

2014

A Chronicle of Freedom: Freedom Summer Collections at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Dorian Randall

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Randall, Dorian (2014) "A Chronicle of Freedom: Freedom Summer Collections at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.3301.03

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol33/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Primary Source by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

“A Chronicle of Freedom: Freedom Summer Collections at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History”

Dorian Randall

Researcher

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Abstract

The Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, better known as Freedom Summer, propelled the state and nation closer to racial equality. Organizers are currently preparing for the fiftieth anniversary commemorations, hosted by cities around the state this summer. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) holds collections chronicling that summer’s events. Although there are many from which to choose, this article will discuss several that are representative of the photography, manuscripts, and personal experiences of summer volunteers and the established activist leadership.

Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, Series 2515, 135,000 images

http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/colldesc.php



Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Group of volunteers viewing items on ground at COFO volunteer orientation

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records comprises the digitized records of the defunct organization, which functioned as the state's official counter civil rights agency from 1956-1973. The Commission acted as a clearinghouse for information about segregation and local civil rights activities and national legislation. The collection includes investigative reports on specific individuals and organizations, and overviews of communities and various counties around the state. In addition to the paper-based records, the original collection included two audio recordings and over nine hundred photographs, some of which pertain to the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project.

Sovereignty Commission records are online as part of MDAH's digital archives.

Mississippi Freedom Summer Project Collection, Z/1946.00/S. 0.28 cubic feet

The Freedom Summer project was a massive civil rights effort centralized in embattled Mississippi. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), made up of the top civil rights organizations of the time, organized the event to secure the black vote. The project was inspired by the 1963 "Freedom Vote" campaign in which white Stanford and Yale college students assisted local activists in registering approximately 83,000 black voters for a mock gubernatorial election. The campaign garnered major press coverage. COFO leadership desired to branch out into other counties to uplift the black community and ensure fair voter registration procedures. By summer's end, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an interracial alternative to the state's Democratic Party, challenged the seating of the all-white delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The major item in the collection is the project prospectus, which outlines COFO's purpose and goals. Also included are copies of the *Mississippi Free Press* and other civil rights publications, as well as posters, news clippings, and correspondence between activist Reverend Ed King and P.S. Bowles, a former president of Alcorn State University.

Council of Federate Organization Records, Z/1867.000/S, 0.66 cubic feet

COFO was originally formed in the spring of 1961 to secure the release of incarcerated Freedom Riders. Civil rights leaders Aaron Henry, Medgar Evers, and Bob Moses were instrumental in reactivating the organization in January 1962 after brief inactivity. COFO became a confederation including the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and local groups such as the Holmes County Voters League and the Ruleville

Citizenship Organization. COFO organized the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 to assist blacks in voter-registration and education.

This collection contains typed and handwritten affidavits and depositions for voter registration and other activities. The affidavits and depositions, in particular, document harassment, brutality, bombing, terror, and murder workers witnessed or withstood. Many of the affidavits and depositions were later edited and published in the *Mississippi Black Paper* in 1965.

Thomas Foner Freedom Summer Papers, Z/2312.000/S, 0.34 cubic feet http://mdah.stat.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/series/foyer

~~snatched~~ snatched into
one of the SNCC workers
when he was driving and
blamed. arrested him.
The police also heard
supposed a Negro gentleman
who had attempted to register
a few days ago and shot him
dead!!! Three SNCC staff
members two white and one
Negro (the ~~two~~ ~~one~~ I had
all three good friends with
my room-mate) have
disappeared for the last
three days and the police
don't have them so the K.K.K.
must have killed them!
If they didn't kill them
did, you must have heard
about this by the cops
of searching this
letter sets
to you?

Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

**Foner's letter mentions the
three missing COFO workers
(Chaney, Goodman, and
Schwerner)**



Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

**Four young men standing
arm-in-arm, two girls
playing in the background in
Mississippi**

Thomas Foner was born on January 27, 1946, into a family of political activists. While a sophomore at New York University, Foner applied to volunteer during the summer project. He arrived for training at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, on June 14. While there, he befriended James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. The three men were later murdered for their activism. Foner served as a COFO escort for the FBI during the investigation. He was assigned to voter registration canvassing in Canton and was arrested for distributing project leaflets. He was later reassigned to Neshoba County where he served as a project leader.

