

“SHE WHO LEARNS, TEACHES:” BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS OF THE 1964
MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

KRISTAL TATIANNA JOANN MOORE: “SHE WHO LEARNS, TEACHES¹”: BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS OF THE 1964 MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SCHOOLS²
(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

In this dissertation I examine Black women’s experiences as teachers in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. The southern-based Black Freedom Movement of the early 1960s negotiated the implications of gender in addition to setting out to dismantle White supremacy in the South (Ransby, 2003). The emergence of women leaders transformed the gender relations within the movement. “Activist community educators” like Ella Baker and Septima Clark developed curricula that infused radical pedagogy, epistemology, and worldview (Ransby p. 357, 2003). My research questions are: 1) How did women develop ways of knowing about teaching, activism, culture and womanhood? 2) What were the significant ideological contributions of Black women educators enacted in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools? 3) How did teachers conceive of a curriculum that separated Freedom Schools from other modes of schooling?

This study utilizes Black feminist theory as a lens to articulate how Black women develop special standpoints on self, family, and society. This ethnohistorical study begins by reviewing previous work on the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Then the study provides a historical overview of the education of African Americans in Mississippi. Finally, a historical portrait of the African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom

¹ This is an adaptation of the Ethiopian proverb “He who learns, teaches.”

² I intentionally keep “Freedom Schools” in its plural form because Dr. Jean Middleton-Hairston reminded us at the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School National Training of the multiplicity of the Freedom Schools movement. This is in part to honor the tradition of the historical and contemporary Freedom Schools movement.

Schools is offered. Oral histories reveal the former teachers' teaching experiences exposing themes of pride, community involvement, activist education, and collective memory.

This study is important because it offers a portrait of the African American women teachers who put their lives on the line to educate Mississippi's youth. My study provides a counter-narrative from the research participants describing what it was like to be African American and female during the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project (Delgado, 2000). This study pushes women who worked within the confines of the Mississippi Freedom Summer from the margins to the center. This study also works to reconstruct educational history to include the experiences of Freedom School teachers in the modern civil rights movement of the United States.

In memory and in honor of my great-grandmother

Mary Byrd Neely

July 12, 1917 ~ January 12, 2009

And my “te-te”

Joann Neely Harris

October 16, 1958 ~ May 14, 1985

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“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

~Hebrews 11:1

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCCC	Black Community Crusade for Children
BSLN	Black Student Leadership Network
CDF	Children's Defense Fund
COFO	Council of Federated Organizations
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SSOC	Southern Students Organizing Committee

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope. For when we have faced down impossible odds; when we've been told that we're not ready, or that we shouldn't try, or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people. Yes we can. It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation. Yes we can. It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail toward freedom through the darkest of nights. Yes we can.

Barack H. Obama, 44th President of the United States

“Organizing is no good without knowledge” ~ My Story, Part I

As an undergraduate student at DePaul University, I had the pleasure of working as a Servant Leader Intern³ for the Children's Defense Fund⁴ (CDF) Freedom Schools. The CDF gathered hundreds of Servant Leader Interns from across the country for its national training at Alex Haley's farm in Clinton Tennessee and The University of Tennessee-Knoxville. The national Freedom School training forced me out of my comfort zone and into conversations about African American history that before this experience, I did not know

³ The term “Servant Leader” is derived from the Biblical scripture Matthew 23:11. It also comes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s February 4, 1968 sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church. He preached, “If you want to be important –wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But, recognize he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's the new definition of greatness.”

⁴ The Children's Defense Fund is a non-profit child advocacy organization. The CDF Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

existed. Quite honestly, that summer changed my life. I began to develop a spiritual space inside of me that brought me to a closer understanding of what it means to believe in God and I found teaching. I sat in workshops and learned how to develop a transformational educational curriculum. I listened to amazing, powerful Black women like Reverend Joan Parrot, Alice Walker, Unita Blackwell, and Marian Wright Edelman talk about their trials and tribulations of being Black, activist and female in the movement. The CDF national training was more than just preparing young adults to work with children in their respective communities. It was two weeks of intensive Civil Rights and African American History training. Prior to attending the CDF national training, I was not fully aware of the impact of the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. I was ignorant about my Civil Rights Movement ancestors and their contributions to my life. I did not even know what a Freedom School was. Humbled by my ignorance, I sat attentively at each session hoping to soak it all in, because I wanted to be the most effective teacher possible.

Fast forward to March of 2008. I decided to attend the 3rd Annual Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference at Jackson State University. I wanted to go to this conference to begin preparing for this dissertation. I wanted to try to meet some of the folks I had been reading about in the literature. The first few people I met: Constance Curry, Margaret Block, and Rims Barber. I had lunch with Mary King, and Lawrence Guyot. Unbeknownst to me, I was in the midst of activist royalty. I was not able to place all of the names I had been reading in the literature with their actual faces. The way I pictured them in my mind was just as they were in the images I saw in books — teenagers, youthful and vibrant, dressed in 1960's clothing. But what stood before me was what my church family would say a group of "Seasoned Saints"—older people who look like they have been through

some things in life. I sat next to Mr. Guyot and introduced myself. We talked a little bit about Chicago and Washington D.C. and traded stories about the U district, working for Teaching for Change and hanging out at their bookstore/ café Busboys and Poets. I eventually asked him about his time as director of the Freedom Summer Project in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). He gave me pointers on which historians had, according to the veterans' standard, done the movement justice in their research. He also referred me to a plethora of texts I had not heard of and provided me with the contact information of several women who had taught in Mississippi Freedom Schools. After our conversation, he handed me a piece of paper and said "organizing will do you no good without knowledge". I was not catching on at first but I took the piece of paper and realized it was statement from the living members of the MFDP endorsing Barack Obama. He asked me about my involvement in the campaign and told me what Barack Obama's presence has meant for the veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.

As I think about the significance of Barack Obama's mere physical appearance, not negating his multi-racial background, Harvard Law School education, and long community organizing record, I too am reminded of the women and men who in 1964 put their lives on the line to combat the racial disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South. Thousands traveled to Mississippi to register African Americans to vote. This movement was called the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project and its primary objective was to combat the many Black voting rights violations. You could see the sense of urgency in Mr. Guyot's eyes as he talked about why the MFDP was endorsing Barack Obama. His concerns rested in the fear that young people would forget the history of the movement and refuse to continue the struggle for equality.

This past July, the Cable News Network (CNN) ran a special series entitled Black in America to chronicle the issues facing African Americans in the United States. In that series, they investigated what it was like to live life as Black person in present day American society. The news special covered issues ranging from the genetic makeup of African Americans to education to discrimination on the basis of race and gender. Giving special attention to the “achievement gap” among African American children and the disproportioned number of Black women on welfare, the special reified many of the pre-conceived notions people have with regard to the Black community. The special, coupled with the election of Barack Obama has lead me to think more critically about the significance of historical and contemporary educational research. CNN also reported 44% of African Americans voters believe that education is the one thing that can change or improve their quality of life. The African Americans polled for this information also looked at the economy and race, but in their mind education was the bridge to move beyond race and economics. This, perhaps, is the most important phenomenon because the impression I got from viewing this special is that African Americans are looking at future generations to get the best education they possibly can achieve in order to rise above racial stereotypes and economic subordination.

I got this same feeling after talking to Mr. Guyot. It’s hard to explain the feeling I had as I was making the split second decision on whether or not I was going to approach him. I was nervous. The Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference was a place where old friends connected and talked about life before, during and after the movement. Yet it was also a space to bridge the generational divide. They were looking at me to pick up where they were leaving off.

(November 2008)

Purpose of the Study

In 1964, Mississippi was the poorest state in the nation and nearly 86% of people of color lived below the national poverty line. For African Americans, participating in the democratic process of voting for their elected officials represented a new hope for a positive change in their realities. 45% of Mississippi's population was African American, yet only 5% of voting age Blacks were registered to vote (Levine, 2001). Homes, churches, and business were bombed because African Americans endeavored to register to vote. Thousands of people, Black and White, lost their lives in the struggle. The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was just one component of the movement for civil rights.

College age students (mostly White and from the north) caravanned first to Oxford, Ohio for education and resistance training then to various counties in Mississippi to institute all they had learned. These college age students were preparing for their participation in the Civil Rights Movement's Mississippi Summer Project (later known as the Mississippi Freedom Summer). Summer project volunteers wanted to increase voter registration amongst African Americans in Mississippi and open Freedom Schools across the state of Mississippi. With little money and few supplies, the Freedom Schools set out to empower African Americans in Mississippi to become active citizens and change agents in their respective communities. In 1964, there were at least forty-one Freedom School sites located in churches, run down taverns, back porches, and under trees in various counties in Mississippi.

In 1964 the average state expenditure per pupil for a student in Mississippi was

\$21.77 for Blacks and \$81.86 for Whites (McAdam, 1988). The racially segregated schools provided White and Black students with patently unequal learning opportunities. The Freedom Schools of 1964 were considered a necessary component of the Mississippi Freedom Summer. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized Freedom Summer to help Mississippians combat the educational disparities among Blacks and Whites in public schools and ensure all residents were registered to vote. In the 1963 prospectus for the summer Freedom Schools, Charlie Cobb described

Mississippi education, for Black or White, is grossly inadequate in comparison with education around the country. Negro education in Mississippi is the most inadequate and inferior in the state. Mississippi's impoverished educational system is also burdened with virtually a complete absence of academic freedom, and students are forced to live in an environment that is geared to squashing intellectual curiosity and different thinking (1991, p. 1).

He goes on to describe the educational system in Mississippi in terms of a "social paralysis" where Negro students were thrown out of classes for asking questions about the freedom rides and voting rights. This was the case in Mississippi and throughout the South. "Black schools were inferior to White schools; and along with this, the almost contradictory belief that education was one of the main avenues to greater opportunity and a better life" (Cobb, 2008, p. 71). In a personal conversation with Hodding Carter III, he described, "the Mississippi Delta as the *South's South*". He reminded me how in the Mississippi Delta the fall school term was delayed while cotton was picked. Cobb (2008) also describes new brick school buildings were built to give the illusion of "separate but equal" contained virtually bookless libraries and science labs with no equipment (p. 71). Even in the midst of the landmark piece of legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Mississippi remained a dangerous, racially segregated place for African Americans. Simply put, Mississippi

followed its own set of rules regardless of federal laws.

This historical work is vital and focuses on a key period in American history—the transition from Jim Crow to desegregation. This change would not have happened the way it did without the Freedom Schools of 1964 in Mississippi. This dissertation involves the examination of race and gender relations and the quest for democratic citizenship in Mississippi through the experiences of African American women teachers in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. I specifically use Black feminist theory to examine Black women's experiences as leaders in the Mississippi Freedom Schools.

Very little is known about Black women and their role in the Civil Rights Movement. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson (1998) write “for decades history has been so dazzled by [Black men's] commitment and charisma that it has not looked behind them to see the tens of thousands Black women standing there” (p. 267). Barnett (1993) reminds us although seldom recognized as leaders, “Black women were often the ones who initiated protest, formulated strategies and tactics, and mobilized other resources (especially money, personnel, and communication networks) necessary for successful collective action (p. 163). Furthermore, she writes,

The invisibility of modern Black women leaders and activists is in part a result of gender, race, and class biases prevalent in both the social movement literature and feminist scholarship. Social movement scholarship has focused almost exclusively on great men and elites as movement leaders (Barnett, 1993 p. 163).

In the years before 1964 there were more women in the movement than men (Payne, 1990). Between the ages of thirty and fifty, women outnumbered men three or four to one, and they were not just raising funds or handing out flyers, they were leaders in the movement (Payne,

1990). Yet, in casual conversations with colleagues and friends about women and the Civil Rights Movement only names like Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King come to mind.

This dissertation works to reconstruct educational history to include the experiences of Black women in the modern civil rights movement of the United States. Moreover, I want this dissertation to describe the experiences of Black women teachers from their own standpoint. This may also serve as a corrective to what is, and is not, currently in the literature.

This study involves a collection of oral histories of three African American women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. I explore and chronicle the Freedom Schools movement and its educational ideologies as well as examine African American women teachers' pedagogical mission to educate students who participated in the Freedom Schools in 1964. This study provides insight into how Black women viewed the Mississippi Freedom Schools and their significance to the Black community. It also provides a lucid picture of the true quality of "activist community educators" (Ransby, p. 357, 2003).

Black Feminist Intellectuals

The women included in this study are part of a larger Black feminist intellectual community. The section that follows is a brief literature review of a Black feminist intellectual tradition within the context of the United States. Since this section aims to provide an intellectual history of Black Feminism, it is imperative I investigate epistemological and historical issues concerning the idea of Black feminist thought.

Feminism constitutes both an "ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which men as a collectivity have authority over women as a collectivity" (Collins, 1998, p. 66). According to Black feminist theorist and

activist, Pearl Cleage (1993), feminism is “the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities—intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic” (p. 28). Thus, using the term Black feminism supports African American women in examining how issues affecting Black women in the U.S. are part of women’s emancipation struggles globally (Davis, 1989; Collins, 1998).

Betty Friedan’s (1963) *Feminine Mystique* described the condition of women in the U.S. as “the problem with no name,” which was directly connected to the experiences of college educated, married, middle-class, White women who were tired of house work and raising children and wanted more out of life. bell hooks (1984) problematizes this notion of “wanting more out of life” in her essay *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*. hooks (1984) articulates how feminists in the United States did not emerge from the women who have suffered the most from sexist oppression, and physical, mental, and spiritual violence. She writes,

“ She [Friedan] made her plight and the plight of White women synonymous with the condition affecting all American women. In doing so, she deflected attention away from her classism, her racism, her sexist attitudes towards the masses of American women”(hooks,132).

Black feminist thought, consequently, has worked towards complicating this notion of “the problem with no name”. hooks challenged American feminism and described Black women as the “silent majority”. hooks (1984) critiques Friedan and a host of other contemporary White feminists for dominating the feminist discourse and articulating a view of feminist theory that had little understanding of the racial politics of White supremacy and the psychological impact of class subordination (p. 272).

Here, we gather from hooks (1984) that Black women and other women of color began to realize how systematically they were being excluded from a movement that was supposed to address the oppression that all women faced. As a result, many Black women refuse to call themselves feminists. They did, however, join the fight against gender oppression. This stimulated a serious debate about exactly what feminism set out to do, and for whom. As a result of this disconnect, the notion of knowledge and feminism continues to create various epistemological concerns. Epistemology can easily be defined as the standards we use to assess how we know what we know. Harding (1987) reminds us that epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge that investigates why we believe what we believe to be true. Moreover, Collins (2000) asserts the importance of understanding a feminist epistemology, specifically a Black feminist epistemology, is far from being an apolitical study of truth, rather it can point out the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why (p. 252).

Much of Black feminist theory has grown out of the work of materialist and Marxist feminism. bell hooks has done extensive work on understanding the subordination of women of color under the guise of White, capitalist, patriarchy. Collins (2000) specifically writes about a Black feminist standpoint. Her background in sociology has allowed her to build upon the scholarship of Nancy Hartsock (1997). A Black woman's "standpoint" requires first that Black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self-valuations that enable them to establish positive, multiple images and to repel negative controlling representations of Black women (Taylor, 1998).

Beverly Guy-Sheftall's (1995) text *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* documents the presence of a continuous feminist intellectual tradition in

the nonfiction prose of Black women going back to the early nineteenth century. Guy-Sheftall (1995) critiques Miriam Schneir's (1972) text *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writing*, for focusing on "first wave" feminism and including Sojourner Truth as the only Black woman from the mid nineteenth century that made modern feminism possible (p. xiii). Guy-Sheftall's complicates Black Feminist theory and reminds us of the abundance of Black women writers who acted and wrote in feminist resistance without ever using the word "feminism" (p. xv). Thus, "first wave" Black feminists between 1830 and 1860 were comprised of Black women abolitionists who fought against sexism, slavery, and racially gendered sexual abuse (Taylor, 1998).

During the abolitionist movement, the majority of African American women were slaves. Black women were confronted with rape and physical abuse and receive almost no legal aid against the abuse. Black women were considered "property" of their White slave holders. Enslaved and free Black women fought to dismantle slavery through consciousness raising meetings and the use of theology as a primary source of liberation. Collins (2000) begins her definition of the social construction of Black feminist thought by describing the work of Maria Stewart. Stewart was the first African American woman to lecture in public about political issues and challenge African American women to reject negative images of Black womanhood (p. 1). Collins (2000) writes, "Maria Stewart was not content to point out the source of Black women's oppression. She urged Black women to forge self-definitions of self reliance and independence...to Stewart, the power of self definition was essential, for Black women's survival was at stake" (p. 1).

Similarly, scholars have written about Ida B. Wells and her commitment to the anti lynching campaigns across the nation, yet very few talk about her relationship with White

suffragettes Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. At the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, Wells requested Black women's issues and slavery be put on the agenda and they refused. White suffragist only fought for the equality and the unification of White women. White women were not willing to fight for gender equality and racial equality simultaneously. This forced women of color to renegotiate their position in the realm of feminist and suffragist movements and develop their own collective. Women of color, for example, developed a Black Feminist consciousness, a Womanist consciousness and a Chicana Feminist consciousness and others to counter the domination of their White feminist counterparts.

Also at this time, Black women became subjected to various hyper-sexualized myths (the Jezebel/Sapphire) and stereotypes (the Mammy) about Black womanhood. Deborah Gray White (1985) describes how the Jezebel excused miscegenation, while the Mammy helped endorse service of Black women in Southern households (p. 61). This made it extremely difficult for Black women to participate in the (White) suffrage cause. Many White women resisted Black women's political agenda because the majority of Black women were also doing race work, in addition to gender work. White women were afraid Black men would receive the right to vote before they did.

The "first wave" of Black feminism also included the Black women's club movement. Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Nannie Helen Burroughs assumed the mantra "reach and lift" and "each one, teach one" as a means to uplift the Black race. Their ideas about womanhood were focused directly around debunking the myths of Black women's sexuality and improving educational opportunities for Blacks. At this time, Black women were seen as women without virtue while their White counterparts were seen as pure

and chaste. Mary Church Terrell specifically addressed morally elevating the masses and worked relentlessly for such organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). The Black women's club movement has been critiqued for its lack of critical analysis of middle class values and ideals however, at this time they were some of the only women who could afford to spend the majority of their time advocating for the better treatment of African Americans.

The "first wave" was connected to the abolitionist movement and the fight against Jim Crow laws. Similarly, the "second wave" of Black feminism was linked to the Civil Rights movement, and the Women's liberation movement. African American women during 1954 to 1970 participated in the Freedom Summer of 1964, supported Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and participated greatly with the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson and Ella Baker spoke out against racism and chauvinism and refused to be manipulated in these male dominated spheres. Paula Giddings (1984) writes about the importance of acknowledging the influence of African American women at this time. During the 1960s Black women were almost forced to choose between membership to a movement against racism or membership to a movement against male dominance (Taylor, 1998).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the establishment of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the birth of the Black Panther Party had a profound impact on Black Feminist thought. Giddings (1984) asserts Black women initiated social reform in Black communities when government fell short and created a means to educate their own. Sheftall's (2004) describes particular historical moments in women's history where Black women

fought to express their critical stance as both feminists and race women. The southern-based Black Freedom Movement of the early 1960s negotiated the implications of gender in addition to setting out to dismantle White supremacy in the South (Ransby, 2003). The emergence of women leaders transformed the gender relations within the movement. “Activist community educators” like Ella Baker and Septima Clark developed a curricula that infused radical pedagogy, epistemology, and worldview (Ransby, 2003, p. 357).

Black Panther Party members Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, and Kathleen Cleaver combated chauvinism and worked to expose the “counter revolutionary nature of male dominance” (Taylor, 1998, p. 244). Frances Beal, the author of *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female*, coordinated the Black Women’s Liberation Committee, renamed in 1970, the Third World Women’s Alliance. As a result of Beal’s work, other Black women began to mobilize and created organizations like the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) and the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973. These organizations dared to address the issues previous organizations like the NAACP and NOW refused to address at their general assemblies. Taylor writes, “during the first wave of feminism, Black women had negotiated with racist White women but the second wave required nonracist entry tickets. White women and—all men—were not admitted into the workshops, but all had access to the large assembly” (p. 248).

As time progressed, heterosexual norms were challenged. The Combahee River Collective (1983) issued a statement to Black feminists and lesbians to define their political commitment to dismantling the interlocking racial, sexual, and economic oppression. Their identity as lesbians made them more aware of homophobia, heterosexism, and patriarchy. During the 1980s, Black women began to distribute their work and create a public discourse

on feminist theory and Black women. bell hooks (1984), in particular, challenged Black women to move beyond personal experiences and create a theoretical framework to destroy structures of domination. African American women's intellectual work, such as the work listed above, has aimed to foster Black women's activism. "This dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African American women's ideas and our intellectual activism in the face of that suppression, constitutes the politics of U.S. Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000, p. 3).

There are compelling similarities between early Black Feminist writers outlined above and those writing in the 1990s to the present. The "third wave" in a Black feminist context is a complex yet interesting topic. While I am inclined to believe contemporary Black women are participating in a "third wave" of Black feminism, I have not ruled out the fact that contemporary Black women may not want to be labeled within the wave paradigm and may just be continuing the work of Black race women concerned with gender issues. After all, Black feminism has undergone many shifts and withstood the test of time to prove itself as an imperative political paradigm no matter what time period.

Kimberly Springer (2002) challenges this notion of a "third wave" space of Black feminism and articulates the possibility of an intergenerational Black feminist theory. For Springer, there is a bridge between the foremothers and future Black feminists. As a contemporary Black feminist, I have created an intergenerational dialogue with African American women Freedom School teachers about the nature and scope of Black Feminism through my research for this dissertation.

As a result of my understanding of the contributions of early Black feminists outlined above, I have selected Black feminist epistemology as the theoretical framework that has

directed my choice of study, fieldwork and interpretation of my findings. Black feminist theory has its roots in standpoint theory, a feminist materialism that enables us to expand the Marxian critique of capitalism to include all of human activity, especially the activity of women (Collins 2000; Hartsock 1983). I selected Black feminist theory as the guiding theoretical framework for this dissertation on Black women who worked in the Civil Rights Movement via the Mississippi Freedom Schools because Black feminist epistemology is deeply rooted in the experiences of Black women in the United States. Guy-Sheftall (1995) defines

Black feminism as “the emancipatory vision and acts of resistance among a diverse group of African American women, Black women attempt in their witting to articulate their understanding of the complex nature of Black womanhood. They also work to understand the interlocking nature of the oppressions Black women suffer and the necessity of sustained struggle in their quest for self-definition, the liberation of Black people and gender equality” (p .xiv).

