



THE FREEDOM SUMMER ★ MURDERS ★

DON MITCHELL

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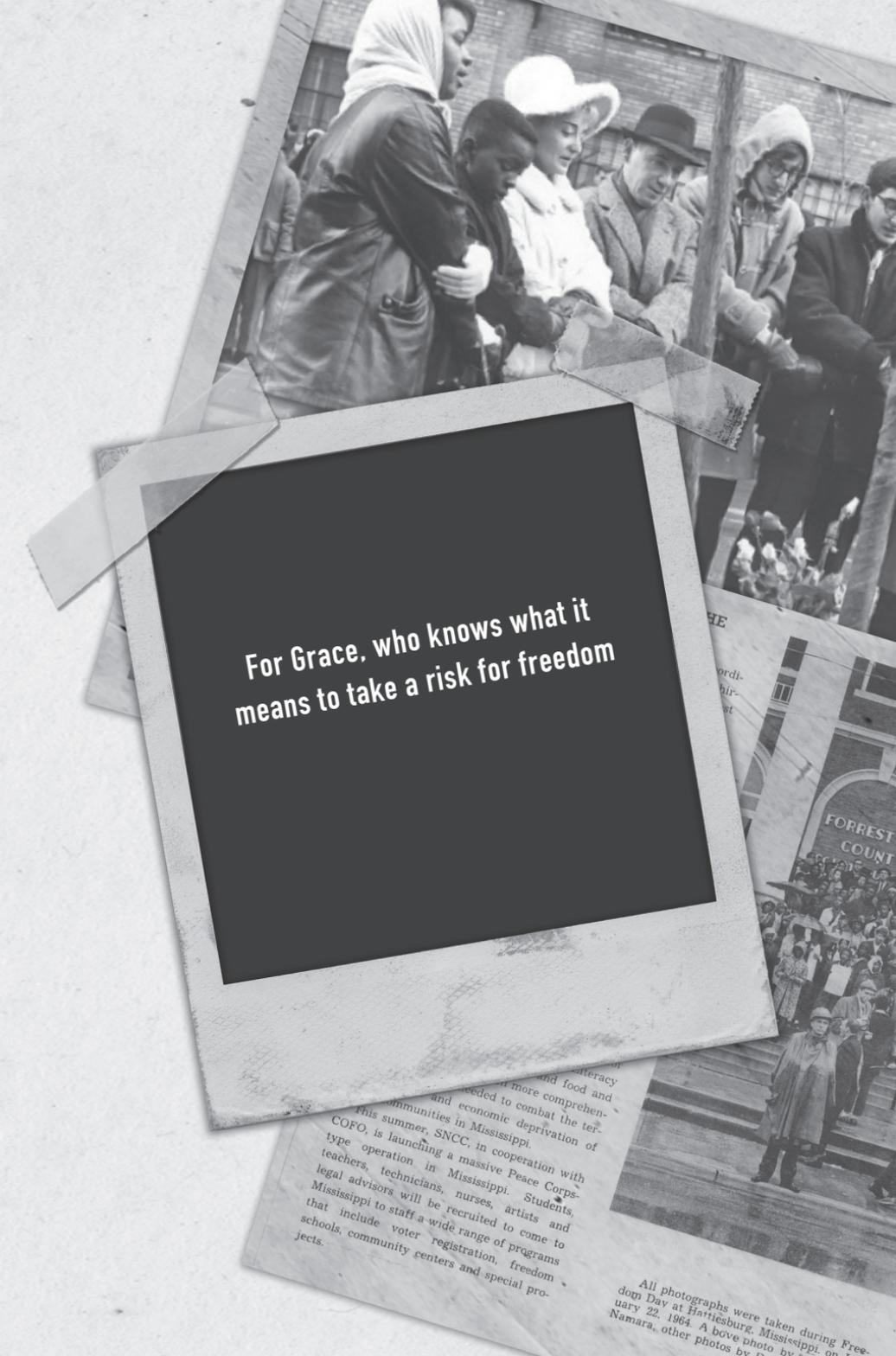
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For Grace, who knows what it
means to take a risk for freedom

...and literacy
...needed to combat the ter-
...and economic deprivation of
...communities in Mississippi.
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 pro-
jects.