The collection consists of correspondence, a voter registration plan, photographs, news clippings, and Foner's personal letters detailing the conditions volunteers faced during that summer, including the fears and frustrations stemming from violence and intimidation.

The collection is also online as part of MDAH's digital archives.

Ed King Collection, PI/1984.0018

Reverend Ralph Edwin King was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi and worked with civil rights leaders such as Medgar Evers and Robert "Bob" Moses in the 1960s. A Methodist minister and chaplain at Tougaloo College, King, was also one of the founding members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

The Ed King collection contains forty-three black and white photographs that document aspects of Freedom Summer including the MFDP state convention, COFO and SCLC leadership, and Freedom School activities.

Christopher T. Hexter Mississippi Freedom Summer Project Papers, Z/2293.00/S, 0.33 cubic feet

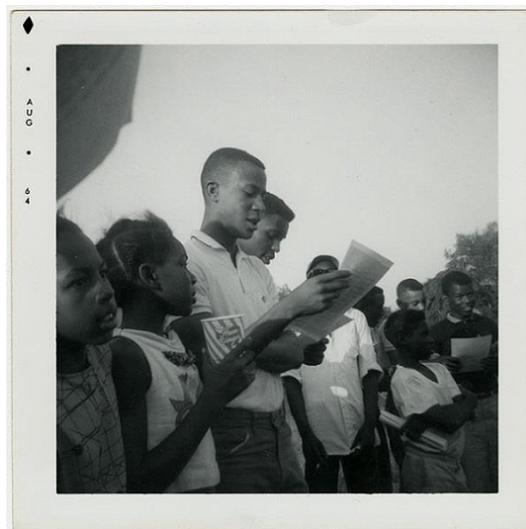


Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Freedom School students outside

Christopher T. Hexter was born about 1944 and became active in civil rights as early as 1960. He was a member of the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in St. Louis, Missouri. At age nineteen, Hexter volunteered as a teacher in the Freedom Schools in Indianola and Ruleville, Mississippi. These schools were an alternative to educate black children and adults throughout the state. The curriculum included lessons on black history, foreign languages, state politics, and mathematics. Twenty-five schools were scheduled to open, but over forty were established by the end of the summer with 2,500 students enrolled.

This collection contains school materials, photographs, miscellaneous papers, and printed materials. Of note are written declarations of various civil rights organizations and photographs of the project's events.

John R. Warner Mississippi Freedom Summer Project Papers, Z/2297.000/S, 0.58 cubic feet



Image courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

A Freedom School in Gluckstadt

John R. Warner, Jr., was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1936. While in seminary, Warner and Ed King were roommates. King introduced Warner to the Civil Rights Movement and encouraged his volunteerism. In 1964, Warner attended the National Council of Churches orientation in Jackson, Mississippi, to assist in the summer's efforts. For two weeks, Warner was a minister and driver for twenty-one people assigned to work on voter registration and at a Freedom School.

The Warner Papers are composed of several scrapbooks containing articles, news clippings, pamphlets, photocopies, photographs, and correspondence about his participation that summer. The collection contains several articles and papers, which span Warner's reactions to his time in Mississippi and his reflections on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Freedom Summer.

Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, approximately 600 cubic feet

In a collaborative partnership with Tougaloo College, an institution that played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, MDAH houses thirty-eight collections that comprise the Civil Rights Collection, documenting the black experience in Mississippi. One in particular is the Fannie Lou Hamer Collection, which contains documents and images detailing her life, activism, and role during the Freedom Summer Project and in the MFDP.

Tracy Sugarman Logbooks, Z/2296.000/S, 0.25 cubic feet

Tracy Sugarman was born in November 14, 1921, in Syracuse, New York. He graduated from Syracuse University with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and pursued a career as a graphic artist and illustrator. While on assignment for *Fortune* magazine in 1962, Sugarman witnessed the poverty and oppression of black Mississippians. He became a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement and later participated in the Freedom Summer Project.

The logbooks are diaries documenting the artist's experience as an informal reporter for CBS during Freedom Summer. In 1966, he wrote and illustrated *Stranger at the Gates: A Summer in Mississippi*.

Conclusion

These materials at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History are invaluable to understanding the contributions of civil rights volunteers and leaders, specifically during the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964. These collections offer a glimpse into the struggles and triumphs, fear and courage, conflict and determination of that summer.