Similarly, Collins (2000) writes,

U.S. Black feminist thought and practice respond to a fundamental contradiction of U.S. society. On the one hand, democratic promises of individual freedom, equality under the law and social justice are made to all American citizens. Yet, on the other hand, the reality of differential group treatment based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status persists... U.S. Black women encounter a distinctive set of social practices that accompany our particular history within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions. Race is far from being the only significant marker of group difference—class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship all matter greatly in the United States (p, 23).

African American women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools articulate their experiences with the “distinct set of social practices” through a unique matrix of domination characterized by being both Black and female in the Civil Rights Movement.

For the purpose of this study I utilize the term “Black Feminist Theory” and “Black Feminist Epistemology” interchangeably. The omission of the use of the term “Womanist theory” is not as a result of me situating Black feminist theory in opposition to Womanist

theory. I recognize Black women's multiple ways of knowing and respect the scholarship that has been written about Womanist theory. I draw upon much of Alice Walker's work, as I see similarities amongst the two theories. Alice Walker (2003; 1984) defines Womanist as

“A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/ or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength (p. xi).

For the purpose of this study I use Black feminist theory to inform and support my work because, “U.S. Black women constitutes an oppressed group. As a collectivity, U.S. Black women participate in a dialectical relationship linking African American women's oppression and activism” (Collins, 2000 p. 22). Moreover, Black feminist thought is critical social theory—theorizing about the social in defense of economic and social justice and it “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black Women as a group” (Collins, 2000, p. 31).

I am not, as Barbara Christian puts it, in a “race for theory”. She writes,

For people of color have always theorized- but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seemed more to our liking (Christian, 2000, p. 13).

Although she is critiquing Western philosophers and their takeover in the literary world, her point still rings true in understanding what it means to theorize. This “race for theory” has re-centered the gaze and challenges the academy that gets caught up in theory and loses sight of the cultural foundation of the discourse. Christian points out how people of color are innovative and our means of communicating are indeed legitimate. I used Black Feminist

Theory not as the “right” theory or “best” theory, but rather as one way to further understand Black women’s lives.

Finally, the following four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology have helped me design my research agenda for this dissertation. Collins (2000) describes Black feminist epistemology as: 1) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, 3) the ethics of caring, and 4) the ethics of personal accountability. Collins further describes Black feminist theory as a “process of self conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (p. 31). My use of Black Feminist Theory as it related to conducting fieldwork and these four dimensions will further be explained in the Methodology chapter of this dissertation.

Research Questions

The questions for this study stem from my scholarly interests in sociology of education, social justice and human rights, qualitative research, particularly post-critical ethnography, feminist methodologies, and narrative theory. I also use my experiences working across disciplinary boundaries, namely women’s studies and African American studies to help me find opportunities to explore varied discourses framing African American women’s issues in education. The research questions for this project are: *What were the significant ideological contributions of Black women educators enacted in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools?* 2) *How did women develop ways of knowing about teaching, activism, culture and womanhood?* 3) *How did teachers conceive of a curriculum that separated Freedom Schools from other modes of schooling?*

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry typically centers on relatively small samples selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2002). I have selected an ethnohistorical approach to gain a greater understanding of the experience of African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools of 1964. Thus, I investigated general aspects of the community such as employment, community organizations, churches and politics. I completed archival work and document analysis to gather data for this research. The documents reviewed included newspapers, magazines, student's work, letters of correspondence related to Council of Federated Organization (COFO), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC pronounced "snick"), and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, and the contemporary Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools program. Additionally, original lesson plans and letters of correspondence between Freedom Summer volunteers related to the social and educational environment were reviewed. Moreover, in effort to provide more cultural and historical insights, I also examined photographs (Blackman, 1986). The body of work done on race and visual culture is vast. The examination of photographs helped me articulate my analysis of distinctly how African American women have been omitted from the larger history on teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Shawn Michelle Smith reminds us "visual archives reinforce the racialized cultural prerogatives of the gaze, which determines who is authorized to look and what will be seen, such that looking itself is a racial act, and being looked at has its racial effects" (2004, p. 11). As stated earlier, the teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools were primarily comprised of White, Northern college students thus the examination of who

was photographed and who was not photographed served as valuable data for the project.

The use of a qualitative research methodology, which includes interviews three African American women teachers who were active with the Freedom Schools in 1964, provides a view of the Freedom Schools from the insider's perspective. I use narrative to introduce and represent the stories these women shared about their past and present teaching and learning experiences. Narrative inquiry is one way we make meaning from our experiences. More than method or theory, narrative inquiry for me is about understanding stories. I contend that narrative provides understanding of experience (MacIntyre, 1984), welcomes contradictions that emerge in the narration and representation of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and allows readers and researchers to honor the particular (Noblit, 1999).

This dissertation is also a critical feminist ethnographic piece of research. I am committed to researching and teaching about the lives of women particularly as it relates to issues of justice and power. The participants for this study were women teachers who traveled to Mississippi to organize, teach, and direct a Freedom School. There were a total of three participants. I selected the participants based on their identification as an African American woman and their work experience as teachers in the Mississippi Freedom Schools in 1964. These interviews were completed in person and via telephone. One set of questions was developed for the purpose of the interview. Appendix VI contains the interview protocol. The data from all participants was coded and analyzed to find patterns in the responses in order to develop an understanding of women's experiences as teachers in the Mississippi Freedom Schools in 1964.

Limitations

Delimitations and limitations provide two parameters by which a research study establishes the boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications inherent within its design (Castetter & Heisler, 1977). More specifically, delimitations narrow the scope of a study, whereas limitations identify potential weaknesses (Creswell, 2003). In order to properly delineate these parameters, several delimitations and limitations must be addressed.

This study is limited to an analysis of literature and oral data from the perspective of the participants who taught in the Mississippi Freedom Schools in 1964. I sought out information that articulated the development of the Freedom Schools, assumptions, and methods about teaching from an insider's perspective. The written resources on African American women's experiences in the Mississippi Freedom Schools of 1964 are somewhat limited. The choice of qualitative methodology is an acknowledgment that biases do exist and cannot be controlled or separated out.

Role of the Researcher

My perspective as a Black feminist intellectual cannot be separated from the process and the end result of the research project. I know what it feels like to be ignored, silenced and feel voiceless. As an African American and female, society has deemed me invisible and unworthy of being heard or documented. As a result, this study reaches beyond the scope of fulfilling a requirement for a degree. This dissertation allows me to have my voice heard and to document the stories of other silenced members of the Black community. Moreover, this study allows me to ground myself. I continually fight feelings of frustration and inferiority within the American educational paradigm of schooling. I have experienced firsthand, explicit and implicit messages from teachers, peers, and the curriculum that render Blacks as

inferior in culture and intellect. Such educational experiences have left me feeling out of place. I am constantly searching for moments to feel valued.

My experiences as a Servant Leader Intern for the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools has had a major impact on this work. My personal interaction with Freedom Schools was one of the first experiences where my knowledge claims and aspirations were validated. As mentioned earlier, I was not fully aware of the impact of the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964 prior to attending the CDF national training. I was somewhat saddened by my ignorance because I was a political science and women's studies major in college. After that summer, I felt as if I was living in two worlds- one that affirmed African American women's contributions to education and the Civil Rights Movement and another- a White power world where Black women's work was erased from the script of everyday life.

Additionally, as a researcher, I have been caught between two worlds of reality and theory. At various times throughout this study, I have been caught in between the past and the present. This notion of being lost in the past and the present is difficult to negotiate. I am a student and educator I am Black and female. How does my role in documenting the past affect how I will educate students in the present? I reconcile this dilemma through my use and understanding of Black feminist theory.

Yet, even as I work on this manuscript, I must acknowledge the duality of this purpose—a product primarily for the predominately White world of academia while also a product for the teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools. For some, these two worlds could be distinctly different, but because my participants and I exist or have existed in both worlds simultaneously we have used our lived experiences as a bridge. I am working

towards a sense of harmony and unity between all of the dualities that exist within this context: academia and African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, insider and outsider, and educator and researcher.

Significance of Study

The creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools began at a critical time in our nation's history. African American students were violently disenfranchised in Mississippi's public schools. Noblit and Johnston (1982) remind us that the first wave of desegregation was distinguished by judicial intervention and the second began with the Office of Civil Rights review of compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As stated in a previous section, Mississippi chose to follow its own set of rules. The schools remained segregated and often the education of African American children was not a priority. The significance of this shift must be understood as part of the reaction to and backlash from the Civil Rights Movement. Organizations like SNCC and SCLC wanted to take action and bring the nation's attention to what was going on in Mississippi.

Thus, the significance of this study is grounded in the voices, ways of knowing, and experiences of Black women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom School. I offer a counter-narrative to the historical legacy of education research that silences and marginalizes the pedagogical knowledge and practices of African American teachers. Thus, this study offers insights on the possibilities of improving the academic achievement of Black students by utilizing Black teacher pedagogical strategies (SiddleWalker, 2001; Jeffries, 1997; Foster, 1993, 1997).

The act of both teaching and learning are inherently political. Education is seen as the key to upward mobility and often leads the way to positions of prominence and respect. The history of American education is filled with themes that articulate a crucial link between democracy and citizenship. Anderson (1988) reminds us “both schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education” (p. 1). I began this chapter reflecting on CNN’s report about African Americans’ positive feelings toward education and my personal experiences with teaching and learning. I am still confronted with the stereotypes that African Americans do not have an interest in an education that is rooted in democratic citizenship. Moreover, Black women’s contribution to education and social movements are minimal. Much of the work that has been published about women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools has only focused on White women’s experiences (Hayden & King, 1965; Belfrage, 1990; Adickes, 2005; Allen, [1964] 2005; Miller, 2006). Thus, African American women’s stories in this dissertation offer a critical understanding of early movements for change like the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer and the teachers who conceived a radical curriculum to inspire and motivate students from a different lens.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is an ethnohistorical qualitative study using oral history interviews. This study is also guided by my positionality as a Black feminist intellectual and Collins' (2000) Black feminist epistemology. In this chapter, I present a synopsis of the nature and scope of qualitative research, my rationale for using Black feminist theory as my theoretical framework, as well as my data collection and data analysis techniques. In addition, I discuss my thoughts on the importance of reciprocity and research trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research sheds light on understanding in such a way as to guide an increased knowledge about a particular narrative. What matters most is the quality of the insights, not the quantity (Patton, 2002). Its multi-disciplinary lineage prevents the creation of an umbrella or catch-all definition. Thus, fundamentally, qualitative research is the quest to discover meaning within a particular narrative or story with particular concern to the nuances of the story to deepen meaning and understanding. Glesne (2006) describes a format to begin a search for developing a research project. She suggests 1) state a purpose, 2) pose a question, 3) define a research population, 4) develop a time frame, 5) collect the data, 6) analyze the data, 7) then present the outcome.

Although this dissertation is a collection of oral histories, I situate my dissertation in the tradition of critical and post-critical ethnography because of my politics on issues of positionality, subjectivity, voice, and representation. I reviewed Madison's (2005) *Critical Ethnography* to help me think more critically about conducting qualitative research. She asks us to think about what is at stake when we stand in as the transmitters of information and the interpreter in both presenting and (re)presenting the lives and stories of others. As a qualitative researcher, I am often granted access to study peoples' lives and through our interaction they give me permission to reveal their stories. Therefore, it was crucial that I worked to remain accountable for the consequences of my representation and the implications of my messages because that is ultimately what mattered the most.

Glesne's (2006) format coupled with Collins' (2000) notion of standpoint theory allowed me to build upon what Noblit et al (2005) have called postcritical ethnographic research. Postcritical ethnography contributes to emancipatory knowledge and revolves around a discourse of social justice. It is imperative that we make the move from "what is" to "what could be" (Thomas 1993; Noblit et al, 2005). The aim is to address the process of unfairness no matter the lived domain. In order to do this effectively, positionality is key. Murrillo (2005) asks, "What difference does it make when the ethnographer comes from a history of colonization and disenfranchisement?"(p. 157) In this case, my race, gender and social class have forced me to develop my positionality around my own power and privilege as a researcher in the academy.

Positionality

Positionality has its roots in feminist literature and allows me to clearly identify the lens through which I interpret the social world. How one conducts fieldwork, how one codes the data, and one's rapport with participants is extremely important. As I prepared to interview Black women Freedom School teachers, I was afraid. I thought, "Who am I to ask a group of older, seasoned, sophisticated Black women who taught in the original Mississippi Freedom Schools about their activist work and whether or not they would call themselves a feminist?" I'll never forget when I spoke with one of my participants on the phone and told her about my project. She was shocked that I wanted to hear her story. Once I was able to put my fear aside, I realized these women wanted to share their story.

I recognized it was imperative for me to take a political stance as a feminist and to become self-reflexive as to what exactly that meant in terms of my life and research. I needed to answer personally and professionally, "what's my investment in this research?" or as Alice Walker puts it "what is the work my soul must have?" Madison (2005) writes extensively on positionality and stresses the importance of being vulnerable, transparent to judgment and evaluation. As a Black feminist activist scholar educator I also have to make sure I have a comfortable relationship with theory. By comfortable, I mean even in the midst of struggle and confusion I commit to wrestling with uncomfortable ideas. I was constantly struggling in the field with what I thought things were and what I found things to actually be. When I was researching Black women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, the majority of them did call themselves feminists but they were well aware of the White feminist paradigm that, as far as they were concerned, had done little for them.

In order to fully understand and challenge how my identity impacted my professional life as a qualitative researcher, I searched for texts centered on Black women engaged in the same work. In *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: Collecting Treasures*, Vaz (1997) begins with, “Why conduct oral narrative research with African and African American women?” This research method, “allows the unique knowledge domains of Black women to come into full view” (Vaz, 1997, p. vii). Vaz works with several Black women personal narrative researchers and comments on the strategies they have found helpful when writing about the experiences of Black women. Methodological information about conducting oral narrative research from this standpoint is rare. As a Black woman, interviewing Black women, I had to understand the “insider privilege” I had as a result of being from the same racialized community. This experience of understanding “the other” when I was “the other” was challenging and forced me to be more self-reflexive about this project (Groves, 2003). For example, as a younger Black woman I worried about my language and how I worded my questions. I did not want to come off as Alice Walker describes in *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden’s* (1983) “womanish” or sassy to my elders for asking what they might interpret as obvious questions. I was also concerned about questioning older Black women on private matters relating to racism and sexism in the Civil Rights Movement. I knew from my own familial experiences, asking too many questions could easily be interpreted as getting in to “grown folks business” and may have been perceived as me doing more harm than good.

In effort to “make the familiar strange,” “Black women researchers must consider the places we were reared, our gender, race, class, and ability, along with other interrelated factors that play a crucial role in developing and shaping our experiences and the experiences

of our participants” (Generett et al, 2003, p. 3). While I felt I knew what they would potentially say, I carefully asked each question and was able to get the participants to explicitly comment about their lives and work as teachers in Mississippi Freedom Schools.

After reading *Black Women in the Field: Experiencing Ourselves and Others Through Qualitative Research* by Jefferies and Generett (2003), I was challenged to organize a legitimate piece of work that could celebrate the work of women in their communities, function as a critical ethnographic piece that was not exploitative and promote further emancipation of Black women. I was reminded of Sophia Villenas (1996) when she wrote, “we are both the colonized and colonizer, marginalized by the academy yet using the resources and tools of the academy to write about our own communities and, even more intimately, our own lived experiences” (p. 713). I made sure to make myself available for the women I interviewed if they needed any assistance. I was conscious throughout the entire process of my positionality: young, Black, feminist, activist, scholar, educator. In an effort to be sure that I was not taking their stories and “profiting” off of them, I developed relationships with each participant. I fostered them through email and telephone conversations. I had to understand that “research is not an objective endeavor, void of the interrelationships formed and maintained by the researcher and participants” (Generett et al 2003, p. 2). As a result of this phenomenon, I felt comfortable developing a kinship with the text, the participants, and the mission to create a research project that would aid in the development of a better understanding of Black women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools.

Black Feminist Theory

This dissertation is also a feminist study. In *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Reinharz (1992) states, “At the heart of much feminist research is the goal, even the obligation of taking action and bringing about social change in the condition of women” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 251). Feminist research aims to give voice to the invaluable, but all too often, overlooked are the experiences of women of color. For the purposes of this project however, I tried to create a space where Black women could share their experiences and contributions as educators and activists during the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer. I wanted to illustrate how Black women activists are Black women theorists and producers of knowledge.

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* Collins (2000) describes the importance of an Afrocentric methodological approach. Collins writes,

I knew that when an individual Black woman’s consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them (Collins, 2000, p. x).

The act of sharing one’s story and drawing a connection to other Black women who have similar experiences is powerful and can aid the understanding of the many challenges Black women faced while working in the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Moreover, the “Afrocentric feminist methodology validates the experience, dialogical knowledge, caring, and accountability that may exist within a Black female academic philosophy” (Jefferies &

Generett, 4). Black feminist theory offers insight to a complex history of Black women's work and activism.

In linking Patricia Hill Collins' definition of Black feminist theory to conducting fieldwork I looked at standpoint theory. Black feminist theory comes out of standpoint theory, a feminist materialism that enables us to expand the Marxian critique of capitalism to include all of human activity, especially the activity of women (Collins, 2000; Hartsock, 1983). The four dimension of Black feminist epistemology have also impacted my role as a qualitative researcher. 1) Lived experience as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, 3) the ethics of caring, and 4) the ethics of personal accountability all aid in helping me understand the interviewee as a participant with agency and history.

The first dimension, "lived experiences as a criterion of meaning", situates the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Here, Collins gives the example of Sojourner Truth's statement, "look at my arm, I've ploughed and planted...Ain't I a woman?" She situates Truth and other Black women as "connected-knower[s]" because of their lived experiences and unique voice to address societal issues. This is very important for African-American women because not only have we developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but we have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge (Collins, 2000, p. 252).

The second dimension of a Black feminist epistemology addresses "the use of dialogue". This implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. Collins (2000) notes this humanizing speech challenges and resists domination. Rather than believing that research can be value-free, Collins argues that all knowledge is intrinsically

value-laden and should thus be tested by the presence of empathy and compassion. Collins third characteristic of Black feminist epistemology implies that knowledge is built around ethics of caring. Collins (2000) argues, the presence of emotion validates the argument. “Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument”(p. 263). For Collins, the ethics of care can bridge the binary breakdown between the intellect and emotion that Eurocentric knowledge values.

The “ethic of personal accountability” is the third dimension and it demands for one to be accountable for their personal knowledge claims. Knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will weigh more than those offered by less respected figures. In addition, ideas cannot be divorced from the individual’s who create and share them. Finally, the “ethic of caring”, implies talking with the heart, appropriateness with emotions because emotion indicates that the speaker believes in the validity of the argument, and capacity for empathy (Collins, 2000, p. 266). Collins work examines exactly what Black feminist theory is and how it began. This dissertation offers an alternative way of knowing and uses the narratives of three women to challenge the status quo. Each narrative is an articulation of the above four dimensions in each woman’s narrative illustrates how their mere survival is a form of resistance and their struggles represent the foundations of Black women’s activism.

I formed partnerships with my participants and began a dialogue as they began to remember instances and give meaning to their experiences past and present. Feminist research methods is concerned with social justice and dismantling power structures and recognizing that women experience oppression and exploitation and that experience varies based on race, class, sexual orientation, ability etc. (Reinharz,1992). When linking Black

feminist theory to conducting fieldwork I become equally concerned about the research process as I am with the data I am collecting. Black feminist theory is critical social theory and from this I was able to craft a research methodology that aimed at uncovering the subjugated voices of the community I was working with.

Data Collection and Analysis

There is no single right way to analyze qualitative data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 2). Data for this dissertation was managed through various methods. First, archival data was compiled chronologically to situate Freedom Summer, Mississippi, and Freedom Schools. I used relevant documents to provide context to the educational and community organizing experience of participants. Document analysis in qualitative research makes use of excerpts or entire passages from journals, personal diaries, correspondence and memoranda, and official publications (Merriam, 1998). In this dissertation, I included information from relevant newspaper articles, curriculum lesson plans and registrations forms from the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Highlander Research and Education Center and the Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture.

When I conducted the interviews the interviewees chose the time and location, making it comfortable and accommodating for the participant. During my interviews I used consent forms and remained diligent about recognizing my positionality: my role as a student, my role as a member of a predominately White institution, and the audacity of my role as a researcher. Additionally, I shared my experiences as a former Freedom School teacher in the new contemporary setting as well as my commitment to documenting women's stories of teaching and activism. Often I failed in organizing timely follow up phone calls with my participants. However, through member checking and the process of collaboration

over my narrative analyses, I believe what I have represented in the chapters that follow reflect some instances of narratives I shared with the women. I used field notes and digital recorders during my interviews. The purpose for the digital recorder was solely for transcription purposes. All field notes, audio recordings, and personal email communication have been kept confidential and stored. I made all names pseudonyms to protect participants. Appendix VI contains the interview protocol.

I interviewed three African American women. Each woman was a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi in 1964. The majority of my data collection was done in two interviews for each participant. I conducted a phone interview and a face-to-face interview. If I met the participant at the *Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference* my first interview was face-to-face and my follow up was via telephone. If I met them through the veterans of the Civil Rights Movement website, I did a phone interview first and a follow up interview face-to-face. I transcribed two interviews along with reflective field logs, and a transcriptionist was hired to transcribe eight interviews.

Glesne (1999) writes, keeping a reflective field log is synonymous with writing personal memos. I called it journaling and have used parts of those journal entries to create the “My Story” sections throughout the dissertation. The reflective field log allowed me to document my thoughts as they occurred in the field. Many times I wrote in my journal while other times I spoke directly into my digital recorder as I was traveling to participants homes.

Coding

Coding is an essential part of my data analysis that allows me to identify salient themes and patterns. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), “in practice, coding can be

thought of as a range of approaches that aid the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data” (p. 27). The three approaches to coding that I employed in my study are in vivo coding, sociologically constructed coding, and open coding. The initial approach I employed during data analysis was open coding. Open coding is identified as an ‘open’ process because it “allows me to engage in exploration of my data without making any prior assumptions about what I might discover” (Kerlin, 2002).” After employing open coding, I moved onto more selective approaches, in vivo coding and sociologically constructed coding. In vivo coding “refers to the codes that derive from the terms and the language used by social actors in the field, or in the course of the interviews” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 32).” In vivo coding allowed me to inductively engage with the participant’s narrative. On the other hand, sociologically constructed coding allowed me “to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of my interest and that provide a means of organizing data sets” (p. 32).

