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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Freedom Summer (1964) | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_gandhi_society_for_human_rights) | |
| Although the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_student_nonviolent_coordinating_committee_sncc/) had labored for civil rights in rural Mississippi since 1961, the organization found that intense and often violent resistance by segregationists in rural areas of Mississippi would not allow for the kind of direct action campaigns that been successful in urban areas such as Montgomery and Birmingham. The 1964 Freedom Summer project was designed to draw the nation’s attention to the violent oppression experienced by Mississippi blacks who attempted to exercise their constitutional rights, and to develop a grassroots freedom movement that could be sustained long after student activists left Mississippi.   When SNCC activist [Robert Moses](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_moses_robert_parris_1935/) launched a voter registration drive in Mississippi in 1961, he confronted a system that regularly used segregation laws and fear tactics to disenfranchise black citizens. In 1962, he became director of the [Council of Federated Organizations](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_council_of_federated_organization_cofo/), a coalition of organizations led by SNCC that coordinated the efforts of civil rights groups within the state. Capitalizing on the successful use of white student volunteers in Mississippi during a 1963 mock election called the ‘‘Freedom Vote,’’ Moses proposed that northern white student volunteers take part in a large number of simultaneous local campaigns in Mississippi during the summer of 1964.   Letters to prospective volunteers alerted them to conditions in Mississippi, explaining the likelihood of arrest, the need for bond money and subsistence funds, and the requirement that drivers obtain Mississippi licenses for themselves and their cars. Volunteers were also asked to prepare for the experience by reading several books, including King’s memoir of the [Montgomery bus boycott](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_montgomery_bus_boycott_1955_1956/), [*Stride Toward Freedom*](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_stride_toward_freedom_the_montgomery_story_1958/), and [Lillian Smith](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_smith_lillian_eugenia_1897_1966/)’s novel *Killers of the Dream*.   On 14 June 1964 the ﬁrst group of summer volunteers began training at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Of the approximately 1,000 volunteers, the majority were white northern college students from middle and upper class backgrounds. The training sessions were intended to prepare volunteers to register black voters, teach literacy and civics at Freedom Schools, and promote the [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s (MFDP)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_mississippi_freedom_democratic_party/) challenge to the all-white Democratic delegation at that summer’s Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.   Just one week after the ﬁrst group of volunteers arrived in Oxford, three civil rights workers were reported missing in Mississippi. James Chaney, a black Mississippian, and two white northerners, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, disappeared while visiting Philadelphia, Mississippi, to investigate the burning of a church. The abduction of the three civil rights workers intensiﬁed the new activists’ fears, but Freedom Summer staff and volunteers moved ahead with the campaign.   Voter registration was the cornerstone of the summer project. Although approximately 17,000 black residents of Mississippi attempted to register to vote in the summer of 1964, only 1,600 of the completed applications were accepted by local registrars. Highlighting the need for federal voting rights legislation, these efforts created political momentum for the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_voting_rights_act_1965/).   In an effort to address Mississippi’s separate and unequal public education system, the summer project established 41 Freedom Schools attended by more than 3,000 young black students throughout the state. In addition to math, reading, and other traditional courses, students were also taught black history, the philosophy of the civil rights movement, and leadership skills that provided them with the intellectual and practical tools to carry on the struggle after the summer volunteers departed.   At Mose’s invitation King visited Greenwood, Mississippi, to show the support of the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_southern_christian_leadership_conference_sclc/) for the summer project and to encourage black Mississippians to vote despite acts of violence and intimidation. Less than three weeks after King’s visit, the murdered bodies of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were found. King characterized their brutal deaths as ‘‘an attack on the human brotherhood taught by all the great religions of mankind’’ (King, 4 August 1964).   Freedom Summer activists also worked to make the MFDP a viable alternative to Mississippi’s ‘‘Jim Crow’’ democratic convention delegation. King publicly supported the MFDP, telling the 1964 convention’s credentials committee, ‘‘if you value your party, if you value your nation, if you value democratic government you have no alternative but to recognize, with full voice and vote, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’’ (King, 22 August 1964). While the MFDP was initially unsuccessful, some of its members were seated at the 1968 convention.   Freedom Summer marked one of the last major interracial civil rights efforts of the 1960s, as the movement entered a period of divisive conﬂict that would draw even sharper lines between the goals of King and those of the younger, more militant faction of the black freedom struggle.   **SOURCES**  Carson, *In Struggle*, 1981.  King, Statement before the Credentials Committee, 22 August 1964, MLKJP-GAMK.  King, Statement on the deaths of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney, 4 August 1964, MLKJP-GAMK.  Martinez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 1965.  McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 1988. |