public speaking from appearances at church rallies," should practice writing by creating "pungent leaflets," learn about the "law and the courts as they really operate," and ultimately learn the "economic structure of [their] community" (613-14).

In "Freedom Summer," in particular, we moved the class at least once a week to different locations in an effort to reflect the experience of Freedom Summer 1964 and to expose students to different community sites in Charlottesville. As part of our moving classroom, we went to Mel's Café, a local soul-food restaurant, where we held an energetic discussion on Ta-Nehisi Coates' recent and provocative article, "The Case for Reparations," for *The Atlantic*. The owner, an elder named Mel, chimed in with history about the Vinegar Hill neighborhood in Charlottesville, a once-vibrant black commercial district destroyed by "urban renewal." We also held a class at a popular barbershop to discuss Stokely Carmichael's 1966 article "Power and Racism: What We Want." The barber, a young man from Charlottesville, also named Mel, facilitated a conversation about the freedom vision implied in Carmichael's piece and our freedom visions for today.

Because the Summer Project of 1964 was designed with an emphasis on the importance of teaching in community, the "Freedom Summer" class venues included those able to accommodate larger audiences from within Charlottesville, including the historic First Baptist Church, where we screened Stanley Nelson's new film *Freedom Summer*. Led by Pastor Hodari Hamilton, the church was originally built by the congregation of the Charlottesville African Church shortly after the Civil War, and continues to have a strong local membership and activist stance in the community. The multi-racial audience included officials of local government, teachers, members of the church's congregation, and students of the University of Virginia—not all enrolled in the course. After the screening, one of the students, Curtis Falkenstein, and Deborah McDowell, commented on the film and opened a spirited discussion that reinforced at multiple levels the findings of "Teaching the Movement" on which this essay began. Following the screening, one audience member wrote to say, "Never heard about LBJ's backroom plotting to overshadow [Fannie Lou Hamer's] address to the [Democratic National] Convention. Oh, what they don't teach in school!"

Again and again, audience members echoed this refrain during the discussion of the film. Of course, we have grown accustomed to such phrasing, particularly as regards figures known mainly to scholars, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, but the community screening brought to the surface

unexplored frontiers in civil rights scholarship, including incorporating emotional vocabularies and discourse in telling the history of this movement. One audience member spoke at length about the anger and bitterness which have consumed her for the majority of her life, emotions which well up each time she sees a film or hears a story about the violence and repression African Americans have experienced throughout their history, but especially during the Jim Crow South. Her “testimony” brought to mind the insights of Nell Irvin Painter’s essay, “Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting.” While focused on slavery, the essay holds possible implications for future directions in civil rights scholarship. The “soul murder” of Painter’s title refers to the emotional and psychological damage done to blacks and whites alike throughout the institution of slavery. As she argues, whether in “family groups or as individuals, slaves emerged from historians’ pages in the pose of lofty transcendence over racist adversity. Any analysis hinting that black people suffered psychological trauma as a result of the vicious physical and emotional practices that slavery entailed seemed tantamount to . . . admitting the defeat of the race at the hands of bigots” (21). “It is tempting,” Painter goes on to say, “to see all slaves as strong people who recognized the injustice of their treatment and were, therefore, able to transcend the savagery to which they were subjected . . . However ex-slave narratives also bear witness to much psychological hurt” (29).

Obviously the institution of slavery cannot be collapsed so easily into Jim Crow, though many scholars are prepared to trace the legacies of the former in the latter. Leaving aside this thread for the moment, it is certainly possible for scholars to begin to conduct such a “fully loaded cost accounting” for Jim Crow. Just as ex-slaves point the way to such an accounting in the hundreds of narratives they penned, contemporary writers of the civil rights era also provide the framework for such accounting. Their framework could serve to counter-balance the frequently triumphant narratives of the movement, derived from the truly heroic “ordinary people” who performed “extraordinary” feats throughout the civil rights movement, those who daily embodied the sensibility of “an old black lady from Mississippi,” whom Alice Walker describes in her essay, “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?” It had been suggested to the woman “whose legs had been badly mangled by local police who arrested her for ‘disturbing the peace,’” that the civil rights movement was dead, to which she countered, “If it’s dead, it shore ain’t ready to lay down!” (120)