All photographs were taken during Free-
dom Day at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on
February 22, 1964. A Dove photo by
Namara, other photos by

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THIS MEMORIAL IS PRAYERFULLY
AND PROUDLY DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF

JAMES CHANEY
ANDREW GOODMAN
MICHAEL SCHWERNER

WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE
STRUGGLE TO OBTAIN HUMAN
RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE.

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"WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED"

Chorus:

*We shall not, we shall not be moved,
We shall not, we shall not be moved;
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,
We shall not be moved.*

*We're fighting for our freedom, we shall not be moved,
We're fighting for our freedom, we shall not be moved;
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,
We shall not be moved.*

Chorus

*We must stand and fight together, we shall not be moved,
We must stand and fight together, we shall not be moved;
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,
We shall not be moved.*

Chorus

PROLOGUE

Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.

— Horace Mann, Antioch College commencement address, Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1859

In June 1964, Willie Peacock, a member of the civil rights organization the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was arrested, along with several black colleagues, on a trumped-up traffic charge outside Columbus, Mississippi. He was describing his treatment from the police officers in the county jail to a group of civil rights volunteers:

“Nigger, do you believe I’d just as soon kill you as look at you?”

“Yes,” Willie responded to the police officer. But he wasn’t fast enough. *Whack!* Willie was struck with the officer’s left hand.

Willie looked out at the sea of mostly white college students who had come to this safe, idyllic school nestled in the rolling farmlands of southwestern Ohio. He was giving them a firsthand account of what life was like in the South. And he unnerved his audience when Willie’s colleague occasionally



Willie Peacock (*front row, third from left*) attended a rally on the steps of the Hinds County Courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi, in October 1963.

rubbed his aching jaw where his teeth were still loose from the beating he took in that Mississippi jail just a few weeks before. Willie and his friends were speaking to the Freedom Summer volunteers who were training here in Oxford in preparation to live in Mississippi for the summer and register blacks to vote.

Willie warned his idealistic young listeners: “When you go down those cold stairs at the police station, you don’t know if you’re going to come back or not. You don’t know if you can take those licks without fighting back, because you might decide to fight back. It all depends on how you want to die.”

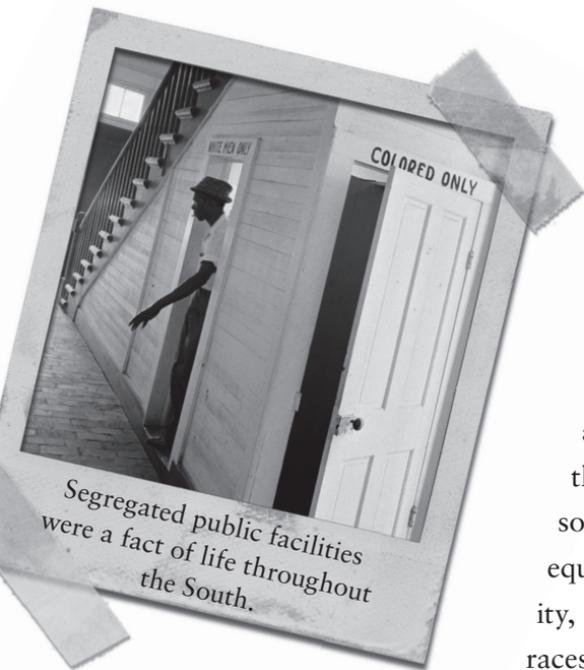
INTRODUCTION

To be born black and to live in Mississippi was to say that your life wasn't worth much.

— Myrlie Evers, wife of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers

Blacks in the South were second-class citizens at best. Mississippi, like other southern states, operated under a policy of segregation, which meant keeping the white and black races separate. Blacks had different — and usually inferior — restaurants, restrooms, drinking fountains, waiting rooms, schools, hospitals, and housing. It was understood that blacks must be deferential to whites in virtually every interaction. If you were black and walking on the public sidewalk and white people approached, you had to step down into the street and let the white people use the sidewalk. And public transportation? If you were black, your place was at the back of the bus. And if the bus was crowded and a white passenger needed a seat, you better stand and give up that seat or it could mean jail, or a beating.