Since I am invested in my research, my positionality is evident in my data analysis as I identify themes and patterns that reflect my own lived experiences. I conducted two sets of interpretations. First, I looked at the transcripts and arranged them into a somewhat thematic and chronological order. After I read each participant’s transcript and reorganized them chronologically, I developed like or common subheadings for each participant. I conducted an inductive content analysis, “identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns of data” (Patton, 1990, p. 381). For example, each participant has a “personal background”, “working for civil rights”, “legacy of a Freedom School” and “life after Freedom Schools” section. After the initial patterns were revealed, the data was then reviewed and patterns were rearranged and recreated. I abstracted themes from the stories by coding. I described to see substantively what they had to say about their experience in

Freedom Schools, the wider Civil Rights Movement; about themselves as Black women and educators. All of the subheadings are pulled directly from the transcripts. I present three narratives, one for each participant, Eva, Denise, and Mildred (pseudonyms). I constructed each narrative in first person because I wanted each woman to speak for herself. The narratives were constructed from the individual interviews. I presented the data chronologically to illustrate what they went through throughout the course of their journey as students, civil rights activists, and women after the movement. Denise's story reads a bit differently because she was the only participant who published parts of her story as a Freedom School teacher in a personal memoir. I was able to fill in a few of the gaps from our interview from memoir.

Narratives

In chapter four, I offer three narratives from the African American women participants. Narrative inquiry is the process of organizing, interpreting, and producing stories that generate reflexivity. People who work with narratives are in turn the interpreters, evaluators, and producers of stories. They use narrative to frame understandings of people, culture, and change, and to address social and cultural phenomena without reducing the phenomena to isolated variables. In narrative inquiry certainty is not the goal rather an in-depth understanding and a gathering of meaning is.

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), "narratives have rather specific, distinct structures with formal and identifiable properties (p. 57)." Therefore, I used a formal narrative analysis to code, analyze, structure, and interpret my data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) refer to William Labov's sociolinguistic approach as a method to interpreting a story.

In my research, I used Labov's sociolinguistic approach, specifically the evaluation model, to "identify how the participant tells their story the way they do: how the participant gives the events that recount shape; how the participant makes a point; how the participant 'packages' the narrated events and their reaction to them, and how the participant articulates their narrative with the audience or audiences that hear them" (p.58).

Participants

After I reviewed the literature and saw how few African American women's stories were documented in terms of women teachers in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools 1964 I decided to send out queries for participants to both men and women with hopes that it would lead me to a community of African American women Freedom School teachers. In December of 2007, I emailed and mailed recruitment letters to the veterans of the Civil Rights Movements. (See appendix IV for the recruitment letter.) First, I logged on to the Civil Rights Movement Veterans Website –<http://www.crmvet.org>. This website is devoted to documenting the Southern Freedom Movement. The website is comprised of profiles from African American and White women and men who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Many of them were members of SNCC, CORE, SCLC, SSOC, NAACP, Deacons for Defense, Delta Ministry, and other civil rights organizations.

"In addition to documenting the Southern Freedom Movement by telling it like it was and testifying to what we did and what it meant to us, this website is also a place to begin renewing the ties that once bound us together in a beloved community, a place for finding lost friends, and a tool for helping fellow veterans in need. And it is a living memorial for our fallen comrades" (<http://www.crmvet.org/about1.htm>).

To meet this mission the website provides a number of sections: veterans roll call, in memory, the movement and history timeline, our stories, our thoughts, discussion, frequently

asked questions, documents, poetry, speakers list, bibliography, your thoughts and a website annual report.

I sent a general email of inquiry to the “Webspinner” or webmaster of the Civil Rights Movement Veterans Website at webspinner@crmvet.org with hopes someone would contact me in reference to my study. Then, I conducted a more detailed search through the “Veterans Roll Call” page where I was able to find personal profiles with short descriptions of 425 veterans. I only clicked on profiles that indicated they were in Mississippi in 1964 because I wanted to find African American women Mississippi Freedom School teachers who taught in 1964. From the “Veterans Roll Call” page I was able to get personal mailing and personal email addresses of men and women who worked in Mississippi in 1964. I then took my recruitment letter and personally addressed each Veteran. Only two people contacted me from the website and of those two people who contacted me, both of them were White women--Barbara and Susan (pseudonyms). I corresponded several weeks via email with Barbara and Susan and eventually I was able to set up a time to conduct a phone interview with Barbara. She was very protective of the history and served as a sort of “gatekeeper” of the history. In our talks, she asked me very distinct questions about my positionality and whether or not I was African American. Barbara and I talked a lot about what it meant for me, an African American graduate student, to collect oral histories about African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom School. I also shared with her my experiences working with the contemporary Freedom Schools movement. Barbara, a faculty member at a large public university in California was fully aware of the dissertation process and gave me the personal email addresses to Mildred and Denise (pseudonyms).

Mildred was my first African American female participant. When I contacted Mildred she was working as a university professor at a large public institution in Florida. She and Barbara met while they were both undergraduates at Spelman College. Mildred attended Spelman right after high school and Barbara was an exchange student at Spelman during the 1964 Spring semester. Barbara and Mildred kept in touch through participating in various Civil Rights Movement reunions over the years. Mildred and I corresponded through email for several weeks. Eventually we set up a time for me to interview her over the phone. The interview began as more of a conversation as I explained to her my dilemma in finding African American female participants for my study. Mildred suggested I attend the *Annual Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference* in Jackson, Mississippi to find more participants. Mildred is originally from Memphis, Tennessee and in 1964 she served as a Freedom School teacher and project director in Laurel, Mississippi.

It was through my interview with Susan that I was connected to Denise. Susan and Denise were roommates in 1964 when they taught Freedom Schools in Mississippi. Barbara did not personally know Denise but she knew of her work as an author and director of an oral history project at a historically Black college in Georgia. Both Barbara and Susan directed me to her website. I contacted Denise's assistant and told her about my project and within a few days I had a phone interview set up to talk with her about her experiences in Mississippi. Denise is originally from Memphis, Tennessee and in 1964 she served as a Freedom School teacher in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

In March of 2008, I took Mildred's advice and made arrangements to attend the 3rd *Annual Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference* in Jackson, Mississippi. While sitting in a workshop entitled "The Importance of Documenting Your

Journey” lead by Flonzie Brown Wright⁵, I met Eva. In this session, Ms. Wright spoke to veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement about the ways in which they could go about documenting their stories. She provided many examples of the strides she has made in documenting her own story. She has written an autobiography and participated in several documentaries about the Civil Rights Movement. Ms. Wright spoke in great detail about people in my generation not fully understanding the multiple experiences of those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. She stressed to them how their stories would be lost forever if they did not take the time to write them personally or collaborate with someone to write their stories. She ended the workshop with the question, “why are you here and what do you want people to know about your story?” When it came time for me to answer the questions I spoke honestly and candidly about working on my dissertation and trying to preserve the stories of African American women. I talked about my positionality as a Black feminist and my commitment to understanding the multiple ways Black women engaged in activism in their communities. I ended my statement with, “if anyone needs help documenting their story, particularly if you taught in the Mississippi Freedom School, I would be happy to help”. At the end of the session, Eva and I began to talk about her work in Mississippi. She began to share her story with me and agreed to be interviewed. Eva is originally from Clarksdale, Mississippi and in 1964 she was a Freedom School teacher in McComb, Mississippi.

The overall data for this research was taken from three women: Eva, Denise and Mildred who served as teachers and community organizers in the Freedom Schools. I asked

⁵ Flonzie Brown Wright is the author of *Looking Back to Move Ahead: An Experience of History and Journey of Hope* (1994). She was born Canton, Mississippi. While she was a student at Tougaloo College she began working in the Civil Rights Movement. Mrs. Wright is also on the planning committee of the *Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference*.

questions about women's community work, voter registration in the South, attitudes about life in Mississippi, their view or connection to education and pedagogy and the impact Freedom Schools had on their life and career. The participants were asked to share their stories from memories they had while working, living and traveling in Mississippi and circumstances surrounding their political work. Appendix II has a description of the participants for this study and Appendix VI has the interview protocol used for this study.

Reciprocity

For Glesne (1999), reciprocity can have a therapeutic effect on the interview process. She writes, "What specifically is therapeutic about the interview process is the unburdening effect of the respondents saying safely whatever they feel...The therapeutic dimension of a good interview is part of what [I] return to [my] participants" (p. 85). Similarly, Patton (2002) also found that giving participants recordings of the interview and transcripts was a way to continue family legacies. He writes, "Participants in research provide us with something of great value, their stories and their perspectives on their world. We show that we value what they give us by offering something in exchange (p. 415). Patton and Glesne's words resonated with me and challenged me to think about the reciprocal aspects of research.

I distinctly remember two instances where I saw how the interview process was therapeutic. I met Eva at the 3rd *Annual Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference* in Jackson, Mississippi. Both her and I were sitting in the workshop on the importance of documenting your story. The facilitator challenged each veteran in the room to make a commitment to documenting their journey in the Civil Rights Movement. Eva spoke briefly about her life as a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi and how she had

started to write her story but was not able to finish. I spoke with Eva after the session and told her about the nature and scope of my project and offered to send her audio files and transcriptions of her interview if she allowed me to interview her. After our interview, I sent her the transcripts so she could continue writing her story. Mildred had started writing her autobiography but because of the demands of her job was not able to finish. As soon as I was done interviewing her I burned all of her interviews onto a disk for her to keep. At the end of each interview each woman thanked me and said, “this has been good for me.”

I also believe the act of writing this dissertation and acknowledging their sacrifices over the years is one way I am “giving back”. Their stories have given so much to so many the least I can do is make them the subject of my research. Moreover, their stories may be useful to the field of education and women’s studies. This study should be particularly beneficial to the veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. I intend to share the research with this community at the next conference.

Research Trustworthiness

Glesne (2006) states that validity is an issue we should consider “during research design as well in the midst of data collection” (p. 35). She lists several verification procedures one can employ to address the issue of research validity. The procedure I used was member checking. Glesne (2006) describes member checking as “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (p. 36). Member checking helped me verify the trustworthiness of my data collection and analysis. I also checked in with the Veterans at the conference in Mississippi to see what sources they liked in

particular. I brought my dissertation proposal with me to the conference and asked their opinions on whether or not a particular historian told the story more accurately than others. For example, I asked questions like “In your opinion, do you think *Eyes on the Prize* did justice to documenting what you went through?” or “In your opinion do you prefer Payne’s (1995) *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* or McAdams’ (1989) *Freedom Summer*? I engaged in casual conversation with the Veterans about their opinions about the type of scholarship that has previously been done because I wanted to get a sense of the research they valued. I wanted to make sure I understood the impact of the Civil Rights Movement as they saw it.

Alridge (2003) names the dilemmas and challenges of objectivity, voice, agency, and presentism African-American educational historians whose research focuses on the education of African Americans encounter. Similarly, Collins (2000) notes that Black women run the risk of “being discredited as being too subjective and hence less scholarly” (p. 19). Alridge (2003) argues, “that the ‘double consciousness’, I face as an African American scholar within the academy may be transcended by using solid and innovative conceptual and methodological approaches” (p 25). I reconcile this dilemma by actively recognizing my race, sexuality, gender, and class as tools that shape my identity as a researcher.

Oral History

This dissertation is specifically focused on ethnohistorical methodology. *The Handbook of Ethnography* (Atkinson, et al, 2001) explains the purpose of the ethnohistory as a blend of fieldwork in modern day settings, particularly interviewing older informants along with the analysis of historical documents. All of these elements are important in an ethnohistorical design, but none is as critical as the collection of oral histories. Oral histories

are done to “ask the questions that have not been asked, and to collect the reminiscences that otherwise would be lost” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 46). Wilson (1996) states, “History is important for what it can give people today; the study of history would not have survived if it did not have meaning for the living. Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words” (p. 253). Additionally, it allows for the creation of identities through the face-to-face interaction of everyday talk (Brunn, 1994).

Oral history can also address issues of justice and reconciliation. Clark (2002) sees oral history as “cultural community development” and defines four distinct ways in which this process becomes actualized. Clark (2002) writes,

1. Oral history restores the subject to history by documenting the history of communities that may have been excluded from historical accounts and encouraging individuals to see themselves as historical actors. It is possible through oral history projects to encourage people to remember as a way of entering and transforming history. (p. 91)
2. Oral history is a dialogical encounter based on rapport between interviewer and narrator, which can support healing, reconciliation and development. (p. 94)
3. Oral history is an artistic practice that can transform relationships and build new cultural perspectives, opening up new dialogues about the past. (p. 95)
4. Oral history is a libratory practice which can empower communities to speak for themselves and act on their own behalf. (p. 103)

Oral history is an academic and cultural practice that is generally defined as the “narration, representation and interpretation of history through recorded interviews with eyewitnesses” (Clark, 2002, p. 89). I am using oral history as a source of dialogue to ensure the stories of African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools will not be lost.

A dialogical relationship characterizes Black women’s collective experiences and group knowledge. On both the individual and the group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed

actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness (Collins, 2000, p. 30).

Oral history coupled with Black feminist theory articulates how “Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women’s group empowerment” (Collins, 2000, p. 30).

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I woke up this morning with my mind, it was stayed on freedom
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia
Walkin' and talkin' with my mind, it was stayed on freedom
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia
Devil can't get when my mind, it was stayed on freedom
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia

-Artist Unknown, *Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom*

Yes, we wanted an end to segregation, discrimination and White supremacy. However at the core of our efforts was the belief that Black people had to make decisions about and take charge of things controlling their own lives; the effective movement was grounded in grassroots local leadership. We were organizers in Mississippi, not leaders, even if at moments we led. The distinction was important to us, and a practical necessity.

-Charles E. Cobb, Jr., *Organizing Freedom Schools*

Into the Delta ~ My Story, Part II

Months before I set out to Mississippi, I struggled with how I was going to get there and how I was going to find someone to show me around. I was looking for an "in" someone who knew someone to help me find a place to stay and women to interview. A few months before my trip, I attended a friend's graduation. The irony of this situation is I really did not want to go my friend's graduation because I was working on the historical section of my dissertation. I took a few of my readings to the Dean Dome and read transcripts from

Eyes on the Prize as I sat waiting for my friend's name to be called. Hodding Carter III was introduced as the commencement speaker. Carter spoke about his experiences in the Mississippi Delta and the importance of recognizing the United States as a constantly changing nation. Carter's words immediately peaked my interest. I thought to myself, "What are the odds of me finding someone from Mississippi at the Dean Dome?" I grabbed the commencement program and read his bio. I learned about his work as a journalist in Greenville Mississippi and his job as public policy professor at UNC-Chapel Hill.

I eventually met with Hodding Carter III and told him I was trying to get to Mississippi for the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference in Jackson. We talked about growing up in each of our respective hometowns and why we both liked Barack over Hillary. We talked about my dissertation and I asked for some guidance. He hooked me up with JoAnne Prichard Morris. She opened her home to me and shared stories about working with Unita Blackwell and other Mississippi heroes.

In March of 2008 I drove through the lowest hills and looked out at the sweep of fields, flat land was for as far as my eyes could see. Mississippi was breath taking and those who have not been to the Delta may find themselves gasping at the sight as they come over the lowest hill and see the expansive, flat, agricultural land. While I took in the beauty of the land I grew sad as I thought about the likes of Emmett Till and the thousands of other brothers and sisters, primarily young people, brutally killed on Mississippi soil. Growing up in Chicago, I saw how we honored Till's legacy with renaming streets and bridges on the South Side. My aunt explained Emmett Till as the sacrificial lamb of the Civil Rights Movement. Till's murder was the impetus for community activists to mobilize. Moreover, it

brought national and international attention to the race relations in the state of Mississippi.

I never thought anything would bring me to this place.

(April 2008)

In this chapter I present the social, political, educational and economic landscape that lead to the struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi. I describe the death of Emmett Till to build upon the notion of his death as the impetus for the beginning of grassroots mobilization in Mississippi. This chapter also serves as a guide to understand the historical context in which the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was created. I provide a brief synopsis of the ways in which local people, both children and adult, fought against political disenfranchisement by creating the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and Freedom Schools. I pay special attention to the development of the Freedom Schools curriculum and provide detailed descriptions of the ways in which Freedom Schools cultivated young leaders to work for civil rights. Finally, the last section of this chapter acknowledges African American women's significant role in the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality.

The Magnolia State

A generation ago Mississippi was a state charged with racial hatred. Its Blacks were free in name only. African Americans were second-class citizens unchanged since the turn of the century. Most lived without hope, but a few fought back, and others, Black and White joined with them, they were young with no political power or experience.

Black men and women had to be schooled on the ways of being in Mississippi; they lived by an entirely different set of rules. For a Black person, it was "yes ma'am or "no ma'am". When White women were on the street, Blacks had to get off the street. That was a

way of life in this country that was supported by the law. Whites from the Delta to the state house spit fire at Black people. Blacks were being lynched. The citizens of Mississippi created a culture of violence that spread hate throughout the entire state.

John Dittmer's (1995) chapter "The Magnolia Jungle" in *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* described how African Americans had no protection from discrimination or violence. Dittmer (1995) describes the summer of 1955 when Emmett Till, a young Chicago boy ventured south. The small town of Money was located in Leflore County. Bryant's Grocery Store owned by Roy Bryant, Caroline Bryant, and J.W. Milam was located in Money. Till and several other teenagers went to the store on Wednesday, August 24, 1955. They were hanging out as teens do, laughing and joking and purchasing bubble gum. Emmett's crime: talking and perhaps whistling at Caroline Bryant, a White woman at the grocery store. That following Sunday, Roy Bryant, Caroline's husband and J.W. Milam, Roy's half-brother, kidnapped Emmett Till from his great uncle, Mose Wright's, home in the middle of the night.

On August 31st, just three days after Emmett was kidnapped, a boy fishing in the Tallahatchie River found a body. It was in a curve, near a drift in the river, he saw a foot sticking up. A seventy-pound cotton gin fan was tied around his neck and ankle weighing down Emmett's body. Till was so badly beaten that his great uncle, could only identify him by his father's ring. Till had been brutally lynched. On September 2nd, Till's mother, Mamie Till met her son's casket at the Illinois Central Terminal. When the coffin arrived to Chicago there was a terrible odor. Till's mutilated body was deteriorating as a result of being drowned in the Tallahatchie River for over three days (Crowe, 2003).

The headlines read “A Negro boy ‘whistling’ at a White woman at Bryant’s Grocery store”. Black people had a visceral reaction to Till’s murder. Everyone knew Black people were under attack and that attack was actualized with the murder of a 14-year-old boy. Emmett Till’s death was the spark that launched the movement for civil rights. The Emmett Till case made international headlines and illustrated the racial hatred in the United States (Larsson, 1986). In the 75 years before Emmett Till set foot in Mississippi, over 500 men were lynched. Mississippi was unlike any other place. If a White person did something to an African American, they had no recourse. Black people just disappeared.

Although the world watched this case unfold, it has been over 50 years since his murder and very few know about him and the significance of his death. It is important to think about Emmett Till’s murder and the historical and political landscape of Black culture in the South. The Emmet Till murder created the necessary sense of urgency for folks to begin mobilizing in Mississippi.

The only way to crack Mississippi was through the vote. Mississippi had half a million Blacks but would not allow them to register to vote. A voting campaign turned the country’s attention to the injustice and pull the federal government into the fight. This strategy was explained to the Federal government, specifically to the Kennedy administration. The justice department believed the caste system could be dismantled in open and free voting.

In 1960, the Democratic Party became a house divided. Although John F. Kennedy occupied the White House, the Southern Democrats, called Dixiecrats ruled the South and resisted any attempt for change. In Mississippi, segregation was written into the bylaws of the state’s Democratic Party and was carried out by an official alliance between lawmakers,

police officers and White Citizen Councils. The state's entire political system was organized to promote racism. The Magnolia state was the battleground for the South's last stand. When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law it did not protect Black voting rights. The only thing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did was alienate the Dixicrats of the South.

Mississippi Freedom Summer Project

Mississippians heard about civil rights workers possibly coming to Mississippi in 1961. They heard about the Freedom Riders⁶ but no one actually thought they would show up. Unita Blackwell recalls, "Nobody thought they would ever show up, you know, everybody talked about it, maybe they would come to Jackson or someplace like that. But uh, my personal experience was that I didn't ever think they would show up in Meyersville, Mississippi, a little small town in the Mississippi Delta."⁷ In 1964, Freedom Riders were rumored to be in the area, but at this time anyone suspected to be a part of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) immediately placed their lives in danger. Freedom Riders walked, talked and waved differently and once they arrived on the scene highway patrol and police officers increased neighborhood watches. Unita Blackwell describes her experiences on becoming involved in the movement, "I knew they were different, because they were walking fast...they just waved, you know and said hello.

⁶ The Supreme Court banned segregation on interstate travel but many of the Southern states ignored the rulings. To test the President John F. Kennedy's commitment to civil rights CORE proposed a "journey of Reconciliation called the Freedom Rides in May 1961. The strategy was interracial groups would board buses headed to the South. Blacks sat in the front and whites in the back and at rest stops Blacks would use "white only" rest rooms and whites use "black only" rest rooms. Mob violence brutally injured the Freedom Riders and many were sent to Parchman maximum-security prison for trespassing. Eventually, Kennedy got the Interstate Commerce Commission to ban segregation in interstate travel.

⁷ Unita Blackwell, Eyes on the Prize Interview (p .2)

You know we didn't do that either. We always said 'how y'all feeling'?"⁸ Freedom Riders went to local churches and invoked statements like, "God helps those who helps themselves, you can help yourself by trying to register to vote."⁹ Eventually Freedom Riders marched door-to-door encouraging people to register to vote.

Black people involved in voter registration efforts faced losing their jobs, being put off the plantation, and many were put in jail. Local community activists like Blackwell were jailed regularly as they encouraged others to register to vote. The right to vote was framed very differently between Black and White Americans in Mississippi. White people understood voting as a means of political power and privilege. Black people looked at voting as access to better schools and better housing conditions. The disenfranchisement of Blacks in Mississippi was institutionalized and systematic. White people knew if Blacks were able to utilize their right to vote there would be a major paradigm shift.

