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## Finding Freedom: the Civil Rights Collection in the Western College Memorial Archives

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## **“Finding Freedom: the Civil Rights Collection in the Western College Memorial Archives”**

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### **Abstract**

Archives have always been an important part of academic libraries. Our role to preserve and promote materials within our collections is enhanced when we have unique collections.

First, we will discuss the history of Western College and the institutions long tradition of independence and commitment to social justice and civil rights.

Second, we will discuss the establishment of the Western College Memorial Archives and the importance of these unique collections to academic libraries.

Finally, we will discuss the history of Freedom Summer and the civil rights materials located within the Western College Memorial Archives. During the summer of 1964 Western College for Women opened its campus to civil rights activists for training of college students to register African Americans voters in southern states. This training, now known as the Freedom Summer Project, was organized by a coalition including the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Student for Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Freedom Summer documents collection consists of journals, diaries, posters, photographs, newspaper clippings, recorded oral transcripts, and other ephemera related to this historic training.

### **Introduction**

Western College in Oxford, Ohio was the site of the Freedom Summer’s training site in 1964. President Herrick Young and the Western College Board of Trustees made the bold and controversial decision that allowed civil rights workers to train on the campus. The materials telling this amazing story are now housed within the Miami University Libraries; the Mississippi Freedom Summer Collection is part of a broader collection known as the Western College Memorial Archives. It reveals stories of college administrators, as well as the Freedom Summer teachers, students, volunteers, and the local community’s involvement as well. This decision made the civil rights movement a part of the lives of this small town and catapulted it into the midst of a struggle for equality. This decision would bring even national attention to Western College. From June 14-27, 1964, Western’s campus was the site of orientation and training for an estimated 700 young idealistic

volunteers mostly from northern states, as well as some adults, preparing to go to Mississippi to work for civil rights. All of those involved were people of courage. The students and workers who came to the training had to face fears which were certainly real as was witnessed within two weeks of the start of Freedom Summer when James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman disappeared and were rightly assumed dead. They were among the trainees in Oxford, Ohio.

These materials have a wide applicability to a broad range of the humanities and can be used to study the Mississippi Freedom Project. The information can impact the following disciplines: history, anthropology, jurisprudence, ethics, photography, print journalism, religion, media studies, psychology, women's studies, African-American studies, music, education, social justice and religious studies. Because of this close association near the inception of Freedom Summer, Western College Memorial Archive contains a number of revealing materials that provide a direct link to the past. The Mississippi Freedom Summer Collection contains: 150 photographs, 120 oral history interviews both in transcripts and recordings, 450 newspaper articles, 170 pieces of correspondence, 77 administrative documents, 10 newsletters, 7 pamphlets, 18 flyers, and 2 journals. These materials are particularly significant because they narrate Ohio's involvement in the civil rights movement making this collection unique to the state of Ohio and therefore of national importance as well. Some examples of primary documents are show below.

### **Journals**

There are a number of student journals where the young participants share their fears and emotions about the training at Western College, the interaction between the two different races represented in the interactions and the work in Mississippi. These honest and reflective narratives allow researchers to learn about the challenges, injustices, social justice issues, customs and mores of the times. One journal by Ellen Barnes, a college student at Miami University is a powerful narrative chronicling the events that occurred at Western College during the training sessions in 1964. Her firsthand account offers a realistic glimpse of the nonviolent techniques that were being taught on the Western campus.