In its 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the US Supreme Court validated racial segregation in Mississippi and



Segregated public facilities were a fact of life throughout the South.

elsewhere when it ruled that states could require separate facilities (e.g., transportation, schools, restaurants) for blacks and whites as long as they were equal — the so-called “separate but equal” doctrine. But in reality, while facilities for the races were frequently separate, they were seldom equal.

The 1954 ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned “separate but equal.” Segregation in public schools was prohibited and states were required to integrate immediately.

But white officials in Mississippi dug in and refused to desegregate their schools. The white supremacists were determined to detect and destroy any effort to end segregation.

A July 1954 meeting of concerned whites in Indianola, Mississippi, led to the creation of the first Citizens’ Council. By October 1954, the council claimed to have more than twenty-five thousand members. The council was dedicated to preserving Mississippi’s social order of white dominance and the organized resistance to any federal government efforts in support of integration. Its membership was comprised of white citizens, many of whom were businessmen who believed

that segregation could be preserved through legal, nonviolent means. The council simply relied on the use of threats, coercion, and economic retaliation against those who sought to change the status quo.

The most effective way for Mississippi's white elites to deprive blacks of their voice in government was to deny them the right to vote. Individuals who tried to register blacks to vote, or encourage others to do so, could find themselves out of a job and labeled as virtually unemployable. Local banks could refuse to extend them credit, loans, or home mortgages. The council would take out advertisements in newspapers and list the names and addresses of individuals who were, or were suspected of being, civil rights activists. The white community would react quickly to these postings. Insurance policies could be canceled. Boycotts were arranged against merchants who were sympathetic to the civil rights movement.

The government of Mississippi felt so strongly about the need to protect segregation, it created its own spy agency to deal with the threat of integration. By an act of the Mississippi legislature, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was created on March 29, 1956. The new organization was granted extensive investigatory powers. Anyone, black or white, who expressed support for integration, was involved in civil rights, or even had suspect political affiliations was a fitting target for commission investigators. The Sovereignty Commission exercised far-reaching authority on the people of Mississippi. It banned books, censored films, and closely



In January 1964, at a courthouse in Mississippi, black applicants attempt to register to vote. The wall sign warns of the public exposure applicants will experience in order to intimidate black citizens.

examined school curriculums. It even censored national radio broadcasts and television programs.

Mississippi's white racists fought ferociously to maintain their supremacy, and many blacks were harassed, arrested, beaten, and even murdered. For many years before the 1964 Freedom Summer, Mississippi held a special place of terror for America's black population. Indeed, blacks were victimized by violence in Mississippi perhaps more than anywhere else in the United States. And lynching, in which mobs took the law into their own hands, was the ultimate penalty. Lynchings often, but not always, involved hanging a person from the neck until they died. While available records likely

underestimate the scope of the practice, during the period from 1889 to 1945, more lynchings were held in Mississippi than any other state. Most of the victims were young black men who were suspected of assaulting a white person or who in some way challenged the system of segregation.

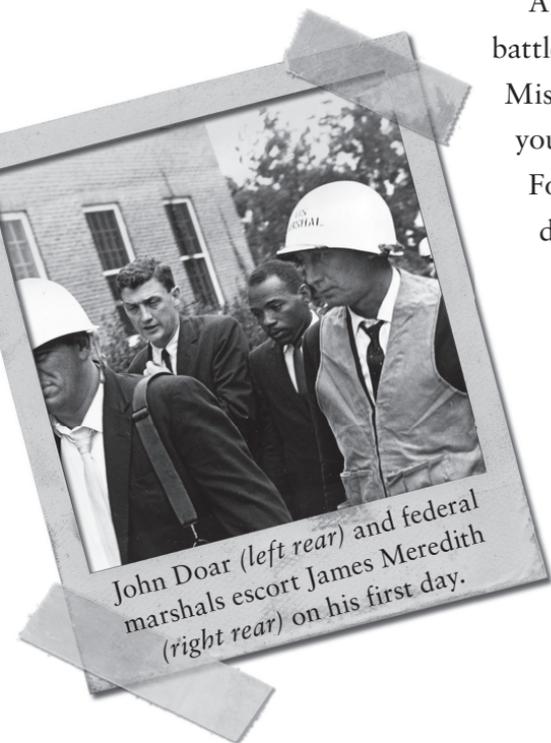
Many whites joined the Ku Klux Klan — or the KKK, as it was commonly known. The KKK was established in 1867 following the Civil War. The Klansmen hid behind masked costumes, which were intended to conceal their identities, as well as to strike fear into their victims. Local authorities were seldom willing to stop them. The Klan and similar groups didn't hesitate to use threats, violence, and lynching to establish and maintain white supremacy.