I was told when I started off that if I registered to vote I would have food to eat, a better house to stay in...my child would have a better education, and at that particular point our children only went to school two to three months out of the year. That was what we were told, it was on the basis of the needs of the people. For the Whites, they understood it even larger in terms of political power, because it wasn't even taught in Black schools. We didn't even know it was such think as a Board of Supervisors and what they did and School Board members and what they did, even the Mayor... nobody's ever thought of any of those things.¹⁰

This type of systematic disenfranchisement paralyzed Black people in Mississippi.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer was a beginning of a new era. It was a vehicle to fight the institutional and physical violence they faced everyday of their lives. Blacks and

⁸ Unita Blackwell, Eyes on the Prize Interview (p. 2)

⁹ Unita Blackwell, Eyes on the Prize Interview (p. 2)

¹⁰ Unita Blackwell, Eyes on the Prize Interview (p. 2)

Whites from the North and West and other cities in the South came to talk about the right to vote. During that summer, Freedom Summer volunteers, primarily White men and women came and lived in the homes of Black families.

African Americans made up over half the population in several counties in Mississippi. Blacks had been denied access to the vote and intimidated in hostile ways. In 1950, Mississippi was 45% Black, and only 5% of voting age Blacks were registered to vote. In 1962 only 6.7% of Blacks in Mississippi were registered to vote (Levine, 2003). By the early 1960s, Mississippi was the poorest state in the nation. The Citizens Council, a White segregationist group, used segregation laws and fear tactics to control Mississippi's political leadership and regulated who could and could not register to vote. The state had a terrible record of Black voting rights violations and in some counties there was not one single Black person registered to vote. Mississippi passed new voting laws and created a test that was designed to prevent Blacks from becoming registered to vote. The original design of the test asked applicants to "read or interpret" a section of the constitution. Later, applicants were asked to "read *and* interpret" the constitution (Williams, 1987). Most Blacks failed as a result of White registrars who arbitrarily decided who passed the test. Most Whites, even those with insufficient education to even take the test, passed and were registered to vote. Many Blacks wanted to vote but they feared losing their job and homes. In effort to gain their political voice, volunteers created a new political party the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).

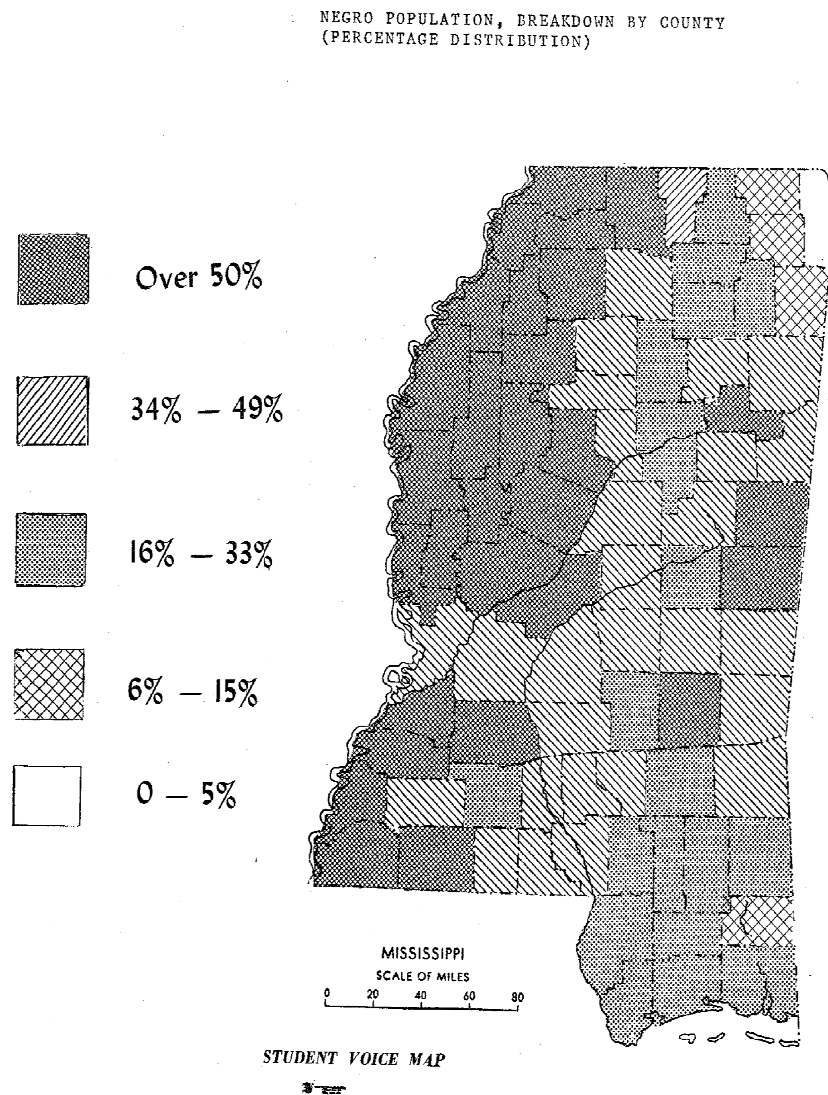


Figure 1: Mississippi Map (Black population breakdown by county).

The MFDP was established in April of 1964 at Council of Federated Organization's (COFO) monthly state convention to challenge the state's "regular" Democratic party. For decades Mississippi had denied blacks the opportunity to participate in the electoral process. Building the MFDP was a major thrust of Freedom Summer. People who were not working with the Freedom Schools were strongly encouraged to prepare for the Democratic National

Convention challenge in Atlantic City, New Jersey. “The problem was that relatively few blacks had signed [MFDP] registration forms. While more than 80,000 had voted in the November 1963 freedom vote, only 21,000 blacks and a handful of Whites were on the [MFDP] rolls in mid July 1964” (Dittmer, 1995, p. 272). Bob Moses wanted to successfully challenge the legitimacy of the Democratic Party in Mississippi (Dittmer, 1995). MFDP moved ahead with its plan to unseat the regular Democrats at the national convention. The MFDP’s first precinct meeting took place in late July and immediately following on August 6th, the MFDP held its state convention in Jackson (Dittmer, 1995, p. 281). Ella Baker gave the keynote address. At the convention, Charles McLaurin, Jimmy Travis, and Lawrence Guyot as well as a host of other Mississippi activists were elected to the MFDP delegation. In effort to “make sure the delegation was representative of the majority of the state’s blacks, the rural poor” the convention delegates elected Lawrence Guyot as MFDP Chair and Fannie Lou Hamer as Vice Chair (Dittmer, 1995, p. 282).

Once the MFDP arrived in Atlantic City, they headed to the Democratic National Convention to be seated as delegates. Fannie Lou Hamer, a former sharecropper turned activist from Ruleville Mississippi,

“graphically described her life, her eviction from the plantation when she registered to vote, and, most dramatically, her beating in the Winona jail. It soon became apparent hers was an authentic voice describing simply yet powerfully the reality of life in a closed society” (cited in Dittmer, 1995, p. 288).

President Lyndon Johnson ordered the television station to cut away to an emergency speech of his own during Hamer’s testimony. He then ordered the Credentials Committee to offer Mississippi two seats at large with no power to vote on any of the issues discussed at the convention. After hours of deliberation, the MFDP delegation rejected the Atlantic City

compromise. Hamer stated “I got up and I soon said what I had to say and I sat down...we didn’t come all the way up here to compromise for no more than we’d gotten here...We didn’t come all this way for no two seats” (cited in Dittmer, 1995, p. 302).

Freedom Schools 1964

Civil rights activists continued to mobilize. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leader, Amzie Moore, asked the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizer, Bob Moses, to open offices in Mississippi. Bob Moses had launched a voter registration drive in 1961. In 1962 he helped form the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to coordinate the efforts of civil rights groups in Mississippi. Through COFO, SNCC, the NAACP, and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) organized its Freedom Summer Project campaign. The Freedom Summer Project included three main initiatives: freedom schools and community centers, voter registration on the official state rolls, and a freedom registration plan designed to independently elect a slate of delegates to the 1964 Democratic National Convention (Levine, 2003). Voter registration was the cornerstone of the Mississippi Freedom Summer and approximately 17, 000 Black residents of Mississippi attempted to register to vote in 1964 but only 1,600 of the applications were accepted by the registrars (McAdam, 1988).

In late 1963 Charlie Cobb, a student at Howard University wrote the prospectus for the Freedom Schools. He described the inadequate teaching and learning conditions of Mississippi schools. Cobb outlined in his premise that Mississippi schools were inadequate and Black students in them received an education in every way inferior to that available elsewhere, and as a result they were victims of “social paralysis” (Rothschild, 1982, p. 402).

Cobb's initial proposal contemplated two-month session for tenth and eleventh grade high school students. The main objectives were to achieve three things:

1. Supplement what they were not learning around the state;
2. Give them a broad intellectual and academic experience during the summer to bring back to fellow students in the state, and
3. Form the basis for statewide student action, such as school boycotts, based on their increased awareness (Rothschild, 1982, p. 402).

Cobb wanted Freedom Schools to build upon cultural knowledge as well as equip students with basic skills like typing. Political and social studies education would be the focal point of the curriculum. Freedom schools operated on a very limited budget and opened their doors on July 4, 1964. The schools gathered in church basements or run down community centers. The 250 volunteers and between 3,000 and 3,500 students worked together to develop an experience which profoundly affected many of their lives (McAdams, 1988, p. 85).

In June of 1964, summer volunteers began training at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio (See appendix I for memo to accepted applicants). 1,000 of the Freedom Summer volunteers were White, northern college students. The training sessions in Oxford were intended to prepare volunteers to register Black voters, teach at local Freedom Schools, and assist the efforts of COFO.

Freedom Summer organizers hoped the presence of the volunteers would draw the nation's attention to the hostile and violent repression of voting rights for Blacks in Mississippi and throughout the country. It was also a move to solicit the support of the federal government to intervene and ameliorate the racial apartheid of the American south.

“The idea of bringing 1, 000 mostly White, Northern, middle-class students into Mississippi was the product of SNCC staff’s frustration with the notably vicious and intransigent system of White supremacy which governed the state’s race relations from the end of Reconstruction into the early 1960s” (Levine, 2003, p. 3).

The general population was not outraged by the suffering and murder of Southern Blacks. SNCC activists predicted, “public anxiety over the fate of young White Northerners was likely to accomplish two related goals. The nation would finally begin to focus on the moral degradation of Mississippi political life and federal authorities would feel impelled to protect the lives of anti-racist organizers, both Black and White, in the state” (Levine, 2003, p. 5).

Part of the idea of the summer project was based on Bob Moses’ analysis that the law only covers certain people in America. It did not cover Southern Blacks and it covered Northern Blacks somewhat and covered Northern Whites completely. Thus, if one wanted to bring the law to the south they would have to bring the people who the law covered to the south. The people who organized the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project understood that if White people went to Mississippi, their parents would care, the people in their communities would care and people would be more inclined to help. If a young African American were put in jail, often they had no recourse. However, if a White Freedom Summer Project volunteer were put in jail SNCC or COFO would get the story out and Congressperson or Senator from their respective hometown would advocate on their behalf. This is what Bob Moses meant by bringing the law to Mississippi.

The day before volunteers were scheduled to head to Mississippi—a 21 year old Mississippian James Chaney, and two White New Yorkers 20 year old Andrew Goodman,

and 24 year old Michael Schwerner were reported missing. They were eventually found murdered in Philadelphia near Neshoba County Mississippi. Bob Moses and the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project staff had to wrestle with the fact that the volunteers were dead. They had to re-evaluate going to Mississippi in light of the fact that some of the volunteers were dead before they even set foot out to Mississippi.

Mississippi prepared for their arrival by requiring law enforcement officials to be armed with military artillery. The system of racism was so institutionalized down to every single encounter. The Black/White binary amongst the Summer Project volunteers was deeply impacted. The Black families that hosted the Summer Project volunteers were forced to grapple with the social construction of race at a very personal level. The White volunteers had to grapple with Black people, some of them forty years their senior, calling them “Miss” or “Mister” and giving up their seat. In Mississippi, Whites did not socialize with Blacks. They did not worship in Black churches, teach in Black schools, or live in Black homes. Northern Whites were breaking all of the rules and Southern Whites retaliated.

Education was a significant part of the Mississippi Freedom Summer. The Freedom Summer campaign combined education with political action in order to combat the political disenfranchisement of African Americans in the American south (Zinn, 1964). In 1963, the schools in Mississippi were the worst in the United States. Anderson (1988) reminds us how African Americans felt about their educational disenfranchisement. He cites a newly freed slave, “there is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education” (p. 5). Southern schools for African Americans were to promote freedom but rather to continue subordination of African Americans. The Freedom Schools’ curriculum was largely influenced by the adult education curriculum of the

Citizenship Schools. The Citizenship Schools, administered first by the Highlander¹¹ and later on by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), linked the learning of practical skills to issues of political power (Levine, 2001; Perlstein, 1990). Founded by Myles Horton, the Highlander Center in Tennessee has supported grassroots activism since the 1930s. Myles Horton corresponded with John Dewey for many years and from there he developed a center that “was based on the conviction that responses to oppression had to grow out of the experiences of the oppressed” (Perlstein, 1990 p. 302).

With the establishment of over thirty Freedom Schools throughout Mississippi, during the summer of 1964 over 3,000 students attended these Mississippi Freedom Schools. Originally aimed at school-aged children, the Freedom Schools served many adults. In order to recruit students to participate in the Freedom Schools, volunteers created brochures and pamphlets to solicit participation from the African American families in various counties in Mississippi. The families that participated in the Freedom Schools were subjected to acts of violence and increased discrimination. This meant they could have lost their homes, jobs and even loved ones.

¹¹ Highlander was created in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West in Grundy County, TN. Highlander's work in the Civil Rights Movement focused mainly on school desegregation and voter education/voting rights. Highlander also conducted cross-race educational sessions; Highlander served and continues to serve a role as a key gathering place for civil rights activists.

What You Can Do:

This is your **FREEDOM SUMMER**. It will not work without your help.

COFO is asking you to:

- provide housing for the people who are coming to work here.
- look for buildings which can be used for Freedom Schools and Community Centers.
- get names of students who want to go to Freedom Schools.
- let us know when you have meetings or arrange meetings so we can come answer questions about the **FREEDOM SUMMER**.

Many people are coming here to work during our **FREEDOM SUMMER**. They want to learn about Mississippi. They feel that the problems here are the problems of people all over the country. Most of them will be college students, both Negro and White.

COFO is your organization. The things it is trying to do should be done by the state. The people who have been elected to run the state say that they do not have to do things for Negroes.

IT IS THE FAULT OF THE STATE that you cannot:

- find work
- read and write
- send your children to better schools.

If you work with COFO you will be working to get yourself the

What Is COFO?

COFO is an organization made up of all the civil rights and local citizenship groups in Mississippi which decided they must work together to improve conditions in Mississippi.



For more information:

Write to - COFO STATE OFFICE
1017 Lynch Street
Jackson, Mississippi

Or call - 352-9605

Other offices near you:

CLARKSDALE - 213 4th Street
phone - 624-2913

COLUMBUS - 1323 6th Ave. North
phone - 328-3916

GREENWOOD - 708 Avenue N
phone - 453-1282

HATTIESBURG - 507 Mobile Street
phone - 584-7670

MERIDIAN - 2505 1/2 5th Street
phone - 485-0286




**Council
Of
Federated
Organizations**



**MISSISSIPPI
FREEDOM
SUMMER**

Freedom Schools



FREEDOM SCHOOLS will be during the summer. They are schools where high school students will be able to talk about things they can't talk about in regular school. They will learn about civil rights.

There will be classes for students who:

1. have trouble with their lessons in regular school and want to do better,
2. like to read and want to learn more than they are taught in regular school.

There will be singing, dancing, sports, hikes and many other things for all students.

Some of the FREEDOM SCHOOLS will be for people who spend 6 weeks away from home to live at them.

ALL OF THE FREEDOM SCHOOLS WILL BE FREE.

Voter Registration

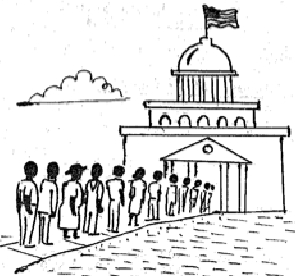
ARE YOU A REGISTERED VOTER?

If we were all voting then things would be better in Mississippi.


We would have:

- enough food
- more jobs
- better schools
- better houses
- paved sidewalks

People coming here this summer can work with you on VOTER REGISTRATION. They can knock on doors, teach the registration forms and drive people to the courthouse. They can help in any way you want them to.



Community Centers



A COMMUNITY CENTER is a place where everyone can do many different things. It will be mostly for adults and will offer many chances for them to learn things to help them live better.

COMMUNITY CENTERS will have:

- job training programs
- classes for people who cannot read or write
- classes on child care
- health programs
- adult education and Negro history classes
- music, drama, and arts and crafts workshops

If you have small children, they will be taken care of while you enjoy the COMMUNITY CENTER.

EVERYTHING AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER WILL BE FREE.

Figure 2: COFO Freedom Summer brochure.

The curriculum focused on the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement, Black history. The educational atmosphere was different than the students of Mississippi had previously encountered. When SNCC set up Freedom Schools, the teacher-organizers fashioned a learning environment and method of instruction consistent with their evolving political and philosophical beliefs. Rigid hierarchy was abandoned, and the curriculum was designed to reflect the world and heritage of the schools' students (Ransby 2003, p. 326). SNCC wanted to "simultaneously change the hearts of southern Whites, to enlighten America about conditions in the South, and to discover true morality in themselves" (Perlstein, 1990, p. 298). The Freedom Schools' primary goal was to instill in the Black community "the capacity to make a demand" (Perlstein, 1990, p. 298). Freedom Schools added new pedagogical functions to direct-action protests and reflected a deep-rooted faith in education among movement activists and Black Americans (Perlstein, 1990, p. 299; p. 302). Staughton Lynd described the curriculum as a "security-blanket" of potential help incase they ran out of things to do and not a blueprint for the inexperienced young teacher-organizer. (Ransby 2003, p. 327).

When the Freedom Schools curriculum and programmatic design were still in the planning stages, Ella Baker was called in to help shape the content and philosophy of the project. Baker served, along with Septima Clark, as "chairman" of the Freedom Schools conference in March of 1964. Ransby (2003) describes Baker as a "reluctant but relentless" teacher whose influence on the Freedom Schools was "pervasive and undeniable" (p. 327). Her politics on radical and democratic education were highly respected. Baker's approach to teaching and learning was evident in each Freedom School classroom. Baker's pedagogical style was similar to Paulo Freire. Ransby (2003) writes,

Three key tenets of Freire's educational philosophy can be found in Baker's practice and the Freedom Schools themselves. The first is the notion that to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibility for the production or construction of knowledge. The second is the idea that teaching and learning should be reciprocal; it would be a contradiction to the teacher who believed in "democracy and freedom" to "at the same time act with arrogance" and be unwilling to listen across boundaries of difference. The final perspective that Freire and Baker shared, one that was manifest in the practices and philosophy of SNCC's Freedom Schools, is skepticism about the conservative impact of traditional ways of teaching and a conviction that a more democratic learning environment has a liberatory potential. (p.328).

For Baker democratic learning and teaching was critical for individual, institutional and societal change.

Black, Women, and Civil Rights

Attempting to discern the racial and gender implications historically and theoretically in academic scholarship is a fairly recent phenomenon. Often, scholars simply add race and gender into the mix of social signifiers that drive American society (Jones, 1998). For the purpose of this section, I focus on African American women's history and looked at the ways in which the intersections of race and gender as it relates to the Civil Rights Movement. Race, coupled with gender, leaves Black women's history in a unique position. During the late twentieth century, historians used the word "race" in imprecise ways as shorthand for dichotomies in the contrast of White people and to people whose ancestors were enslaved (Jones, 1998 p. 220). As race becomes omitted from the discourse on Black women's lives, scholars begin thinking in terms of a "homogenous womanhood". Some feminists are unable to separate their Whiteness from their womanness and conclude that the gender identity of all women is the same.

African American women's historians, Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Roslyn Terborg-Penn have worked to bring Black women's stories to the forefront of the

discourse. Through oral history projects and the creation of encyclopedias devoted to the lives of Black women, we see the power in creating biographical accounts of Black women's lives. These projects identify the complexities of Black women's race and gender. The aforementioned historians look at the social construction of race and gender and detail how they together impact Black women's lives. "Like gender and class, then, race must be seen as a social construction predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying the simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-a vis one another (Higginbotham, 1992 p. 4).

Ransby (2003) describes how the emergence of women leaders transformed the gender relations within the Black freedom movement. According to Ransby, Ella Baker offered an alternative view of womanhood as a result of radical and transformative pedagogical techniques she employed as an organizer. Seldom, do we see Black women's pedagogical practices at the center of the discourse of radical or transformative education. The stories of Black women educators and students often only focus on a perceived conservative, feminine type of teaching that draws its foundation from early Victorian ideals of morality and womanhood and Black elitism (p. 358).

Crawford (1993) writes, despite the major influence Black women in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, few studies document the roles and contributions of these women in the struggle for equality and social justice in America (p. 13). In the South, more specifically in Mississippi, the fight for civil rights was first and foremost a day-to-day struggle for survival. Black women's civil rights work began with developing strategies to be more self-sufficient. Black women also created community-building efforts to free blacks from the severe economic dependency on Whites (Crawford, 1993). "Black women

established rural cooperatives that eventually grew into the Poor People's Corporation. This organization was created to help those who had lost their jobs as a result of their civil rights participation" (Crawford, 1993, p. 15).

Payne's (1990) essay "Men Led, but Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta" suggests there was a greater willingness of women to join the movement in the early 1960s. He also articulates the considerable investment of women in kin and communal networks. Similarly, Crawford (1993) describes Black women as survivors. She writes, "Their ability to lead the struggle for freedom with dignity and indomitable spirit comes from a long history of black women's activism" (p. 24).

Payne (1990) explains prior to the summer of 1964, the civil rights movement had achieved few victories in the rural south. People were not inclined to join the movement. Most Blacks in the Mississippi Delta were afraid of any form of political involvement. Payne (1990) describes the "overparticipation" of women when he writes,

Women took civil rights worker into their homes, of course giving them a place to eat and sleep, but women also canvassed more than men, showed up more often at mass meetings and demonstrations, and more frequently attempted to register to vote (p. 2).

Very little is known about the countless black women who worked as organizers, leaders and strategist for the civil rights movement. Crawford's (1993) essay "Beyond the Human Self: Grassroots Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement" highlights the work of Maggie Douglass, Hilda Wilson, Winson Hudson, Annie Belle Robinson Devine, and Unita Blackwell. These women developed a network to collectively transform their lives and the lives of those living in Mississippi.