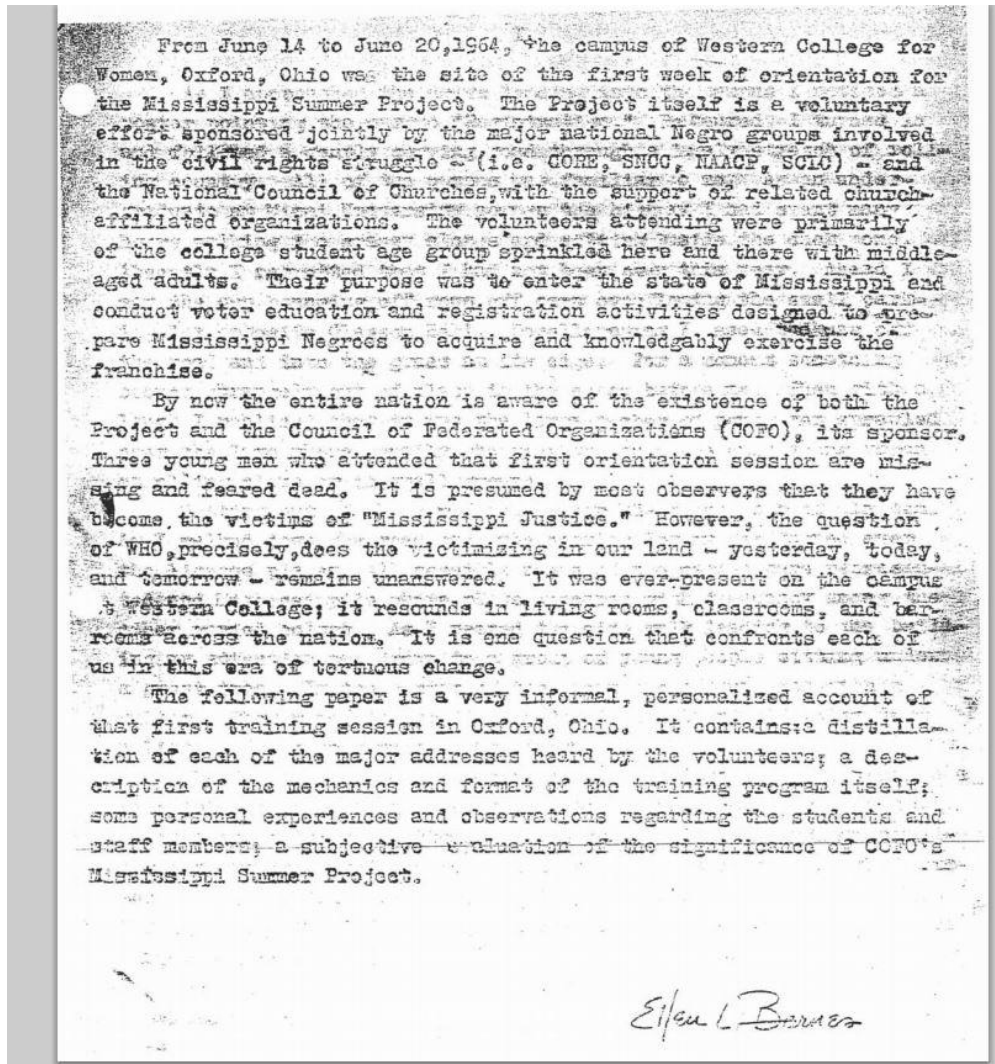


Image courtesy of Western College Memorial Archives, Miami University.

### **A portion of Ellen Barner's Journal**

#### **Newspaper Articles and Newsletters**

Newspaper articles are also an important part of the collection. They show the various moods in the country and represented the view, opinions and event of Freedom Summer across the United States. A newspaper article that appeared in the Oxford Press on June 4, 1964 informs local residents about the scheduled training at Western. It provides detailed information about the intention of The National Council of Churches and the pending activities. The community of Oxford was also engaged in the Freedom Summer activities as this newspaper article indicates. Oxford also had a "Friends of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project", a grassroots group of diverse residents of Oxford, Ohio who raised funds to support volunteers while in Mississippi. The Oxford citizens were by no means left out of this significant portion of our national history.

OXFORD PRESS

6/4/64

## Western C. To Host Civil Rights School

The National Council of Churches' Commission on Religion and Race will conduct a two-week instructional program at Western College for Women, June 12-27, President Herrick B. Young announced today.