This 1872 print depicts members of the Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, as it was commonly known.

On the evening of May 7, 1955, Reverend George W. Lee, who had recently spoken at a voter registration rally, was driving along a street in Belzoni, Mississippi, when a car following him sped up and pulled alongside him. Someone in the car fired several shots at Lee, killing him. No one was ever arrested for the murder. An even bolder murder was committed on August 13, 1955, on a busy Saturday afternoon on the courthouse lawn in the Mississippi town of Brookhaven. The victim was Lamar Smith, a sixty-three-year-old local farmer who was organizing blacks to vote. Despite numerous witnesses, no one would admit to seeing a white man shoot a black man, and no one was ever brought to justice for the murder.

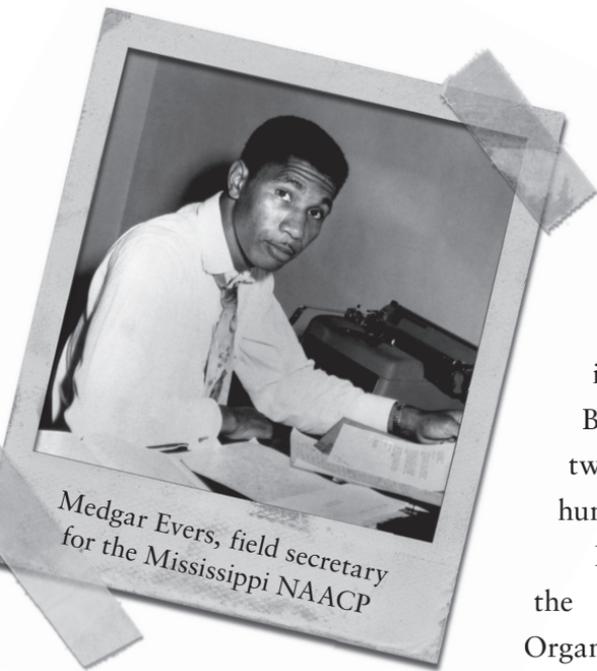
A significant milestone in the battle for equality occurred in Mississippi when a determined young veteran of the US Air Force named James Meredith decided he wanted to be the first black to attend the University of Mississippi — Ole Miss — in Oxford in the fall of 1962. The university was an almost sacred part of Mississippi tradition, and therefore a place where blacks were



not welcome. While federal marshals protected Meredith in a campus dormitory, a riot broke out, resulting in the death of a local bystander and a French reporter. President John F. Kennedy addressed the nation, called for calm, and ultimately had to send federal forces to Oxford to break up the riot. James Meredith went on to graduate from Ole Miss.

The triumph of integration at Ole Miss only increased white hostility in the state. In early June 1963, a group of black civil rights activists were taking a Greyhound bus back to Mississippi after a one-week course on citizenship that was being sponsored by the civil rights organization the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Charleston, South Carolina. The group had tried to integrate the restaurant and lunch counter at the Winona bus station. They were arrested, and the police beat several members of the group, including Fannie Lou Hamer. The Justice Department charged the local sheriff and the other men with conspiracy to deprive the prisoners of their civil rights. Ultimately, a federal jury comprised of local white men in Oxford, Mississippi, found the accused not guilty.