For example, Septima Clark's Citizenship Schools focused primarily on adult literacy education in efforts to increase voter registration in the South. In her first person narrative

Clark describes her experiences as a woman working for change in the civil rights movement,

I was on the executive staff of SCLC, but the men on it didn't listen to me too well. They liked to send me into many places, because I could always make a path in to get people to listen to what I have to say. But those men didn't have any faith in women, none whatsoever. They just thought that women were sex symbols and had no contributions to make (Clark, 1990 p. 77)

Although these women devoted much of their life to teaching and civil rights activism, their names remain largely unknown to the general public.

In addition to rural, African American women, Black female students across college campuses were active in the Civil Rights Movement. Lefever's (2005) *Undaunted By the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement 1957-1967* chronicles the participation of Spelman students and faculty in the civil rights movement. Spelman College, the nation's oldest and best known black liberal arts college for women was founded on the principles to uplift the black race by providing an academic education to disenfranchised Black women. Spelman later became the premier liberal arts college for African American women. Lefever (2005) describes the impact former faculty members like Vincent Harding, Howard Zinn and Staughton Lynd had on the Mississippi Freedom Schools (p. 195). Moreover during their tenure at Spelman they worked with numerous students who eventually joined the movement for civil rights. Spelman women like Marian Wright Edelman, Bernice Johnson Reagan, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson "participated in the movement as both as *students* and as *women*" (Lefever, 2005, p. 256).

This brief sketch of the foundations of the social and political climate of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer along with the foundations of women's participation in the movement, more specifically, Freedom Summer is necessary for an understanding of the

context of the recollections of the participants in this study. The Mississippi Freedom Summer's unique history afforded Blacks economic, political, and educational advances not available in other areas around the country. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the actual organizing efforts for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project lasted only for the summer months of 1964. Some stayed longer, but because most of the volunteers were college students, there were few available to remain in Mississippi. The following chapter will build upon the issues outlined in this chapter through the narratives of three African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools.

What follows are a collection of narratives from three women Eva, Denise & Mildred, all African American, all Freedom School Teachers in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. My participants articulated a willingness to struggle, a constant belief in their abilities to fashion a better world, and a refusal to submit to racism (Hine, King, & Reed, 1995, p. xii). The stories that follow articulate how they specialized in the *wholly impossible*,¹² which makes it abundantly clear that Black women did not view themselves as passive, powerless victims (Hine, King & Reed, 1995, p. xii). A common thread connects all of the narratives—the resistance of Black women to oppression and exploitation and a commitment to education and liberation.

¹² In 1909 Nannie Helen Burroughs opened the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C. she adopted this motto for the school which taught classes on the high school and junior college level.

CHAPTER 4

THREE NARRATIVES

Eva's Story

Personal Background

I was born and raised in Clarksdale Mississippi. I attended school in Clarksdale Mississippi and eventually went to Jackson State University. My school experience was based in the South. I attended parochial school and public school. Most of my time was spent in public school. I started school at Immaculate Conception in Clarksdale, Mississippi and I was probably there two or three years, I'm not sure. Later I went to Holy Rosary Institute in Lafayette, Louisiana, which was a boarding school, and then the rest of my time I went to public schools of Clarksdale Mississippi. I don't have a particularly religious background the way that you would think of a southerner's background. My stepfather went to church on a regular basis, he was a Methodist, but because we were educated at a Catholic school, and my mother really like the Catholic school, some of us converted to Catholicism. I had two sisters and a brother growing up in Mississippi. My sisters converted to Catholicism, my brother did not, and I also converted to Catholicism. Probably more than anything my stepfather was a very quiet, hardworking man, but he believed that he was equal and he believed that his children were equal, and we were taught that we were equal and that we deserved all the bounty that this country had to offer, so that is what I expected.

Working for Civil Rights

I was a student at Jackson State and I was going to summer school. I actually got involved in the Civil Rights Movement in 1961. I was arrested for picketing along with Richard Haley. I was arraigned as a Freedom Rider and I always think it was kind of funny because I did not get on the Freedom Rider bus. But that was my first arrest and actually how I became involved.

I was arraigned with the Freedom Riders. They had this big arraignment and all the Freedom Riders came back and I was arraigned with that group. After that, I was getting ready to go to Clarksdale, must have been Labor Day. I was sitting on the second seat of the bus, and I was arrested. I was just riding the Greyhound bus home, not demonstrating. I was arrested, taken to jail, and kept there all day. And after dark, I was brought back out; there were these policemen, they all had pistols and some of them had on plainclothes. Their pistols were very much in view, they were swaggering; they stood in front of the doors. I was just standing out there waiting to get on the bus. When we could get on the bus, there was a young Black man that came on, and we sat on the second seat, same seat that I had been arrested on, and we were going home. I testified about that, in a hearing in Jackson, Mississippi, with Constance Motley the attorney, and Darren Bell. I guess the testimony was so that the federal government would enforce the Boynton¹³ decision. That's how I became involved with the Civil Rights Movement, which continued for a time after that.

I was walking down the street one day and I met James Bevel and Bernard Lafayette. I met them, either together or separately, and I also met Marion Barry. They were talking about the Civil Rights Movement and they said they had an office. I went down to the office,

¹³ In December 1960 the Supreme Court decided the Boynton v. Virginia case. Integrated travel on inter-state buses and trains became a legal right. The separate white and colored dining rooms and toilets for inter-state travel were ruled illegal and travelers had the right to use whatever facility they wanted.

which was on Lynch St. Thomas Gaither was operating the office and he was working for CORE. My memory of this was that it was upstairs, and it had a photograph standing in front of it with some sign that said “mortuary”. Thomas Gaither, along with someone else convinced me that I should get involved. First, before that, I went to – to Mrs. Harvey’s house, some people were being released from jail, their thirty days was up. So I went down there with, I believe Stokely Carmichael and Ruby Doris Smith. I was very mesmerized. While I was there, I was talking to him and he asked me about going to a demonstration. I said “What kind of demonstration?” He replied with something about the governor, Ross Barnett having a conference, a southern governors conference, on how to deal with the trouble that was coming into the state, from outside agitators. I said I would go and picket the governors’ conference. I was in summer school at the time. I had paid my money, and it was past the point of getting your money back. So I wrote my mother a letter telling her that I was withdrawing from school and dropped it in the mail.

I went to the office and met Richard Haley, he was the field secretary for CORE, and he was going with me. We took his signs and went down in front of the house and that was really frightening for me, and I think it scared me so bad for years. I thought we’d picketed in front of the capitol, and I would tell people that. When I got the records from the Sovereignty Commission¹⁴, the news clippings, then I realized that it was really in front of the house. I was so scared I forgot where I was. We picketed and I was arrested.

I was arrested and taken to the city jail. I was separated from Richard Haley. We were taken to municipal court, to say whether we were guilty or not. And William Kunstler was the attorney and we said that we were not guilty, then I was taken from there to the

¹⁴ The establishment of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission was created in 1956 in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. This tax supported investigation agency was implemented “to do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi.”

county jail. The county jail was probably where I had one of my most interesting kinds of experiences. I was by myself, I was isolated. On the end was a woman, she was in a cell, she was in because she had killed her husband. Next to me was a White woman who was an alcoholic, and I just gave her a name, Jessie May and that suited her. And there was my cell. On the next cell, there was a lady who was waiting to go to Whitfield. They used to when people were having mental problems they would lock them up in jail before they took them to the hospital ward. There was a little corridor, the lady on the end was out, her door was open so she could walk and they gave her a bucket with a dipper and water, Oh it was so hot! And she used to walk back and forth and let us drink out of the dipper. We used to sit there and play cards together, the White woman and the lady who had committed murder, and me. The lady who was waiting to go to Whitfield didn't participate. We used to play cards until we heard the keys of the jailer, then we would run and jump on our bunks, smoke cigarettes, or whatever we did. That was our life. I had no mattress, that was taken, I'm not sure why because I hadn't done anything. They just moved me in and took it out.

I never went to Parchman¹⁵, my time was served in the county jail and all of my other arrests were served in the county. Mississippians were kept separate from other people, and that was probably done to terrorize and intimidate, because it's pretty spooky if you're in someplace by yourself. It's a little different if you have comrades.

It seems to me that a lot of things happened, and it could be that I have compressed thing into this incident. It seems as though when I went into jail there were not a lot of people in the office on Lynch St. It seems like when I came out there were a lot of people in the

¹⁵ One of the South's most infamous prisons this facility was also known as Parchman Farm, Parchman Maximum Security State Prison and now Mississippi State Penitentiary. Located in Sunflower County, MS, civil rights workers who were sent there were raped, abused and killed.

office, and that's also when I met Bob Moses. It seems that when I came out, it was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

My family was terribly upset, they'd paid out of their pockets and they'd worked very hard to send me to college. It was cheap compared to what it is now, but your income was low compared to what it is now. Then, there was the sacrifice, and I was wasting money. That was a problem. My stepfather was pretty pleased by it and my mother seemed to be much angrier about me joining the Civil Rights Movement and about the money. But often women make the biggest sacrifices to the family. They supported my goals, because that is what I had always been taught. My mother had always had this expression that you need to stand for something, or you stand for nothing. She had these opinions and I would remind her, "This is exactly what you told me to do—take a stand". For my mother, it was fine for other people but not for me.

Eventually they just sort of let me be, because by that time I had been involved in the movement pretty continually since 1961 - although I did finish school while I was in the movement. That is the one thing that my mother - I promised - because at one time I wanted to drop out of school - because people were doing that - and I promised her that I would not drop out of school but I would continue and do these things. So I think it was kind of a bargain struck and I - my part was to stay in school and graduate and because I was the first person in my - maybe my entire family - I know in my immediate family to graduate from a or to complete - but I did not go to graduation - to complete a degree at a four year college. I had had a couple of people to you know complete at a business school or a two years nursing program or something like that but not an actual college degree.

When I got out of jail, I stayed in Mississippi. I worked for SNCC as a paid staffer. In 1963, I finished school and graduated from Jackson State. In the fall I worked on a special project called the Literacy Project. And I lived on county line road - the house is still there - it is across the street from Tugaloo - and I worked on that project until the end of May. I left that project but I continued to work with SNCC until the summer of '64. I went back to working at the COFO office and eventually I went to McComb to teach Freedom School.

Legacy of a Freedom School

Freedom Schools were wonderful, in fact, I think that's the reason I teach now. I took teacher's training in college, but I never planned to teach. I only did it because the people in family would tell me "you have to pick something you can do—you need to get a teaching degree". You either got a teaching degree, and Black women especially, or you got a nursing degree.

So I taught Freedom School in McComb. McComb at that particular time it was very dangerous. In fact it was so dangerous that um - they had considered not having a summer project in McComb but Curtis Muhammad is how he is known now - but then he was Curtis Hayes, argued for the project in McComb. Before I got there, actually before I had been asked to come down there and teach freedom school, the freedom house was bombed.

I'm very well aware of the night Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney didn't come back. Somebody called me from the office and said that they hadn't shown up. Most of my memories from that time are about the local people, about the courage. Those are the people who I think about and I think about often. The people who went to vote, or to register, knowing that they just might get killed, people who participated, even in the mock election, those people that lived there. For me, even as a student and then later on, I had no

responsibility. I didn't have any children, I didn't own any property, I had no responsibility so I could take a stand and do what people who had children, and who were willing to send their children to integrate schools. And people were yelling on both sides

There was two young women working on voter registration - one was Freddie Green and I think the other young woman's name was Pat but I cannot remember the last name. I am getting older so I can't remember everything. They were already there working on voter registration and I came to teach freedom school. Ralph Featherstone was the person kind of in charge of Freedom School. I was being paid by SNCC at that time. I think SNCC's paycheck was \$9.64 or something.

When I taught freedom school -we did not have a curriculum defined. I am sure in some places people did - but we did not have a defined curriculum. There were these courses that Ralph Featherstone wanted taught. One of the courses that I taught was typing. Which you know back then people typed on typewriters and since I knew how to type - I could teach typing. That was easy enough for me to do. The other thing that I taught was Negro history—that is what it was called at the time. I was reading every night trying to teach. For Negro history Ralph gave me a book - I can't remember the name of that book anymore but I can strangely, strangely visualize the cover. But I can't visualize or bring the name up. I also taught art and pen and ink drawing because I draw or I did at that time. I don't do it anymore but I used to. I had no special training, but I had eager students. It was a learning experience for both of us. I discovered that you don't need any kind of elaborate situation to teach, you can get the people who want to know and who have a willingness to learn, and you can teach them pretty much anything.

When I think about how I teach then and how I taught then, one of the ways that I taught especially Negro history—I probably enjoyed teaching that more than anything else because I was also learning. You know I had no background in Negro history. I was probably as ignorant as the children that I was teaching. I enjoyed the technique of asking questions and having them to talk about these questions. We might talk about a person or we might talk about a relationship that person had now in the present to their lives at that time. We also wrote about people and it was mostly question and answer reading and writing. Because they were deficient in writing they had to have something to write about. I have always thought if people had something to write about then they do better. I try to tell my students now always try to find something other than what we are required to do to write about. Ah - so that was one way. And since I was teaching outside, for the art class - the drawing classes, we drew things that were around us. Outside - we worked with whatever was available and a lot of times there was not much available.

My students at the time that I was teaching were not much younger than I was. They were high school students basically. I did not teach any elementary aged children. They were older students, so they were teenagers. I was what - four or five years older than they were at most. The students were at the Freedom School because they wanted to be there. They were interested in what was going on. They were bright youngsters but like most or many African American youngsters in Mississippi, they were poorly educated as I was too. Because I was - I went through the Mississippi system too. They were certainly willingly and extremely bright and perceptive and talented and needing an opportunity for expression. I think schools - regular public schools- were strict and Freedom Schools were just a wonderful experience. It was a wonderful experience working with them because I often

think now when I am teaching that I wish I had students that were that interested and enthusiastic about school. Cause we did not - my classes were held in a garage - that had been bombed - I mean this place was kind of in shambles. Because the freedom house had been bombed and it was attached. That is where I had my classes or outside under a tree so we were not like sitting in an air-conditioned space with like a chalkboard with um – computer. It was teaching just real basic without much of anything.

The students showed up every day. They showed up every day. I knew that they were going to be there. When I got up in the morning and got dressed I knew when I got there they were going to be there. That is what kept me going because it was very trying. I can't remember what else was bombed while I was down there that summer but something else was. McComb was very, very violent –very dangerous place. And down in that part of Mississippi in Amite county and Pike county and down there so many things happened to other movement people - I mean people got beat up and got locked up and there was shots fired into the freedom house. So, it was just the fact that the students were going to be there.

I did not think of teaching at Freedom School as an educational experience as much as I did of it as an organizing experience. I was just an extension to me of working with Civil Rights Movement and I don't even think I thought of it as much of "teaching". I mean I had no prepared lessons. I went and met the students and I taught them.

You know I teach probably because I taught at the freedom school. I don't think I would have been a teacher had I not had that experience. Because I had student taught and did not like it. I had decided and when I finished student teaching I was finished teaching. I think it was the way schools were structured. I think that was one of the things that bothered me and I was not ready for that kind of structure. The other thing I think that it was just kind

of the age. The age of the children that I did student teaching with and the place - I student taught in Vicksburg Mississippi.

Life After Freedom Schools

When I left Mississippi I did not begin teaching. I went to New York and worked in New York for a couple of years and I worked for different Civil Rights Organizations and non-profits. Then I went back south to Atlanta and worked for the Southern Regional Council then I came to where I lived now in Yellow Springs, [Ohio] and I worked at Bells Research institute for 2 1/2 years. Then I decided to work on my Masters degree. Everybody at the institute taught and had experience and I thought well - 2 things - the man that I worked for had decided to go back and get a Ph.D. - he was a periodontist- or dentist - but he was going to get his Ph.D. So, he went back and I thought, well maybe I need to find another job. I called Springfield, Ohio and I asked them how to apply for a teaching position. I had never applied for a teaching position and actually had only really applied for one job. Most of the jobs that I had had—and they were jobs now, not careers – was because somebody knew that somebody needed somebody and they knew that I was available. I did not have a lot of experience in job hunting. I called and they asked me if I could come up there that day, and I went up there that day and they told me what to do and I sent off for my transcripts. I filled out an application. That April so they called me like that May and gave me a contract for the next school year so that is how I ended up there. And I liked teaching. I enjoyed teaching but I don't think had I not taught freedom school that I would have ever taught.

Almost Like We Were Ghosts

There were no White women on the project while I was there. It was considered too dangerous. You know there have been different stories and a lot of women. Especially White women feel that SNCC was sexist and they probably were because the country was sexist. You couldn't expect for men in SNCC to be any different from men basically in the wider society. But my thinking about me is that through SNCC I became a liberated woman. I became a strong Black woman, because you know Black women had to be able to fend for themselves too much because mother would say so. I had - so I had that tradition because I grew up very shy. I think about it sometimes about how very shy I was and so through SNCC and through my work with SNCC and the encouragement I received from people and a lot of times it was mostly men um - young men because working on projects I certainly did become more outgoing or vocal but I also was soft spoken, so I it was depended on where you were. You know the feminist movement ah - when Casey Hayden and Mary King¹⁶ write that position paper on women in the civil rights movement has been used by feminists to make it sound like the men were outrageously sexist but they were no different from men at that particular time because that is how it was at that time and I don't think that they would have been any more um - liberal of their ways of thinking as their brothers and fathers and the rest of society. But I found [a] it very enriching kind of experience and I kind of grew a lot.

Especially since - you know sometimes this is this is one of kind of my things that I have - sometimes I have a feeling like um - like Black women who were a part of the movement are almost in a strange kind of way ignored almost like we were ghosts and were

¹⁶ In 1965 Mary King and Casey Hayden wrote a position paper on Feminism and the Civil Rights Movement. Their position paper, written from a White feminist perspective, critiqued the gender inequities they witnessed as members of the Civil Rights Movement. Mary King later wrote more about her experiences and the sexism at that time in her memoir *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the Civil Rights Movement*.

not there. And then I think well maybe we don't write or we don't I'm not sure I know. At one point we did. Some of us we wrote pieces for a book but I doubt I will ever see it published um but it is like and then especially if you are a local Black person and you did not sing or have a commanding speaking voice but you know if you are just quiet - I mean sometimes I do get that feeling like we are shadows. I know on the project that I worked on there were two other people, Black women, that worked on voter registration and organizing. So there were Black women working in the freedom rights movement but freedom teachers I don't know. I don't know...

You see I did not go to the training in Oxford. I stayed in Mississippi, because you know somebody had to stay in Mississippi so I stayed in Mississippi and worked in that COFO office for the period of time that people were in the training. One of the things that was kind of funny to me and I chuckled about it—a few years ago they had some kind of um - reunion - I can't remember what kind of reunion of people who either came through there or were involved in 1964 but mostly they were White people that were at the reunion. That was before my husband died. He went to that. I am not exactly sure why he went to that or how he happened to go to that but he did go to that but it was mostly - fairly well-known people that had been involved in SNCC and the civil rights movement.

Denise's Story

Personal Background

I remember the city of my birth as a big country town overlooking the Mississippi River and bounded by Arkansas and Mississippi. "The Cotton Capital of the South." "Home of the Blues." By any name Memphis, Tennessee, in the late forties, was just a plain ordinary

town in Dixie¹⁷ I went to public school. It was a public neighborhood school I could walk to in ten minutes. If I were running late and not walking with my girlfriends, I would get there in five minutes. If I ran, I could get there in 3 minutes. I had to run because you were never allowed to be late, you were penalized for being late.

School was extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. It was the place where we were told that we were very smart, very special, and that we had been chosen by people in the community to change the world. School was a place where I learned to think, ask questions, hear the sound of my voice trying to explain something and the sound of the voices of my peers trying to do the same thing. It was a place where we learned about what it means to be born Black and woman in the south. There was a critical, critical emphasis on THE SOUTH. We were seen as people who grew in the soil of the South. School was a special place, it was a place of music and movement and it was a place where the generations could come together. It was a happy place for me. It was just very wonderful. I loved school and I don't think I had a choice because school loved me. School loved everybody who entered the doors. So it was wonderful.

I graduated from Le Moyne College and then began living in Boston when I was in graduate school at Boston University. I had left the south. Boston in 1959 was a strange city. Unattractive, cold, and spiritually desolate. Disappointing. At least for me, a Black woman from the South. A daughter of the sun. I was accustomed to people talking with animation on street corners, in groceries stores, and across dusty courtyards. People sitting on front porches watching children, all of whom "belonged" to them. People approaching me with

¹⁷ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p.1

*smiles followed by warm hellos. Nothing seemed right about this city. Even its music was wrong. Monotone. Without soul.*¹⁸

In the south we knew what to expect. We saw the signs which were brighter than neons, flashing “Colored.” Which meant, “Black folks need not apply, enter or even approach.” Boston needed no signs. The city’s behavior said it all: “We, too, hate Blacks.” Whites moved away from us on the train. They took their “blessed time” serving us in restaurants. They made us wait forever in department stores. And those who were not “refined” enough—or phoney enough—to pretend, hurled racist epithets that won a close first with lynching language associated only with the South.¹⁹ And I was supposed to be grateful for being there. A Black girl from a housing project in the deep South attending graduate school in the East. A Woodrow Wilson Fellow at that²⁰.

Working for Civil Rights

I saw a group of a demonstrators at a Trailways bus depot and they were just walking around with picket signs, walking around with picket signs and of course I had seen that happening in the south on television, but I had not seen it with my naked eyes until I happened to be in the neighborhood of Trailways. I didn't even have to think about what I was going to do. I joined the picket circle. I took up a sign and walked. At the end of my walking I signed up to be involved in Boston CORE. Membership with CORE was composed of essentially White privileged students from MIT, Harvard, Boston College, Boston University, Simmons, etc. There were more women in CORE perhaps because of the eastern

¹⁸ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p.121

¹⁹ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 122-123

²⁰ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 122

location of the CORE in which I was involved. Women were the majority in the organization. I allowed my eyes to see a rainbow of ethnicity that never arched over Memphis. At home, Whites were White. Southern and White. Periods. In Boston, Whites were divided into distinctively different groups who claimed different sections of the city as home: the Irish in South Boston, the Italians in North Boston, the Jews in Brookline.²¹

The bus boycotts of the Civil Rights Movement started while I was in Boston. Everything that was happening in the Movement was happening in the South, the place of my birth and my youth. The South, which I left, was changing. I saw the beatings on television, and I wept. I could have joined the Boston chapter of the NAACP, but CORE appealed to me more. It attracted a different type of activist. Instead of working in the courts, it worked in the streets. I needed visible and public proof of my commitment, especially since I was living in a White world.²²

I saw pickets around Trailways and I didn't have to think. It was - it was automatic. I joined them and that is how my involvement in the movement began. I remained active in CORE during my years in Boston. I participated in demonstrations at Trailways and Greyhound. I volunteered to go to confront apartment managers that did not permit Blacks to live in their buildings. I demonstrated at apartment complexes that we found guilty of discrimination and at places of employment. I went to grocery stores in Roxbury and grocery stores in Boston and grocery stores in the White suburbs with grocery lists that we had prepared at our CORE meetings. We would compare the price of the items and the

²¹ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 126

²² Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 128

quality of the items as we saw them in stores located in Black neighborhoods and stores located in White neighborhoods.