Such images of survival through weariness abound, particularly in oral histories and narratives of the movement. These stories should be told, but alongside them should stand writings from this period that invite us to open and expand our conversations about rage, bitterness, hatred, fear, humiliation, shame, grief—and even love.<sup>4</sup> It is productive to compare Walker’s 1967

essay, “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?” to her short story “To My Young Husband,” published in 2000. This semi-autobiographical story chronicles Walker’s involvement in the civil rights movement of Mississippi, a period she has also fictionalized in her novel *Meridian*. As its title suggests, “To My Young Husband” gives an accounting of the effects of working in the movement on her intimate relationships, especially with her husband, a civil rights lawyer, with whom she was in an interracial marriage. The story’s emotional register is grief, a grief borne of various casualties of the period, which neither she nor her husband had ever allowed themselves to feel:

We never took the time before, any of us, to properly grieve what we lost. What *we*, as a perky little human family in a frighteningly unloving culture and country, lost, when our small dream of an indomitable love ended. . . . we also failed to properly mourn the deaths by assassination and terrorism of so many people in public life whom we admired and love, because to do so would have simply overwhelmed us. We would have given up and died. (50)

To be sure, “To My Young Husband” cannot be seen as providing a totalizing view of the emotional landscape and aftermath of Freedom Summer and those who lived through it, but it should be included in any provisional accounting drawn from the rich store of writings that the movement generated. Perhaps the ledger should begin properly with Bob Moses’s description of Charles McDew, former chairman of SNCC, when they were both imprisoned in a Mississippi jail: “McDew . . . has taken [on] the deep hates and deep loves which America, and the world, reserve for those who dare to stand in a strong sun and cast a sharp shadow” (Moses).

### ***Conclusion—The Politics of Education***

Teaching these companion courses on 1964 has been one of the strongest reminders of the politics of education. We saw our classes as fundamentally connected to some of the early visions of African American Studies, most especially those which endeavor to link knowledge production to the work of democracy and social justice. In his 2003 article “More than a Symbol of Freedom: Education for Liberation and Democracy,” Charles Payne argued for “a revival of the Freedom School approach, which links an appreciation of African American history to the cultivation of a sense of social responsibility” (22). As Black Studies scholars committed to a similar mission, we



attempted to incorporate such ideas into our courses. The experience was one that encouraged the university community to reconsider what it means to “commemorate” by delving into the lived experiences of unsung political actors, the tensions and debates over strategy, the diverse and sometimes conflicting visions of freedom, and the historical antecedents that helped to shape present realities and which continue to inform current struggles for racial equality, social justice, and human dignity.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although we refer here to the “modern” civil rights movement, we are well aware of the contested nature of this concept within scholarship on the movement, especially that which calls for a more comprehensive chronology and an understanding of what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and others term “the long civil rights movement,” dating back well before the 1960s.

<sup>2</sup> These works include: Holsaert et al’s *Hands on the Freedom Plow*; Dittmer’s *Local People*; Forman’s *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*; Hamlin’s *Crossroads At Clarksdale*; Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*; Payne’s *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*; McGuire’s *At the Dark End of the Street*; Ransby’s *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*; Carmichael and Thelwell’s *Ready for the Revolution*; and Umoja’s *We Will Shoot Back*.

<sup>3</sup> Our thanks to students Robin Blue, Caroline Melville, Alex Morgan, and LaChaston Smith for their robust engagement with materials pertaining to the Virginia Summer Project. We have learned much about the project from their insights and observations. The VSCRC documents cited here were selected by Blue (“Report on Charlotte County”), Melville (“Handbook for VSCRC Project in Virginia’s Black Belt”), and Morgan (Freedom Rally flyer).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Holloway has begun to do some of this work. He describes the project of his book to read “black memories across time and across a broad spectrum of spaces [where] several phenomena abide,” where the “traumas of racial humiliation and shame are regularly narrated” (Holloway 4).

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