On June 11, 1963, just days after Fannie Lou Hamer's savage beating in Winona, Medgar Evers, the state field secretary for the Mississippi National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was assassinated in front of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. At Evers's funeral, police and demonstrators clashed, and a riot was narrowly averted. A member of the white Citizens' Council



from Greenwood, Mississippi, Byron De La Beckwith, was arrested as a suspect in the murder. Despite overwhelming evidence, De La Beckwith went free after two trials ended in a hung jury.

In the fall of 1963, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella organization of civil

rights groups operating in Mississippi, created the "Freedom Ballot for Governor" initiative. Civil rights activists then worked on a massive statewide "freedom vote" campaign for the general election. On Election Day, more than eighty-three thousand freedom votes were cast in churches, stores, and other gathering places for the black community. The freedom vote expanded the level of civil rights efforts throughout the state, educated blacks about voter registration and voting, and created a political organization.

Mississippi's civil rights leaders considered their next steps, focusing on grassroots work in the state and bringing in people from out of state to generate publicity and financial assistance. Gradually, a consensus was built on the

need for a major voter registration effort in the summer of 1964. The initiative became known as Freedom Summer.

The growing determination of Mississippi's civil rights activists was matched by the state's white racists who thought that they needed to take a harder stance against them. The Citizens' Council had been a leading force over the past decade to intimidate and keep blacks "in line," primarily through economic retribution. However, other whites thought this wasn't enough, and they became increasingly frustrated, angry — and more inclined to use violence. The Klan offered a natural outlet.

In December 1963, Klansmen in Mississippi formed the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, which became dominant in the state and the most violent Klan faction. The Imperial Wizard, or leader, of the White Knights was a forty-year-old businessman and World War II veteran named Sam Bowers, whose stated objective was the destruction of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. By the middle of 1964, approximately five thousand white Mississippians had joined the Ku Klux Klan. And they quickly made their presence known. There were cross burnings throughout the state. Black homes, businesses, and churches were bombed, and individuals were targeted for beatings and shootings. Some Mississippi whites were concerned about this spike in violence, as they feared that it could lead to greater sympathy for the civil rights movement and increase momentum for the passage of federal civil rights legislation. They had little sympathy for the

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSISSIPPI PROJECT

Although the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee has active projects in thirteen Southern states, it has achieved its most dramatic success in the state of Mississippi. A state where individual political life is nonexistent, 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, 1962, SNCC had joined with CORE, SCLC, the NAACP and many young 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 mass democratic 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.

This summer, SNCC, in cooperation with COFO, is launching a massive Peace Corps-type operation in Mississippi. Students, teachers, technicians, nurses, and other legal advisers 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.



All photographs were taken during Freedom Day at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in January 22, 1964. A boy poses by Arthur Sica; Namara, other photos by Danny Lyon.

PROGRESS IN MISSISSIPPI DEPENDS ON YOU

The Mississippi Summer Project needs money now to establish and support the activities described in this pamphlet. We are asking the people of America—individuals as well as institutions—to contribute now to assist SNCC in its commitment to the struggle for justice in the state of Mississippi.

A contribution in any amount will be of help. For example:

- \$5 will supply school materials for one day student for the entire summer.
- \$25 will pay the utility bills for one Freedom School for the summer.
- \$30 will buy office materials for one voter registration field office.
- \$100 will buy materials for a home nursing and baby care class for one Community Center.
- \$125 will buy one tape recorder for a Freedom School.
- \$400 will provide scholarship money for one Southern Negro college student, enabling him to return to school after working in Mississippi for the summer.
- \$2000 will rent and remodel a building for one Community Center.
- \$3000 will buy one used bus for transporting voter workers and registrars.

Send your contribution to:

MISSISSIPPI SUMMER PROJECT
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
814 Raymond Street, N. W.
Atlanta 24, Georgia



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 campaign of Freedom Candidates who will be running for congressional offices.

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 day-time Freedom Schools and three resident schools. The daytime schools will be attend-

ed by 10th, 11th, and 12th grade pupils; the schools will operate five days a week in the student 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 courses in political science, the humanities, journalism and creative writing. Wherever possible, studies will be related to problems in the student's own society.