College students from Yale, Harvard, Oberlin, the University of Illinois, and the University of North Carolina, among other institutions, will be prepared for a civil rights program to be conducted this summer throughout the South.

In making this announcement, President Young stated, "We have made our facilities available for this training program upon the request of the Council. As an institution with a Christian emphasis and an integrated student body, the Western campus is an appropriate setting for such a program."

The students participating in the program will be trained in two groups of three hundred each. The duration of each session will be one week. A staff of approximately fifty lawyers, social workers and educators will conduct the program.

The program will emphasize skills-training, in such matters as voter education, voter registration, remedial reading, how to teach, citizenship education, and the development of community centers.

The students will also be trained to work in Negro community centers in recreation, crafts and other areas to interest persons in their community and in voting.

Many of the students will be going to Mississippi to work with the Council of Federated Organizations there.

One-third of those recruited and trained will work in community centers and another third will teach such subjects as reading in summer schools. The rest will work in voter education and registration.

The students also will be trained in nonviolent discipline, because in many cases they may be called on to work under adverse circumstances, a spokesman of the National Council of Churches said.

The week-long course will also screen out those who should not be sent into situations that could become tense, the spokesman said.

on voter right and other problems and the ministers will act as counselors!

Image courtesy of Western College Memorial Archives, Miami University.

**Portion of article from Oxford's Newspapers**



FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI SUBSISTENCE PROJECT

No. 4

Oxford, Ohio

November 18, 1964

# DESPERATE

## ELECTION IS IMPORTANT BUSINESS AT MEETING MONDAY NIGHT

Election of new officers will be among the main items of business at the next general meeting of FMSP November 23, at 7:30 p.m. at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church.

The nominating committee will present its slate of new officers for consideration by the group. The slate includes:

- |                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| Leonard Confar | Chairman      |
| Anne Fulton    | Vice Chairman |
| Clerk Crennell | Treasurer     |
| Wendy Kiskon   | Secretary     |

Miami University and Western College students and other members of the community are invited to attend.

## BLACK LIKE ME AUTHOR SAYS: SUPPORT OUTSIDE INTERVENTION IN MISSISSIPPI

### Says Oxford Has Favorable Civil Rights Image Oversens

The main hope for civil rights success in Mississippi is through outside intervention by private individuals, organizations like FMSP, and the federal government. That is what John

## FOURTEEN MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM WORKERS DEPEND ON FMSP FOR WINTER SUPPORT

### Treasury Running Out of Funds, Immediate Contributions and Pledges Needed

Fourteen volunteers working in ten Mississippi communities will depend on FMSP members for moral and financial support during the next 30 months.

However, FMSP funds are desperately low and immediate contributions are needed to meet the commitment to the volunteers, Mel Bloom, treasurer, reports.

The names of volunteers, which appear on page 5, were sent to the FMSP executive committee after the last general meeting by agencies coordinating winter projects in Mississippi.

At the last general meeting the group changed its name from the Friends of the Mississippi Summer Project to Friends of the Mississippi Subsistence Project.

"The change of 'summer' to 'subsistence' means that we wish to continue our moral and financial support of Mississippi freedom workers throughout the winter months," William Peabody, chairman, said.

(Please turn to Page 2, see Freedom.)

**GENERAL MEETING! YOU'RE INVITED!**  
**FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI SUBSISTENCE PROJECT**

Nov. 23, 7:30 p.m., at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

Image courtesy of Western College Memorial Archives, Miami University.

## Administrative Documents

Among the administrative documents is an editorial written by Phyllis Hoyt, Dean of Students at Western College in 1964. She discussed the training and gave glimpses into the administrative decisions that led to Western College hosting the training. These are important documents that allow researchers to peer into the decisions of the administrators at Western College.