Returning South

When I moved from Boston to Atlanta in 1963, I immediately joined the hundreds of thousands of Blacks and Whites who called themselves civil rights workers or activists. I was an instructor of English at Spelman College. When I returned to the South and began working at Spelman, I became involved in the movement here in Atlanta with SNCC and with SCLC because CORE didn't have any footing in the southern soil. So when I came here I became involved. I would go to SNCC rallies that were held in congregational church on Chestnut Street, which was right in the heart of the Atlanta University Center. I would go to SNCC planning meetings where Julian Bond was pretty much the leader of the Atlanta Chapter of SNCC. The office was located on what was then Hunter Street in a small-framed house. I would attend the SNCC meetings and help with the organization of demonstrations that we were going to have. It was a very, very exciting time.

I mean I woke up thinking about the movement "What are we doing today?" "What is the activity tonight?" "How many signs do we have to make today?" "How many letters do we need to send out today?" It was just very, very much a part of my life. I was an activist. I was an activist. Demonstrating and picketing and sending out letters and doing the same kind of um civil rights research that we did in Boston comparing the prices and quality of produce in Black stores and White stores and just whatever.

I came to know arrests many times. My first arrest occurred in 1963 when I was a new instructor at Spelman College.²³ I remember one most vividly because it was so different from any other experience I had in Atlanta. I was placed in solitary confinement with a tenth grade girl from Washington High School. Perhaps there were so many demonstrators that the two of us had to be placed in the only space left—solitary—and fate chose us. Whatever the reason, I remember being with her in a concrete cell a little larger than a stall in a public toilet, leaving it only to relieve ourselves. The cell was near an area that White male prisoners (the jails were segregated) passed on their way to work or the mess hall. The men peeped in at us and called us obscene names. In explicit terms, they told us what they'd like to do to us, with us and in what Zora Neal Hurston calls the illusion of male irresistibility, what they'd like to do for us.²⁴ On the second night we were awakened in the early morning hours and loaded like cattle into police vans protected by a ferocious German Shepherd ... The ride took forever. The road was rough, the night was dark, and the dog never stopped barking. We had no idea of our destination. When we arrived at the workhouse somewhere in the county we were relieved. I remember two things about this experience: I was cold most of the time and I worked in a huge kitchen, along with other women, preparing food for inmates. I also remember the obscenity of the White jailers. In their eyes we were sexually talented because we were Black and should be sexually available because we were Black.²⁵ Two days later, untouched by the White jailers, I was released along with my fellow demonstrators. The demonstrations resumed. Atlanta, cultured by southern standards, was

²³ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 140

²⁴ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 144

²⁵ Citation omitted to protect anonymity 1995, p. 144

receiving the “bad press” once reserved for well-known cities in Mississippi and Alabama. At the end of the school year, I was fired at Spelman. Other faculty, among them Vincent Harding, Howard Zinn, and Staughton Lynd, were either fired or, of their own volition, left the Center.²⁶

Mississippi Bound

When COFO announced what some called “a nonviolent invasion” of the state of Mississippi, I signed on without hesitation. Shortly after Spelman’s commencement, I drove my little Volkswagen bug from Memphis, where I bid farewell to my family, to Chicago where I visited my sister, and on to the University of Miami in Ohio, where I joined hundreds of volunteers for a weeklong training program in nonviolence.²⁷

There we learned how to control your anger, how to minimize your fear and what to do if someone hit you. We learned how to protect your head and how to how to curl up in a ball if you were being struck. We learned how to respond to verbal abuse and how to love. How to believe in change. How to forgive and how to continue to resist.

The night before our buses were to leave for Mississippi, we were going to different places in the south and we had our rallies and our prayer meetings and our, and it was wonderful. It was a wonderful bonding experience but the night before we were to leave for Mississippi the bodies of the three civil rights workers had been discovered. Either the bodies had been discovered or they were missing. So with that, my family was very proud but concerned. They were afraid. They were afraid because we lived in Memphis, Tennessee. Memphis is bounded by Arkansas and by Mississippi and we knew about the violence of

²⁶ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 145

²⁷ Citation omitted to protect anonymity, 1995, p. 146

Whites in Mississippi and in Arkansas - so the fact that the civil rights workers were missing or their bodies had been discovered heightened any fear that my family might have had about my going to Mississippi.

Additionally, when our bus, the bus that I was riding on reached the Trailways station in Memphis the bus driver informed us that we had to remove all of our belongings, everything. He was not going to take us into Mississippi. So we had made a decision. No buses were going into Mississippi. We did not know what to do. We figured we would take the train. "How are we going to get to the train station?" I called members of my family and they were able to get a group of people, four or five cars that came down in the middle of the night and took us, drove us to the train station and assisted us with the additional money we needed to go to Mississippi by train.

The fact that that my family was involved in that experience, in that way, helped their fears. After I was in Mississippi, a helicopter hovered over my house regularly and when my family received letters that I wrote them from Mississippi, the letters were unreadable because letters, words had been cut out. It was like looking at a sheet of paper that had windows, boxes, or spaces; they could not read the letters. All of that was frightening, and yet in a way it made my family aware of and more appreciative of the courage of the civil rights workers. Because they knew the helicopters, and the letters with cut out words, and they knew also because they grew up in Mississippi. They knew also because they lived in Memphis, which is on the bank of the Mississippi River.

Freedom Schools

Freedom Schools were quite something, it was nothing that I expected. It was nothing that I can describe to you. And I know that doesn't; answer your question. But it speaks to

my truth. It was an extraordinary experience in that it underscored my faith in the ability of people to take charge of their lives and to resist oppression in various ways. It returned me to the South and that was not the world of the academy.

It returned me to the South, a world of ordinary people awaking every day, to live ordinary lives that were in fact, as I came to understand, extraordinary lives of courage. It was an experience that refueled my belief in the magic of teaching and in the power of the combination of teaching and learning. I can see the freedom school now, as I talk with you. There is a church, a small-framed church. It is White. It sits in a clearing and I reach it by driving from the small farmhouse in which I lived down unpaved roads. I am turning to the right. I am driving on this unpaved road, on which there are no houses and then the road veers to the left and I see a few houses, and then I reach the church and what I see first of all is a huge, huge tree that has long, long braches and under that tree I see benches, wooden benches, and picnic tables. The tree sits to the left of the Freedom School and the Freedom School is the church. I see 1, 2, 3, 4 steps that lead into the church. I see children coming into the church for their classes. I see Madeline and Steven Levine, who were at the time graduate students Harvard. They were my roommates. I see them moving, telling their students to sit in the pews to the left and Madeline in the pews in the right rear, my students are sitting in the pews to the left front and we begin.

The Freedom School was held in the church where our rallies were held. The church was burned, bombed and a portion of it burned down. The farmer and his wife with whom we were living were courageous people who had grown up with the fear of violence but they protected us from. Mr. McKinney, we would call him to keep his identity unknown. The KKK came by one night, and we heard the screeching tires, it is an awful, awful sound, and

gunshots and then we looked outside and there was a cross burning in the yard. Mr. McKinney, Rev. McKinney really, went to a closet and pulled out a gun , a rifle that must have been used in the war of 1812, and he opened the door, and he was protecting us. Madeline and Steven and I would often laugh about this and he shot in the direction of the cross and the sound of the gun would pop—but that’s what kept me going was that the people opened their doors to us.

Every morning when we awoke, Madeline and Steven and I awoke and, and I am sure the others who were living with families, when everyone awoke - we smelled breakfast. Mrs. McKinney made biscuits from scratch, grits, fried chicken or fried pork chops; that was a southern breakfast. Every morning. Every morning. And she didn't want us to do anything, never to help her with the cooking or cleaning and every night she prepared dinner for us. They were so glad that we were there. So they kept us going.

Pedagogy

The children who came to the school felt special because there was a school made just for them. And that is what you have to emphasize when you talk about the Freedom Schools. When someone makes something just for you, it says, “I love you”. And I think sometimes when we talk about Freedom Schools we sometimes miss that point. They were made, created, for those children. And those children knew that. They knew that. And, when you feel special, when you feel loved, you begin to see yourself in a way that you would not perhaps see yourself. And you and you begin to dream in a different way, you begin to believe in yourself and the joy that the children were so happy just because that was their school. In my individual classes... I had 10 students. You are testing the memory of an older

woman. But in the entire school I am counting children as we are standing under the tree maybe - 40.

Our goal was to assist the students in giving voice to their feelings, giving voice to their goals, giving voice to an understanding of learning materials that were in our curriculum, but essentially it was about just about them learning to love themselves. And to believe that, that they had to know, not believe, that they had the right to the best education, the best life possible. That they were not to be denied anything. That there was nothing wrong with them. That they were not inferior. So it was really about assisting them in understanding that a movement was going on yes, and we were outsiders yes, but they were in charge and could be in charge of their lives.

We worked with stories, fables and folk tales and short stories, and all of which focused on, on achievement, dignity, character, and culture. We did a lot in the way of oral reading that they would read and interpret. We did journaling, they would write in the journal and they would write responses to some of the stories that we shared with them. We talked about the beauty of their world, what was beautiful in their world in Mississippi. For me, it was a focus on nature the beauty of the land, the beauty of the trees. I became a bird watcher in Mississippi. So, whatever the students wanted to bring, to share, became central to the learning experience. I, we, did magazine cut outs, we did images of Black people. Of course, we did history, Black history and of course we did songs. And we did games. I don't know whether or not this is relevant, but I remember we visited the homes of children. We bonded with the parents, which was very, very important and I remember going to one of the homes where there were what an urban child would think to be wasps flying freely in the home going in and out. But they were really dirt daubers, what we call in the South - dirt

daubers—they don't sting you, and I remember going into that home without a sense of fear. I don't know if I can even describe it without writing a poem or praying, but the movement and the colors in the room, the wallpaper was creatively done with newspaper. Comics that had color and the news that was in Black and White, but the way that the people cut that paper into different patterns, it was so beautiful.

There is one student who comes to mind immediately. Luella is her name. I mentioned Luella because she was clearly an exceptional student. Clearly, very, very bright student and she wasn't the only student who was smart, but there was drives that Luella had that made her stand out among the many bright students that we taught and who changed our lives. She was in Madeline Levine's class, she was not in my class, but all teachers had the opportunity to interact with all of the students. So I did, I knew in the general sessions how bright Luella was and how enthusiastic she was about experience and how hungry she was for something other than, what she was getting in the rural community in Mississippi in which we lived. To make what was to be a long story short; at the end of the summer program we began working to get Luella into Spelman.

I Am Anchored in My Identity

I am a Black woman from the South who has had the privilege of walking in the path of students; students in the Freedom School and truly privileged students. The Freedom School experiences influences my teaching experience every day in that I continue to believe in change. I believe the goal of teaching is to help students get more for themselves and that teachers should never, ever, ever be at the center of the classroom. There must be a coming together of what we in the Academy call “peer-in-practice”. And if - if what you teach stays

within the pages of a book, or article, or within the walls of a conference setting, nothing has been learned. Because the end of learning has to be “change”. It has to be - it has to be.

This has been good. This has been good for me because as I struggle with the pain of seeing the south lose its soul, I am re-fueled by the journey that you have asked me to take into my memories. The academy is a conservative institution. It has become even more conservative over the past 20 years; it has lost its soul. If I look in my journey and look at who has impacted me—the community. There are Freedom Schools now. We don't call them that. But I work every Saturday with a project that the Atlanta Chapter of Black Women in America. It's a program that focuses on young Black girls. Black high school girls called "at risk" and we say “in preparation in leadership”. And those of us that work with those young girls every Saturday –we continue the work of the Freedom Schools.

Mildred's Story

Personal Background

I am from Memphis Tennessee. In Memphis, I was not involved in the Civil Rights Movement because my grandmother would not let me. There were incidents that were totally spontaneous where I sat on the front seat of a bus in Memphis. I think I realized what racism was when I went looking for jobs at the end of my junior year. It was the first time I had even thought of sitting on the front seat of the bus in Memphis, which had the yellow line where Blacks in back and Whites in front. When I sat down in the front seat I don't know what I was thinking about. It could have been an ugly situation but somehow for whatever reason this guy did not call the police and did not physically throw me off. And I made it home - with him just rolling his eyes at me and telling me to get up. When I told my grandmother what I

had done, she reprimanded me and told me I could not go out ever again looking for a job. She was like, "girl don't you ever do anything like that again."

A lot of us Black folk who grew up in the deep South had loving parents and strong church members and they protected us from the harsh realities. We lived within our own communities and we barely, if ever, interacted with White people. So it wasn't until the end of my junior year and I knew I was going to college and I needed money to buy clothes and stuff like that I went out looking for jobs. I did not want be a total burden on my family. It was the first time I ever worked and I was looking in the paper going after jobs that were listed in the paper called for skills that I had, but of course they were jobs that were not for Black people. I would show up and everyone was White and they would be laughing hysterically and say, "girl we do not have any jobs for Negros" or whatever ugly word they would term me. At the end of two weeks of being treated so harshly when I was on my way home feeling very dejected and angry.

So when I left for college, I swore to my grandmother that I would not get involved in the Civil Rights Movements and she kept saying, "promise me, promise me" because things were not really happening in Memphis at that point but they were in Atlanta. The SNCC was headquarters there and other student movements had launched when I went in the fall of '62.

You Can Always Tell a Spelman Girl

I went to Spelman as the first person in my immediate family to even graduate from high school and I went on a full scholarship. I thought that I was in heaven because I came from quite a poor family and we lived in a very poor section of the city. So, just being at Spelman's campus I noticed the difference in the real estate. I just I thought I was in heaven. I was there on full academic, tuition scholarship and I had a federal loan to pay for my room

and board. My family was so excited about me going off to college. I mean my grandmother who raised me, she was just ecstatic and one of the things she said to me when they dropped me off was "don't get involved with this mess."

Right and then my orientation week at Spelman one of the things that they kept telling us over and over was that we couldn't get involved with the Civil Rights Movement. And that we would lose our scholarships if we did, that was just being hammered in.

When I begun to be involved I knew I had no support from home, I had no support from the school, so I lied because back in those days you could not just leave campus. You had to sign in and you had to sign out and you had to say where you were going if you were leaving the campus. I would say that I was going to the library or to another dorm and of course they could check on me. We could go up to a couple of places, there was a restaurant on West Harnett Street which was the main drag at that time, it is now called Martin Luther King Blvd., we could go up there to a restaurant and we could go to the Black owned pharmacy. I would sometimes sign out saying that I was going to the pharmacy. The house-mother would say you should not be gone longer than an hour to the pharmacy. You could stay a little longer if you were going to the restaurant, to have something to eat, but you could not be doing that every day because the house-mother read the log. And that was all she did was watch us, and stay on top of us for what we were doing.

I was constantly telling somebody in another dorm, "look I signed out saying that I am over here visiting you if anybody calls over here looking for me you have to say I went to the library". I had elaborate schemes to go to the SNCC office to volunteer. I mean, initially, when I was going, I was taking a lot of risks. Then I kept telling myself that I would not do anything that I could go to jail, "I am just going to be a volunteer in the office". I typed,

emptied trash cans, but of course the more I was hanging around with those people who were you know going and coming from jail and demonstrations I got caught by the bug. There was no way not to get caught.

Converging into Radical Change

I got settled and made friends with Reverend Abernathy's sister-in-law. She was a freshman with me, now I cannot remember her name, but she invited me to go to church with her. I had heard of Dr. King but I did not know who Dr. Abernathy was. So I go to this church, West Hunter Street Baptist Church, which was just a few blocks from the campus. I was brought up as a Baptist. I liked the church and I joined and I told my grandmother I joined a church and it reminded me of Gospel Temple, which is the church that I had grown up in. Little did I know how Abernathy was, every Sunday I was getting the gospel of the Civil Rights Movement. I had joined the choir and we went to Ebenezer because they exchanged choirs on different Sundays. Abernathy would preach at Ebenezer, Dr. King would preach at West Hunter Street.

I grew up in the Baptist church but King was obviously one of the most phenomenal preachers I had ever heard. But not only did he have the ability to rock the church, he was saying something totally different than all these other preachers. King was at a different level because he could combine both the intellectual stimulation and challenge. His sermons had the cadence and way of delivery that I was accustomed to growing up in the Black church. He might start his sermons off with quotes from philosophers or theologians that I had never heard of. But then he would break it down and bring it down to the level of the people in the pews many of who were not educated in the least. He did appeal to both and he seemed like such a nice man too, just from observing him and him greeting everybody in the

church and hugging people and you know people obviously loved him and they loved Abernathy too. Abernathy was educated but he had a more folksy down-home kind of way with him.

I was turned on in Spelman not in my Black high school. So really between what was happening in the class with Staughton Lynd, and the SNCC folk outside and Dr. King and I joined Reverend Abernathy's church. So everything was converging to change me into a radical. It changed my life.

I've Got to Do Something For My People

You know I never questioned American history, hand over heart, pledge of allegiance, I never questioned. Even though I knew slavery because my grandmother had taught me about slavery because she was raised by her grandmother who had been enslaved. I was fully aware of how badly we were treated since I had grown up in Memphis, but I never had the whole historical background. Howard Zinn was on the faculty at Spelman. I didn't have a class with Dr. Zinn but he was very famous. I was going to his lectures at the Atlanta University I wound up taking a history class with Dr. Lynd. So, "what was I getting from both of these guys?" "Civil rights, political struggles, the importance of it all." I was getting the same thing in church. I began thinking especially about reading the history for the first time in my life - really reading about slavery, really reading about reconstruction. We were reading W.E.B. Dubois. I had an English class where I was reading James Baldwin and Richard Wright and I had never heard of these people.

SNCC folks came on the campus recruiting us but they would be run off by the campus security. The SNCC folks were saying, "you have to get out of line, you have to come join us on the marches, you are an Uncle Tom, you are Negroes." Willie Riggs who was a prime recruiter for SNCC and other folk would come on the Atlanta University Campuses cajoling us and ridiculing us ah you know saying thing like "what are you going to be ah when you get your degree, are you going to be a nigger with a degree that can't eat in a restaurant, can't do this, can't do that." You know what is more important to get your Civil Rights, your human rights, or to be here you know uh in school and you still gonna be treated worse than a second class citizen. So that was really hitting me hard.

I thought, "Oh, I am not doing anything for my people." I was so afraid of getting in any trouble at school and losing my scholarship, which I could not be there without it and going home and disgracing my family. But my sophomore year was it was beset with all kinds of problems because I had become radicalized by SNCC. I kept telling them I can't go to jail, I can't be seen, I am just here to do whatever I can, I type, I know shorthand, empty wastebaskets. The place was often really in need of cleaning. I was observing these people and growing to admire them so much and God knows when Bob Moses and the Mississippi field staff would arrive I guess you would say the "Green Berets" of the Civil Rights Movement and I don't even want to curse them with calling them Green Berets but you know what I am trying to say.

Mississippi Goddamn²⁸

²⁸ In 1963 singer and pianist Nina Simone wrote the song *Mississippi Goddam*. She writes, "Alabama's got me so upset, Tennessee made me lose my rest and everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam." The song is a response to the murder of Medgar Evers and the bombing of the church in Birmingham that killed four young Black girls.

Mississippi was a hellhole - you know when Nina Simone sang that song "Mississippi Goddamn", I mean she got it. I had grown up in Memphis, so I all my life my grandmother and all those who had been share croppers, my grandmother had been raised by her grandmother who had been enslaved. I had been told the stories of Mississippi all my life and I had knew about Parchman Mississippi, the prison where you know Black people often ended up dead after they had worked them to death. Growing up my grandmother would tell me about how people were kept in slavery in Mississippi in her lifetime. In her girlhood and even during my coming up in the 50s people would have to run away from the plantations. These people were kept imprisoned because they the owners of the plantation claimed that those people owed them money. So they couldn't leave and of course they could never get out of debt because it was the share crop system. So you know the owner of the plantation supplied everything that seeds, the utensils, the house you lived in, you had a store, you had to buy everything from the store, there was bobbed wired, six foot fences that had armed guards so you could not leave. And at the end of the year, you always wound up owing him. My grandmother had told me all of this stuff when I grew up she had made these things and Mississippi was the worst place in America. So when I got to SNCC they tell me the same thing.

Mississippi

I volunteered to go to Mississippi my sophomore year, it was the second semester I had been working with Staughton Lynd. He became my mentor, one of my mentors and so when I learned that he was working on the curriculum for the Freedom Schools I volunteered to work with him on that. I volunteered to go to Mississippi as a part of the Mississippi Freedom Summer. Now one of the reasons that I had gotten a nerve to go and basically

broke up with my family over this issue because ah my grandmother said “if you go to Mississippi, you cannot ever come home” She made me choose between going. She also said I had been “brain washed by these SNCC people and I had been telling you all your life about Mississippi and I cannot believe that believe you are letting some crazy people talk you into growing down there, talking about getting folks registered to vote, you are going to be killed. And I just cannot believe there is nothing I can do to stop you from being crazy enough to do this.” So I think she thought that by saying to me if you go don’t ever come back that would be enough to stop me from going.

The school found out, it leaked out that I had signed up to go to Mississippi and my plan had been to not go home at the end of the spring term and the school had learned this. The Dean called and alerted my grandmother so on the last day of my exams, my grandmother, my mother and my step-father showed up at 6 a.m. in the morning to take me home. So that is the only reason I was in Memphis was because I had no intention of going to Memphis, I was just going to stay ah with the SNCC people, drive to Ohio for the orientation and then go on. As a result of this, I was calling the SNCC people collect frantically saying you know I have been kidnapped I can't go. And so they sent me you know the money to take the Greyhound bus with a little spending money, you know my grandmother intercepted it the first time, tore up the money order and I then had to call them back and say my grandmother found, I mean intercepted the letter without my permission, saw the money order, tore it up, and I need you all to send the money again but this time send it to my girlfriend’s house, I mean you know it was really horrific.