The three resident schools will be attended by more advance 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 with 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 repressive 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 severe upward 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.

Trained Personnel Are Needed

For applications write:
MISSISSIPPI SUMMER PROJECT
1017 Lynch Street — Room 10
Jackson, Mississippi
(applications must be received by mid-April)

This 1964 SNCC pamphlet for the Mississippi Summer Project solicits volunteers.

victims of Klan violence and made hardly any effort to apprehend and bring to justice those responsible.

As the violence raged on in Mississippi, several hundred people descended on the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, in June 1964 to prepare for their role in Freedom Summer. They were mostly young white volunteers

filled with good intentions. Some left in the face of warnings about the grim realities awaiting them in Mississippi. But most of the volunteers stayed.

The volunteers were divided into two groups: those who would travel from house to house in Mississippi's black communities, persuading people to take a risk and register to vote, and those who would be teaching at the freedom schools that were to be established throughout the state. The teachers would be educating Mississippi blacks — both young and old — about civics and black history, among other subjects, for the summer.

Another group also converged on the campus. They were the black, battle-hardened veterans of the civil rights struggle in Mississippi. Like Willie Peacock, they had few, if any, illusions about what was in store for the white volunteers. And they were determined to give their summer guests a crash course in what to expect. They knew their training could help save the lives of the student volunteers. Most of the Mississippi veterans were members of SNCC, and they were determined to convert these idealists into realists and train them in the skills to succeed and to survive.

The volunteers also heard from John Doar, the Justice Department's assistant attorney general in the civil rights division. Doar was highly respected as a friend of the civil rights movement. When asked what the Justice Department would do to assist Freedom Summer volunteers, he was blunt. "Nothing. There is no federal police force. The responsibility for protection is that of the local police." And few people in

the group had any illusions that they would receive assistance from Mississippi's local police. Jess Brown, one of only a handful of black lawyers in Mississippi, bluntly explained the facts of life to the assembled volunteers. He warned the young people that where they were going, people would classify them into two groups: "niggers and nigger lovers. And they're tougher on nigger lovers."

This was the environment that the young Freedom Summer volunteers boldly walked into during the summer of 1964. And this is the story of three young men who placed their faith in nonviolence in the service of civil rights and social justice:

James Chaney, a twenty-one-year-old black man and a native of Mississippi who wanted a better life for his family and his people;

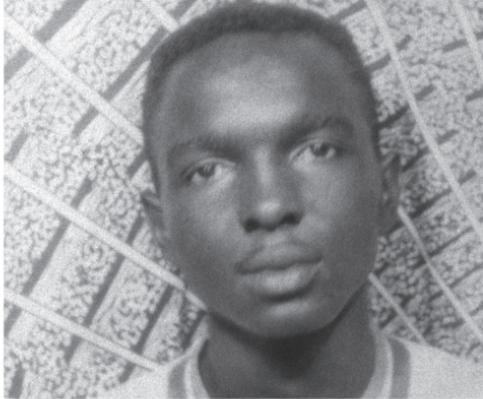
Andrew Goodman, a twenty-year-old white college student from New York who believed it was important to act on his beliefs and fight against injustice; and

Michael Schwerner, a married twenty-four-year-old white social worker and civil rights organizer from New York who was committed to working toward an integrated society.

On June 21, 1964, these three young men were brutally murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, with the complicity of the local police, for trying to help blacks as part of the 1964 Freedom Summer voter registration effort in Mississippi. Their disappearance and the eventual discovery of their bodies caused a national uproar and was one of the most significant events of the American civil rights movement. The murder of

the three civil rights workers marked the height of armed resistance to racial equality in Mississippi — arguably the state most resistant to such change at the time.

This is the story of idealistic, courageous young people who wanted to change the world for the better. It is the story of how their sacrifice helped change their country for the better. It is a story of black and white. And ultimately, it is the story of our nation's endless struggle to close the gap between what is and what ought to be.



James Chaney



Andrew Goodman



Michael Schwerner