THOUGHTS ON CIVIL RIGHTS ORIENTATION  
OXFORD, OHIO

In a New York Times magazine article in November 1963, there was an article reporting on the mood of students. Questions were asked of eight editors of college newspapers across the country from the East to the West coasts. One of the questions was "Do undergraduates care about issues in the outside world?" Five of the eight editors seemed to believe that the present generation of college students was interested in the immediate future, their own personal lives, a place of security, a personal niche, detachment and personal achievement, and a philosophy of individualism. Three of the editors are quoted as saying that there was an increasing concern for the world outside the university, that students were as interested in Vietnam as they were in the football team, and that the university was a place to question and to probe.

The Western College campus has been the scene of an orientation for approximately 700 students and some adults from college campus across the United States and Canada who are interested in working for Civil Rights in the state of Mississippi. The orientation period was organized by the Commission on Race and Religion of the National Council of Churches at the request of COFO. COFO is the title given to the Council of Federated Organizations in the state of Mississippi which is working for Civil Rights for the Negroes in that state. In addition to representatives from the National Council of Churches and COFO, there have been leaders from the National Training Laboratory on Human Relations to work with the students.

In the winter issue of the Alumnae Bulletin, I wrote of the interest which Western College students seem to be showing to an increased degree in matters concerning the world. One of the factors which led me to the conclusion that Western College students were not isolated on this beautiful campus and removed from the major trends of present day society was the fact that there was discussion and thought and questioning about the matter of Civil Rights. Many evenings I sat at table in the Alexander Dining Hall with students who were talking about volunteering their services to work in the Freedom Schools in Mississippi this summer to teach remedial reading to the young people who came out of the cotton fields. As I listened to them talk about the need to do something at home as was being done overseas by the Peace Corps, I sensed a real identification with the rights of individuals. I also listened to students talk about the need to do something in the United States to better the image which the world has of us and the way in which we deal with our domestic problems. I was alarmed as I imagined thousands of students from many campuses of the United States migrating to the state of Mississippi during the summer months. I thought of them being there without supervision, without instruction, without a frame of reference, without support, and I was frightened by the implication of what seemed to be their own spontaneity and good will and good intentions without direction. Therefore, it was with an enormous sense of relief that I heard the request from the Commission on Race and Religion of the National Council of Churches that the Western College campus be rented this summer for two weeks to this group for an orientation period for students who were going to Mississippi. It seemed to me that at last adult leadership had caught up with the students and that an attempt would be made to provide them with the proper kind of orientation for their belief in the rights

Image courtesy of Western College Memorial Archives, Miami University.

### A Portion of Dean Hoyt's Editorial

## Photographs

Mark Levy a student at Queens College, attended the training at Western and then traveled to Mississippi where he served as a teacher in the Freedom Schools. He donated The Mark Levy Collection to the Western Archives. These photographs were primarily taken while he was in Mississippi. They capture images of segregated Mississippi and offer a realistic offer images of segregation.



Image courtesy of Western College Memorial Archives, Miami University.

**Photograph of Mark Levy at Freedom School in Mississippi**



## Oral History Interviews

There are oral history interviews by local activists which include:

- Rick Momeyer a former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee staffer who trained students and volunteered in Mississippi who would later become a professor of Philosophy at Miami University;
- Donald Nelson, Director of International Studies at Miami University;
- Jane Strippel a local school teacher

The last two on this list also visited Western during the training sessions and were also members of the Friends of the Mississippi Summer Project.

## Ephemera

The ephemera answer specific questions related to the training sessions such as:

- Who were the volunteers and staff members of the Mississippi Summer Project?
- What motivated the volunteers and staff members to get involved?
- How did the volunteers train to go down to Mississippi?
- What precautions did they take prior to traveling to Mississippi?
- How did the interracial group of students interact with one another?
- How many volunteers and facilitators were on the campus of Western College?

Although these materials document the events of the civil rights training we must look at them in a broader sense in that they inspire us and allow users to reflect upon and explore issues essential to democratic values and heritage. These types of collections challenge us to think about moral education and what it means to be a citizen of the United States.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer Digital Collection is accessible online at: <http://digital.lib.miamioh.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/fstxt/>

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