So I did get back there to Atlanta, I stayed with Staughton Lynd and his family and drove to Ohio with him and other people and then go assigned to Laurel, Mississippi where

we were told that Law was too dangerous for White people to be sent and that almost scared me to death because the only reason we may not get killed, every last one of us was because I thought the White people would provide a buffer and keep some of us from being killed by those crazy White folks in Mississippi. So when they said you are going to a town that is too dangerous to send White people to, so I thought we are just being offered up as a sacrificial lamb.

It was so bad we could not ever stay in Laurel, we had to stay in a town 30 miles south called Hattiesburg. And from Hattiesburg, we would travel to Laurel during the daylight hours to scout out anybody we had names of NAACP members and to scout out if any of them would house us because we did not have any housing there in Laurel. Anyway, um, after we found a couple of people who were very interested. Willing to go out on a limb and take us into their homes, Mrs. Roberta Spinx was the first woman that I met who said, "oh yes, yes, I have been waiting on you children all my life definitely I will take you in." She got her neighbor Mrs. Carrie Clayton across the street to take others in.

I was going as a Freedom School Director and I had no intentions of becoming Project Director. The Project Director role fell to me only because the man, Lester McKinney, who was the seasoned SNCC worker in my little project, was missing. He had been in and out of Mississippi on several occasions and knew Laurel Mississippi well. I was terrified because I had not done any field organizing. When I called the office in Jackson to report it, they sent out a SOS, got the Justice Dept to call down to the Jones County Sheriff. They admitted that they had picked Lester up and that they were holding him. He had jumped bond, like a dummy. When he had been in Laurel, he had been arrested a year or so prior to that, go out on bond, never told anybody and they had an outstanding warrant for

him. So of course when the snitches found out that he was back in town, they picked him up on the old warrant and said he was going to do 5 years in Parchment.

So of course you know SNCC dispatched some lawyers there and the only deal that the county would take was he had to leave and swear that he would never come back into that state for five years. So that left me and Jimmy, the folks in Atlanta said “you have to be the Project Director it will just be for a short time and we will send someone to replace you.

Well, 18 months later no one had been sent to replace me but they had sent 22 volunteers most of who were White in the interim period. So, I had to turn loose the director of the Freedom schools even though I did not want to give up all my duties related to it. I was only able to teach a class for high school students.

Conduit for Change

As Project Director, I was trying to keep 24 people including myself alive you know for that summer, boy you talk about growing up fast, I was 19 so it was trial by fire learning—to be a head of all these young people, most of whom were White, most of whom even though they were volunteering. I mean why else would they be there. I mean they had never been around Black people. And so they meant well but they were the guys were sexist. They never, you know, thought in their wildest dreams that they would be taking any direction from a Black woman who was in some case younger than they were.

So boy that was - that was - quite something. But in spite of it all we really accomplished the goals of that project. We organized the Mississippi Freedom Democratic chapter that became very strong. We operated two Freedom Schools that summer, we also had a day care center that we ran that summer and we engaged in the mock. People, you know, people could not register, so we had the mock registration and we registered hundreds

of people in that county, also we had the mock elections that the rest of the state had, so we elected our delegates to go to the State convention. And one of them was elected to go to the National Convention in Atlantic City where the big showdown happened with President Johnson.

Starting From Scratch

We had a very difficult time to rent office space to use. Finally a Black man owned a dilapidated old... it had been kind of like a juke joint kind of place. It had been closed for a number of years and he rented that to us at a very high rate of because he was very well-to-do, very capitalistic and did not have any love for the movement. But he was the only person that would rent anything to us and so we had to basically take up this boarded up building and with the community we turned it into offices, Freedom Schools space, we repaired it, we painted it, we re-roofed it and all of this while still paying him a sizeable rent and he did not contribute one dime to the renovation of the place and would not, take off the rent as we were repairing the place for him. But anyway, the Klan car bombed it and burned it down and the fire department did not come and put it out, and so that was ruined.

We had a wonderful library in fact we had more books in that library in fact than the public library which of course was totally segregated and I never even saw the inside of it. But we heard that we had more books than they did. Because some of the students who were volunteers they immediately got her parents and friend to send books. So we just had boxes of books, all kinds. And um we, we also were teaching literacy because many of the older adults, not only older ones, but some young were totally illiterate or functionally illiterate. And so If you were trying to get people to register to vote they had to be able to read and write so we added that in Laurel and then in the satellite we had really sort of a freedom day

care, that um was mainly, you know, drawings and African masks and dance and you know but very young children and so the mothers that lived in the projects were very happy because it gave them some time off because there was no kind of day care organized. People just took care of other folks children.

So in a way it really ah made people very appreciative of us, so this was free And we provided snacks and so those were the ah three things that we did. We had high school aged, middle schooled aged and elementary, kids were very exuberant about it and then in the evening we would do the literacy for adults. And people were just you know they were very pleased with that program. And you know everything was free and it gave us a way to be of service to the community and help them to you know feel that we were doing something that benefited them.

Then we were able to rent a very small, three room shotgun place, I am pressing a lot of time together but that place was also so you know it was really scary down there. We all had walkie-talkies in our cars. We had... you know you had to stay in touch with people. You never traveled the roads at night and I mean these White Klan's people and White Citizen Council people—Bin Laden could learn from these people. They were terrorists. And it was scary. My goodness I told people that I aged 10-20 years down there. It was, it was horrific, but nonetheless, what was so beautiful was what happened with the African American people, young people the leadership that evolved and all of these indigenous leaders. It was just phenomenal to see loads of whom were women. The children were just brave and ready to go up against armed guards and people with sticks and bricks just signing.

Black, Woman, Director

Some of the older students and had never learned any positive things about Black history. And so this was so very new to them. We did have a few young people that were very um ah interested and of course they were also interested in getting involved in the voter registration drives and going out canvassing and just "hanging" with us. They were... just had never been around White people who, first of all treated them like equals, So they were like fascinated particularly by these White folk who had come down there And sometimes that was a little difficult because they kind of idolized them.

The other thing that happened was that local people always wanted to have you over for dinner and there was so many of us. And people were poor, so I had to tell the White volunteers we had to divide this up, everybody could not go. And someone would invites you to dinner but those people can't afford to feed everyone. So there was you know a lot of times friction because it seemed to me that the White volunteers loved the adoration and so I had to spend a lot of time trying to get them to reflect on how this was also something that Blacks had to overcome. I mean and that they shouldn't be sort of really reveling in being looked up to anymore than the rest of us. We all were there volunteering and taking time out you know and we used to have some really knock down drag outs almost – ah staff meetings

Our staff meetings that turned into racial sensitivity kinds of sessions and that's where I got the nickname of being an Amazon. Because I had instituted certain rules about sexual harassment and stuff. Because that had been pretty bad up there in Oxford. And so the word had circulated through Mississippi that I had rules if a man was sexually inappropriate with a woman in the community, on the project, that you know they would get one warning and if they did it again they would be kicked off the project. And so that made

people call me the Amazon. It was just those days we didn't even talk about sexual harassment. I don't even know if I knew that term, I am calling it that now, but I don't know if that was even in my vocabulary like it is now you cannot put yourself - force yourself on any woman in this project and you know no dating of young woman out in the community. This was a constant you know your behavior is inappropriate of the White women to know you have to be extremely careful with these Black men because they could get them killed.

It was like I had to take all of this on and I was only 19 when I started this. They just did not understand and the other thing was that we were living in people's homes so you cannot be inappropriate in people's homes. You cannot call these people by their first names. It is Mrs. Jones and even if they tell you I am Ann don't you call them Ann. She is Mrs. Ann if you don't know the last name. So all of this kind of stuff was wearing because you know a lot of these were privileged White young people. They just did not have any sense, I said, "don't go in there drinking up all the milk in the house, I mean you can't eat up the food, replace it you guys have money." They didn't understand Black morals and you know it is like if you are going to church you have to put on a tie and a shirt. You can't wear your shorts to church, you had to be dressed properly. I mean the church is the very, sanctified sanctuary for Black people you have to respect that place. So it was just so much that I - that this is what I remember so vividly because it was so hard getting through and then of course being none of them had ever had a Black woman as a Director. So I also had to deal with their racism towards me.

Life After the Mississippi

When I left Mississippi, Jim Forman, made me come out. That is how the project ended – only because I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and I had been locked up

for 15 days in Jackson and when I came out, I didn't know how bad of shape I was in, but I had two automobile accidents back to back. And I was at fault for both and had ruined a couple of SNCC cars and then Jim uh said, "what is going on with you?"

That was in the fall of 65. I kept saying, "I can't leave, I can't leave." "How can I leave we still have too much to do?" Jim said, "But if you have a nervous breakdown, what good are you going to do those people in Laurel? and then where are you going? Your folks don't want you, you are going home broken". So he said I had to come out. And so I went – I did – and when I said I was leaving, and then everybody wanted to leave.

In 1968 and then I went to work for the National Council of Negro Women. Then I went back I went to Philly and I worked for the American Friends Service Committee and that is when I stated going back to school – little by little and I went to Antioch, Antioch had those satellite schools and you could get some uh academic points for your life experience and so that I think I got about a year's worth of credit so I only had to do another year because I had done two at Spelman so then I graduated from Antioch. Later I went back to do religion and at Temple and I got the Masters and Ph.D. there.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DATA

The narratives presented in the previous chapter present a broad overview of participants' lives as African American women and their perceptions of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, Freedom Schools, and life in Mississippi in 1964. As I prepared this section, I grappled with the empirical question, "what is at stake by not documenting Black women educators' stories that came of age during this time period?" The historical context of the Black community in Mississippi, the social and political landscape of the time, and the quality of participants' recollections are all interacting with each other simultaneously. What perhaps is most striking from the narratives is the number of sacrifices each participant for the Civil Rights Movement and the Freedom Schools as it relates to both their students' lives and own personal lives.

The oral histories reveal that participants engaged in the retelling of a collective story that puts emphasis on the both the positive and troubling aspects of the Mississippi Freedom Schools. This study works to further the dialogue that "questions how Black women's cultural orientations dictate how they come to understand their relationship to education, and how their understanding of the role of schooling shapes their identities" (Cozart and Price, 2005, p. 173). Moreover, Cozart and Price (2005) remind us of the many stories of Black women, schooling, and identity that need to be heard and understood.

Earlier in this dissertation, I discuss my rationale for selecting Black Feminist Epistemology as my theoretical framework. I used Black Feminist Epistemology both as a methodological tool for qualitative research as well as a theoretical lens to further understanding my participants' lives. Collins (2000) reminds us

U.S. Black feminist thought as specialized thought reflects the distinctive themes of African American women's experiences. Black feminist thought's core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersection oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination (p. 251).

I described Collins' four dimensions and how they can be used as a lens to understand and analyze Eva, Denise and Mildred's narratives. "Lived experience as criterion of meaning" is an understanding of the distinction between knowledge and wisdom. In the context of intersecting oppression this distinction is imperative. "Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate" (Collins, 2000, p. 257). Eva, Denise, and Mildred talk about not being as well versed in "Negro history" as they would have liked to be while they were Freedom School teachers. They were reading and learning the material on Black history as they were preparing to teach. They were critical of the education they received as children that left African Americans and their accomplishments out of the curriculum. While they did not have all of the book knowledge of African American history, they possessed the wisdom they gained from actively fighting on the front lines for civil rights. Their experience as activists gave them the wisdom to facilitate instruction in their Freedom School classroom to support their students in developing the "capacity to make a demand" for equality in their own lives.

This second dimension of Black feminist epistemology, "the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims", functioned in multiple ways in this dissertation. As a

researcher, I used dialogue to interact with my participants. Although, I constructed the interview protocol, it was through our dialogue and shared interest in the education of African American students that lead to the actual data for this research. Although the digital recorder was on at the beginning of our meetings, it took at least an hour for me to ask my first question. We took our time and talked to one another about my dissertation, our life in the academy and the then pending presidential election. It was through this experiences I saw first hand how, “for Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community” (Collins, 2000, p. 260). Collins (2000) builds upon hooks (1989) idea that “dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination” (hooks, 1989, p. 131). I became more human and more empowered after our conversations.

“The ethic of caring” another dimension of Black feminist epistemology places the emphasis on individual uniqueness, appropriateness of emotions and the capacity for empathy (Collins, 2000, p. 263). “Rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power or energy inherent in all life” (Collins, 2000, p. 263). The “ethic of personal accountability” requires “individuals to have definite positions on issues and assume full responsibility for arguing their validity” (Collins, 2000, p. 265). Eva, Mildred and Denise’s narratives are emotional. Their intellectual and emotional capacities are not distinct faculties. They articulated visceral responses to carefully tip-toeing around their respective counties in the midst of school and church bombings, being arrested, harassed in jail, and living as African American women in

the South. Mildred, in particular did not apologize for her individual expressiveness when she stated,

Mississippi was a hellhole - you know when Nina Simone sang that song "Mississippi Goddamn", I mean she got it.

...It was really scary down there. We all had walkie-talkies in our cars. We had... you know you had to stay in touch with people. You never traveled the roads at night and I mean these White Klan's people and White Citizen Council people—Bin Laden could learn from these people. They were terrorists. And it was scary.

Mildred and I laughed when she said this but we both paused. Life in Mississippi was violent. The sound of what she said was just as important as the words—she provided a dialogue of reason and emotion (Collins, 2000, p. 264). “Neither emotion no ethics is subordinated to reason. Instead emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential components in assign knowledge claims” (Collins, 2000, p. 266).

Rethinking Black Women’s Activism

Eva, Denise and Mildred articulate the powerful workings of Black women’s activism. Collins (2000) conceptualizes Black women’s activism in two dimensions:

The first, struggles for group survival consist of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures. This dimension may not directly challenge oppressive structures because, in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred not possible (p. 204).

The second dimension of Black women’s activism consists of struggles for institutional transformation—namely, those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other social institutions (p. 204).

Based on Collins’ definition, Eva, Denise, and Mildred’s participation in the Civil Rights Movement exemplify both dimensions of Black women’s activism. Their narratives demonstrate how they not only survived their experiences with intersecting oppression, but

they clearly rejected White supremacist ideological justifications from their oppressions. “Self definition, self-valuation, and movement toward self-reliance” informed their worldview (Collins, 2000, p. 201). Moreover, the dual dimensions of Black women’s activism offer a new model for examining African American political activism overall (Collins, 2000, p. 207).

For Eva, Denise and Mildred survival is a form of resistance and their struggle to provide a safe and empowering space for students in the Freedom Schools represent the foundation of Black women’s activism. Collins writes, without an understanding of survival as a form of resistance,

Struggles to transform U.S. educational, economic, and political institutions could not have been sustained. Yet, popular perspectives on Black political activism often fail to see how struggle for group survival was just as important as confrontations with institutional power (Collins, 2000, p. 202).

Eva, Denise, and Mildred were in positions where they were forced to struggle for group survival and institutional power simultaneously.

I first met Eva at the *Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Conference*. She had a very warm and welcoming personality. She was enthusiastic about talking to me and expressed her interest in writing her own memoir. We talked about our similar experiences growing up and attending parochial schools and the sense of discipline it gave us. Eva wanted to participate in the movement and although she had paid her tuition in full for summer school, she wrote a letter to her mother stating she was dropping out to work for civil rights. Eva was arrested for picketing the Southern governors conference while she was in summer school at Jackson State University. This was her way of taking action in the struggle for institutional transformation.

Her family was very upset with her about participating in the movement but in talking with her, it was something she felt she had to do. For Eva, Denise and Mildred Freedom Schools was not the first experience or instance where they put their lives on the line to for civil rights. Eva described the sacrifice she made and her family's reaction:

My family was terribly upset, they'd paid out of their pockets and they'd worked very hard to send me to college. It was cheap compared to what it is now, but your income was low compared to what it is now. Then, there was the sacrifice, and I was wasting money. That was a problem. My stepfather was pretty pleased by it and my mother seemed to be much angrier about me joining the Civil Rights Movement and about the money. But often women make the biggest sacrifices to the family. They supported my goals, because that is what I had always been taught. My mother had always had this expression that you need to stand for something, or you stand for nothing. She had these opinions and I would remind her, "This is exactly what you told me to do—take a stand". For my mother, it was fine for other people but not for me.

Here Eva demonstrated how "Black women's community work, with its duality of internal and external effort, also incorporate these interdependent dimensions of Black women's activism" (Collins, 2000, p. 206). Eva's action to maintain community integrity through the struggle for group survival was evident in her work with the Freedom Schools

The external constraints of racism, sexism and poverty have been so severe that the majority of African American women have found it difficult to participate in organized political activities (Collins, 2000). Through their work in the Freedom Schools, Eva, Denise, and Mildred focused on "strategies of everyday resistance that consisted of trying to create spheres of influence, authority, and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed African Americans and women little formal power" (Collins, 2000, p. 209). Eva describes her motivations for waking up every day to work in Freedom Schools:

The students showed up every day. They showed up every day. I knew that they were going to be there. When I got up in the morning and got dressed I knew when I got there they were going to be there. That is what kept me going because it was very

trying...McComb was very, very violent –very dangerous place. And down in that part of Mississippi in Amite county and Pike county and down there so many things happened to other movement people - I mean people got beat up and got locked up and there was shots fired into the freedom house. So, it was just the fact that the students were going to be there.

In describing her role as a teacher, Eva recalls,

I did not think of teaching at Freedom School as an educational experience as much as I did of it as an organizing experience. I was just an extension to me of working with Civil Rights Movement and I don't even think I thought of it as much of "teaching".

I probably enjoyed teaching that more than anything else because I was also learning. You know I had no background in Negro history. I was probably as ignorant as the children that I was teaching. I enjoyed the technique of asking questions and having them to talk about these questions. We might talk about a person or we might talk about a relationship that person had now in the present to their lives at that time.

The students were at the Freedom School because they wanted to be there. They were interested in what was going on. They were bright youngsters but like most or many African American youngsters in Mississippi, they were poorly educated as I was too. Because I was - I went through the Mississippi system too. They were certainly willingly and extremely bright and perceptive and talented and needing an opportunity for expression. I think schools - regular public schools- were strict and Freedom Schools were just a wonderful experience.

Having been educated in the same Mississippi educational system, Eva looked at style of teaching as a pedagogy of liberation, a pedagogy of protests. It rested on an epistemology that critiques Western educational practices (Henry, 2005).

Denise's story reads a little differently than Mildred's or Eva's. She was the only participant who published her memoirs. She requested that I read her book before I spoke to her because she was not sure how time we were going to have when we met. This turned out to be quite helpful because when we talked, I was able to focus in on her experiences at the Freedom Schools in Mississippi. Each time I asked her a question she repeated it back to

me. When we talked she spoke vividly about her memories from Freedom Schools. When she talked she closed her eyes and recounted instances in terms of what she “saw”. She put herself back in 1964 and provided colorful descriptions of what her life was like in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I attribute this to her occupation as a qualitative researcher and oral historian. Denise spoke the most concretely about pedagogy. She provided a poignant description of what students brought to the Freedom Schools:

The children who came to the school felt special because there was a school made just for them. And that is what you have to emphasize when you talk about the Freedom Schools. When someone makes something just for you, it says, “I love you”. And I think sometimes when we talk about Freedom Schools we sometimes miss that point. They were made, created, for those children. And those children knew that. They knew that. And, when you feel special, when you feel loved, you begin to see yourself in a way that you would not perhaps see yourself. And you and you begin to dream in a different way, you begin to believe in yourself and the joy that the children were so happy just because that was their school.

Denise saw the activist potential of education and skillfully used her sphere of influence to foster a definition of education as a cornerstone of Black community development (Collins, 2000). Denise vividly describes the role of the curriculum:

Our goal was to assist the students in giving voice to their feelings, giving voice to their goals, giving voice to an understanding of learning materials that were in our curriculum, but essentially it was about just about them learning to love themselves.

We worked with stories, fables and folk tales and short stories, and all of which focused on, on achievement, dignity, character, and culture. We did a lot in the way of oral reading that they would read and interpret. We did journaling, they would write in the journal and they would write responses to some of the stories that we shared with them.

Finally, when I asked her what she ultimately got out of the experiences she recalled,

I came to understand, extraordinary lives of courage. It was an experience that refueled my belief in the magic of teaching and in the power of the combination of teaching and learning...

Mildred spoke candidly about not wanting to be “out” with her activism because she was fearful of losing her Spelman scholarship. Her actions, in this case, connect directly to dimension one of Collins (2000) definition of “rethinking Black woman’s activism”. Mildred worked behind the scenes as an organizer in the Atlanta SNCC office before working with the Freedom Schools. The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project took place over the course of four months. Over the course of the four months, the women, children, and men had their lives changed forever. Mildred was the only participant who stayed in Mississippi for a total of eighteen months. She did this because she said she felt guilty about starting the project and not following it through. She described most of the other volunteers returning to their regular life after the summer was over. This was hard for Mildred as it definitely attributed to her maturing faster than most of her peers. Mildred describes how she had to learn to be a leader quickly from the following experience,

As Project Director, I was trying to keep 24 people including myself alive you know for that summer, boy you talk about growing up fast, I was 19 so it was trial by fire learning—to be a head of all these young people, most of whom were White, most of whom even though they were volunteering ... We organized the Mississippi Freedom Democratic chapter that became very strong. We operated two Freedom Schools that summer, we also had a day care center that we ran that summer and we engaged in the mock. People, you know, people could not register, so we had the mock registration and we registered hundreds of people in that county, also we had the mock elections that the rest of the state had, so we elected our delegates to go to the State convention.

According to Collins (2000), “Black women used their classrooms and status as educators to promote African American community development” (p. 212). They taught by the courage of their own lives, which [to me] is the highest form of teaching (Walker, 1983, p. 38).

Eva, Denise, and Mildred’s narratives demonstrate how Black women develop ways of knowing about teaching, activism, culture and womanhood through much of their

interaction with political organizations. Each participant was strongly prohibited by their families to participate in the movement. Yet, they participated any way. Moreover, each participant explicitly states the students in Freedom Schools contributed to their ways of knowing about teaching. This also illustrates an emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality (Freire, p.81). By looking at ideological contributions and pedagogical practices, we understand how Black women became producers of knowledge and how they were able to organize community projects. David Lusted (1986) argues that pedagogy involves the entire organization of practices between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce together. He writes,

To insist on the pedagogy of theory, as with the pedagogy of teaching, is to recognize a more transactional model whereby knowledge is produced not just at the researcher's desk nor at the lectern but at the consciousness, through the process of thought, discussion, writing, debate, exchange; in the social and internal...these are also transformations which take place across all agencies in an educational process, regardless of their title as academic, critic, teacher, or learner (p. 4).

This change in consciousness Lusted (1986) describes articulates how Black women's classrooms have been central sites of radical education.

Recently, research on Black teachers and the field of Black education have emerged within the larger field of teacher education and the social foundations of education. Seldom, do we address a Black feminist pedagogy that represents a significant change in the process of knowledge building and learning that is linked to liberatory education. Teaching for liberation is based on the need to empower ordinary people to dig within themselves and their collective experiences to develop answers to social and political questions. Henry (2005) asserts, "Black feminist pedagogy rests on an epistemology that critiques American/Western Education. It is a pedagogy of liberation, a pedagogy of protest. The range of these pedagogies takes place in varied settings outside of formal classrooms, such as churches,

homes, and community groups” (p. 91). As a result, the participants in this study conceive of a curriculum that separated Freedom Schools from other modes of schooling.

The participants understood their role as teachers and women in multiple ways. The data uncovers that the teachers were cognizant of their role as Black women. They used their positionality of being both African American and female to develop a command of the subject matter and pedagogical skills, communicate high expectations, and establish personal connections with students and their families.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I still see the importance of and use the Freedom School model for teaching...My objectives are the same—to give students the understanding of their ability to identify the roots of oppression locally, relate it to the wider world, and in conjunction with others, transform oppressive relationships into liberating ones.

Fannie T. Rushing, *Minds Still Stayed on Freedom?*

Black Feminist Intellectual ~ My Story, Part III

I have tried to replace the external definitions of my life, placed upon me by dominant groups, with my own self-defined viewpoint. This has been a difficult challenge because I have constantly been defined by others for their use and to my detriment. My personal experiences both inside and outside of the academy have led me to develop an affinity for Black Feminist Thought. The voice I now seek is personal and political, individual and collective. This view reflects the intersections of my unique biography within a larger meaning of my historical times. My thoughts and viewpoints have been deeply influenced by my experiences as a Black woman living in American society. I am a Black Feminist Intellectual. Eva, Mildred, and Denise are Black Feminist Intellectuals. They articulate Black feminist pedagogical practices that force us to rethink teaching and learning. Their experiences embody a new curriculum for young Black feminist to continue with an intergenerational dialogue on both race and gender.

Black feminism has taught me about liberation as a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's, rather because of our need as human people for autonomy. I'm standing

on a foundation toward a politic of empowerment that can only begin with a process of consciousness raising or life sharing. From this, I recognize the commonality of the human experience, especially from those who occupy marginal positions in society.

Once we have more textured analysis of Black women's lives, we can begin to think more critically about empowering a new generation of Black Feminist Intellectuals.

Throughout my writing process, I kept thinking, "What is at stake if I chose to not look at biographical accounts of African American women Freedom School teachers?" I thought about this in relation to historical and contemporary notions of Black feminism. I thought about this because as a teacher-organizer, I am always searching for ways to engage elementary and high school age students in the disciplines of social studies and history. My participants' real narrative provided an opportunity to develop a curriculum that allows students to connect their lives and struggles to a historic figure. Women teachers of the Mississippi 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools then becomes more real, more approachable, and perhaps someone to emulate.

I carefully combed through the archives and searched for meanings of the fragmented messages of the past that were left behind. I learned how Black women continue to struggle for institutional transformation, yet much of what they do and how they accomplish goals remain lost and ignored. In the past and present, Black women have saved lives, and fostered familial growth as a result of the work they have done in their immediate communities and in society as a whole. Biographical accounts, oral histories and narrative research specifically on the lives of Black women can challenge what mainstream society calls an educator or activists. Research on Black women, iconic and otherwise, acknowledged,

celebrated and documented Black women's lives to be used as a resource for everyday use.

(March 2009)

Freedom Schools' Legacy: Implications for Educators

One of the most powerful statements from this dissertation is Denise's explanation of why Freedom Schools were important. She states,

The children who came to the school felt special because there was a school made just for them. And that is what you have to emphasize when you talk about the Freedom Schools. When someone makes something just for you, it says, "I love you". And I think sometimes when we talk about Freedom Schools we sometimes miss that point. They were made, created, for those children. And those children knew that. They knew that. And, when you feel special, when you feel loved, you begin to see yourself in a way that you would not perhaps see yourself. And you and you begin to dream in a different way, you begin to believe in yourself and the joy that the children were so happy just because that was their school.

It is evident from this study that leading and learning are all part of the same process. As I think about the pedagogical skills I learned from Freedom Schools, I think about the importance of being a self-reflexive teacher. I went each day not only to teach, but to learn with the students (Howe, 1965). I understood that as a Servant Leader intern in that space I was a "student among students" (Howe, 1965, p. 146).

The Freedom Schools of the past and present offer culturally relevant teaching that "affirms everyone's membership in a larger community, envisions teaching as a way to give back to one's community, and uses a Freirean "mining" rather than "banking" approach to teaching (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pp.478-479). The African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools understood teaching as a moral act that invoked an ethic of care (Noddings, 1999). Freedom Schools stressed the importance of combining content knowledge and an understanding of the human condition. A question we are faced

with is how do we provide standards not standardizations? Only recently, have been able to articulate how the Freedom Schools worked to hold student to a standard of excellent without the use of standardization.

Based on the three narratives, we see the Freedom Schools as a place where teachers praised students first, then taught. While the traditional model of teaching is to teach first, see if the student succeeds, then offer praise only after the student has succeeded. Freedom Schools offered a place of empowerment; something traditional public schools fell short of doing. A typical Freedom Schools classroom was bright, full of posters, books, and art that supported critical thinking. Students were encouraged to explore issues of self-esteem and expand their capacity to dream.

Freedom Schools as we know it in the past and present form can fall under the umbrella of Black Education. Joyce King (2005), Gloria Ladson-Billings (2005), and Carol Lee (2005) have written extensively on the transformative vision of Black education for all of human freedom. African American women Freedom School teachers developed alternative forms of educating students in Mississippi. They worked to “identify discontinuities, injustices, and bad practices that have been perpetuated on Black people over time, but also identify the historical legacy of strength and struggle that has allowed Black people to make powerful contributions to their own education and that of others” (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. xvii).

Freedom Schools are inherently transformative and culturally responsive. I define transformative as the realization that students particularly those less privilege can be encouraged toward expansive affective cognitive growth. Moreover, Freedom Schools are transformative because they work as a vehicle for change and help us re-define democracy

and equality (Levine, 2003). Freedom schools are culturally responsive because they use students' and teachers' cultural knowledge, frame of references and lived experiences to make learning more relevant for everyone (Gay, 2000). The Freedom Schools model reminds us that all education must be multicultural.

Lastly, the most important the most important thing teacher education can learn from African American women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools is their commitment to servant leadership. The notion of servant leadership comes from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct." This is a very powerful sermon, often overlooked because of our immediate attraction to his "I Have a Dream" speech. In this sermon, King reminds us that anyone can be great because any one can serve. He says, "The greatest among you shall be your servant". hooks (2003) reminds us service should not be synonymous with subordinate, we have to view ourselves as servant leaders to find ways to listen and asses the needs of our students who are underrepresented and marginalized.

Implications for Future Research

This study only focuses on the stories of African American women Freedom School teachers. I would like to go back and conduct a similar study based on the lives of White women teachers. As I stated earlier, the significance of this study is grounded in the voices, ways of knowing, and experiences of Black women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom School. I interviewed both White and Black women but chose to only use the voices and experiences of Black women teachers for this study. I reconciled this dilemma not accepting the objectivity/ subjectivity binary (Collins, 2000). What would an

ethnographic study about White women Freedom School teachers done by a self proclaimed Black feminist intellectual look like? Patterson & Rayle (2005) remind us,

“Critical ethnography has recently come under fire for reproducing social relations in which the ethnographer represents the dominant voice and he research participants are portrayed as the exotic Other. This is especially apparent when researchers are members of the dominant culture and research participants are members of minority, oppressed, and colonized groups” (p. 248).

I am interested in building upon my work on women’s historical and contemporary experiences in education in addition to interrogating whiteness and critically examine White institutions and those in position of power and privilege.

In my conversations with Barbara and Susan (White women Freedom School teachers) and in my reading of the personal memoirs of White women Freedom School teachers, I detected elements of “dysconscious racism”. Joyce King (1991) explains that:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the *absence* of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others (Wellman, 1977). Any serious challenge to the status quo that calls this racial privilege into question inevitably challenges the self-identity of White people who have internalized these ideological justifications (p. 135).

Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given (King, 1991, p. 135).

Finally, as a result of African American women’s race and gender, it is difficult to gain an understanding of both African American women’s public and private persona. Darlene Clark Hine writes about a “culture of dissemblance” that developed to help Black women “protect the sanctity of inner aspect of their lives” (Hine, 1998). I would like to

embark on a more textured analysis of Black women's lives, so I can begin to think more critically about the politics of silence.

I would like to build on Black feminist theory's notion of the intersectionality of race, class and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). This type of analysis has can reshape how we now think about feminist theory. I would also like to use Black feminist theory understand system and institutional barriers for both African American men and women during the civil rights movement. Collins (2004) explicitly states the importance of looking at Black men and women as gendered subjects who have been forced into oppositional binaries along side their white counter parts.

APPENDIX I

MEMO TO ACCEPTED APPLICANTS

To: Mississippi Summer Project Workers

From: Mississippi Summer Project Committee

- 1) We hope you are making preparations to have bond money ready in the event of your arrest. Bond money for a single arrest usually runs around \$500. We shall assume that the first person listed on your application as the person to notify for your bond will be the best person to contact in the event of your arrest.
- 2) There will be a series of orientation periods starting in mid-June and running until the beginning of July at Berea College. People will be staggered over three sessions, each lasting about four days.
- 3) After July 1 there will be a series of summer long orientation sessions held at Mount Beulah in Edwards, Mississippi. We expect all summer workers to go through some orientation period before going into the field.
- 4) A conference was held the weekend of March 21-22 at which various civil rights people and educators gathered in New York to work out a detailed curriculum for the Freedom Schools. The conference broke into small working groups which discussed the various Freedom School programs -- remedial instruction, leadership training, cultural activities, etc. At present various people are pulling together the results of their sessions and sending reports to the Jackson office. By the end of April we hope to be able to put together a comprehensive and detailed curriculum with working suggestions which will be circulated to all those who are being assigned to work in Freedom Schools this summer.
- 5) We are presently in a very critical financial condition. We are trying to run a number of very important programs this spring and at the same time we are preparing for this summer. We are running three congressional campaigns as well as a senatorial campaign and conducting a Freedom Registration program -- in which we hope to register 400,000 Negroes on our own registration books -- and building a grass-roots foundation for our delegation to the Democratic National Convention to challenge the regular all-white party delegation. Believe it or not, at the moment we are absolutely broke. Our workers go without eating and our bills are piling up. While two years ago this would not have cut seriously into our program, at the present time we can no longer operate for extended periods without funds -- e.g. we need money for office rent, phone, office supplies,

transportation, etc. We are enclosing a prospectus of our spring program and hope that you could raise some money, however small, to help finance our current programs.

6) Of course, we will also be needing a huge amount of funds for this summer. For this purpose we are enclosing a Freedom School Prospectus in the hope that you might interest some church, civic or other group in financing a specific Freedom School. In addition, it is hoped that you could help raise money for general operating funds. If there is a Freedom Center in your area, this could probably best be done by working along with the people active in the center. Though, in the final analysis, you would be best judge of what approach would produce the best results.

7) We would appreciate two more photos of yourself as soon as possible. These will be needed for publicity and other purposes.

8) Finally we must point out that the Mississippi leadership must reserve the right to "deselect" any summer worker at the time of orientation as well as to ask people to leave Mississippi at any time during the summer.

We will try to communicate with you periodically from now until the time you come to Mississippi. We will be feeding you general information, specific instructions, and suggestions of things you might do for the summer program before this summer. Thus, we will shortly be sending all Freedom School teachers curriculum material as indicated above. In addition, we will be sending out lists of materials which it would be helpful if you could help gather and send to us or bring with you. Further, there will be specific information on where you will be assigned to work and what you will be asked to do, when you will be expected at the orientation period, etc. If you own a car and are planning to bring it to Mississippi this summer there will be some specific information that we will need to know.

Keep in touch with us if you have any suggestions, require any information, etc.

Yours in Freedom,

Bob Moses
COFO Program Director

MEMO TO ACCEPTED APPLICANTS (#2)

To: Mississippi Summer Project Workers
From: Mississippi Summer Project Committee

Here is some additional information which we have thought of since the first memo was written:

- 1) Money: The best arrangement for money is probably for you to bring \$60.00 expense money with you (above transportation costs) and arrange to have \$20.00 to \$25.00 living costs sent you weekly.
- 2) Arrests: We must re-emphasize that all workers during the summer are liable to arrest, although Freedom School teachers, white community project workers and researchers will be less likely to be arrested than others. All workers, however, should have bond ready.
- 3) Transportation to orientation site: Everyone who is near a Freedom Center (list sent earlier) should contact the center, which will be coordinating transportation from their area. If you are a long distance from the nearest center and do not have a ride or other transportation, contact us and we will try to help you.
- 4) Cars: Everyone who possibly can should bring a car this summer. The car you bring should be insured. The legal situation on cars in the state is this:

---Anyone who is in the state 60 days must secure a Mississippi driver's license. If you have a license from another state you only have to take a written test, but if you plan to be in the state over 60 days you should get your license before the local authorities know who you are. License costs \$2.50.

---Any car which is in the state 60 days must have Mississippi license plates. Tags are expensive (about 4% the value of the car). You can plan to purchase the tags. We advise that you plan to take the car out of the state periodically so you can claim that you are only visiting the state and have only been in the state x days.

We need a complete record of all the cars that will be coming down. Some of you indicated whether you would bring a car when you filled out your application. We are asking all accepted applicants to fill out the slip below, tear it off, and send it to the COFO office. You should also let the Freedom Center know if you will be driving down, so they can coordinate transportation.

CAR INFORMATION

COFO
1017 Lybch St., Jackson

Name _____

Present (school) address _____

I will be bringing a car to Mississippi. ()

I will not be bringing a car to Mississippi. ()

APPENDIX II

List of Participants

Name	Hometown	College or University Attended	Mississippi Freedom School Location
Eva	Clarksdale, MS	M.A. Ohio State University B.A. Jackson State University	McComb, MS
Denise	Memphis, TN	Ph.D. Emory University M.A. Boston University B.A. LeMoyne College	Hattiesburg, MS
Mildred	Memphis, TN	M.A., Ph.D. Temple University B.A. Antioch College	Laurel, MS

APPENDIX III

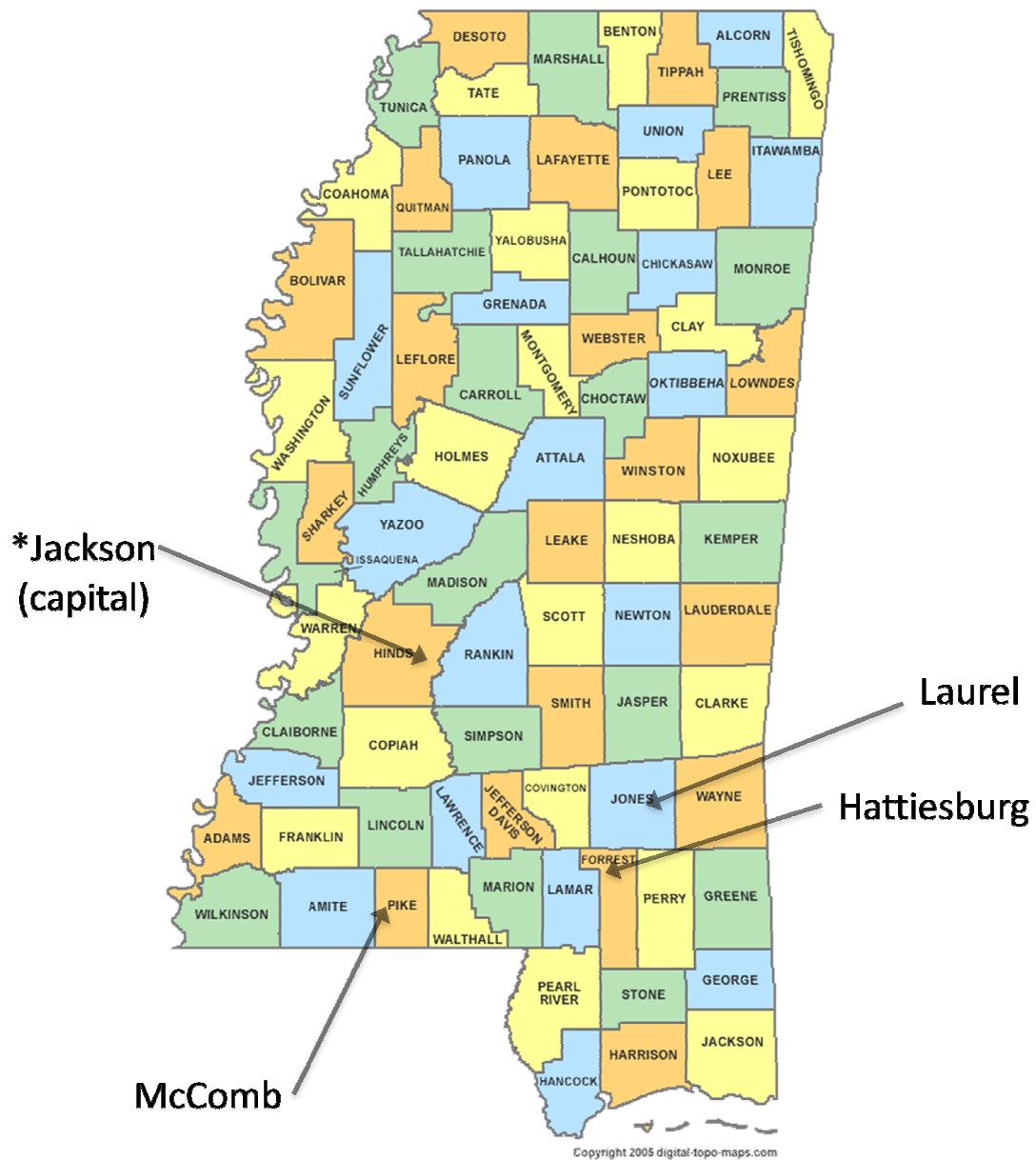


Figure 3: Map of Mississippi with participants' 1964 Freedom School locations

APPENDIX IV

Recruitment Letter

Dear Members of the SNCC Listserv,

I am a graduate student in the school of education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am writing to ask your help in my current research.

I have a strong research interest in the role education played in the civil rights movement. I am currently working on my dissertation on the Mississippi Freedom Schools. I am especially keen to interview former Freedom Schools teachers and students about what the schools were like and how they changed their lives.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me at 773-396-6499 or ktmoore@email.unc.edu and I will send you a consent form. Any interviews I conduct will be under stringent university protocol, which give the interviewee the right to withdraw at any time and to remain anonymous if they wish.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Besides this email, I can be reached at:

Home: 919-450-0962

Cell: 773-396-6499

Sincerely,

Kristal T. Moore

PhD Candidate

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

APPENDIX V

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Consent to Participate in a Research Study

IRB Study # 08-0544

Consent Form Version Date: December 1, 2007

Title of Study: *She Who Learns, Teaches*: Women Teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools of 1964

Principal Investigator: Kristal T. Moore

UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Education

Faculty Advisor: Dr. George Noblit
Phone Number: (919) 962-2513
E-mail: gwn@email.unc.edu

Study Contact telephone number: (919) 450-0962 or (773) 396-6499

Study Contact email: ktmoores@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, so you may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, at any time and for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. Please ask Kristal T. Moore any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The goal of this research project is to obtain stories from women teachers from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. You are being asked to take part in this research study to gain information on the origins and experiences of teachers from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. Your story can help provide us with experiences, thoughts, and interpretations on how we can examine culturally responsive teaching.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of several participants in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

The interview process will be an initial conversation held via telephone. In addition, you will be asked to participate in an in person interview which is anticipated to last approximately 90 minutes. Later, if you would like to share any additional information, feel free to contact me. At the end of all of the interviews, I will ask if you to review the data collected and my analysis in order to verify its validity and trustworthiness.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

You are being asked to participate in an initial conversation held via telephone. In addition, you are being asked to participate in an in person interview which is anticipated to last approximately 90 minutes. With your permission, your interview will be audiotaped. At any time during the interview, you may ask that the recorder be turned off. You are not obligated to answer any question and may feel free to decline to answer any question for any reason. Before beginning the interview, you will be given two consent forms, one to take with you and one to give your written consent. The interviews will consist of 7 main questions that will gain information about your background, experiences you have had in the Freedom Schools, interpretations of teaching, and your thoughts on the changes in the civil rights movement.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no risks anticipated from your participation in this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

Every effort will be taken to protect your identity as a participant in this study. You will not be identified in any report or publication of this study or its results. You will be given a pseudonym that will replace your name on all documents. The list, which matches names and your pseudonym, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure place. After the audiotape has been transcribed, the tape and any contact information will be destroyed. The only people with access to this information are me and my faculty advisor.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time.
I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX VI

Interview Protocol

1. Background information

Probes:

- Tell me about growing up
- How you began working for civil rights

2. Were you involved in any civil rights organization (e.g., SNCC, NAACP, CORE, Urban League)?

Probes:

- What was the membership like?
- Who did the “organizing” work (collecting dues, arranging meetings, hospitality, telephone campaigns, etc.)?
- Were there more women than men, more men than women, or about equal numbers?
- Were there both black and White members?
- Who held the elected positions?

3. How were women treated in meetings of civil rights groups?

Probes:

- Did women hold leadership roles?
- Did they sit on committees?
- Were their ideas for action different from or similar to those of the men in the group?

4. For what reasons did people turn to work in the Freedom Schools of 1964?

Probes:

- Tell me about working in the Mississippi Freedom Schools.
- How did your family react to your decision to work in Mississippi?

5. Describe the mission of the Mississippi Freedom Schools of 1964

Probes:

- Tell me about your first memories of Freedom Schools

6. What were the components of teaching in the Freedom Schools?

Probes:

- Are these components connected?
- Did they help you think about teaching ?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add that I may not have asked?

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