

A War on Terror: The Civil Rights Movement and Mississippi Freedom Summer

Julie Blakley
March 14, 2005
HC 421: The University in Peace and War
Professor Clark

A Summer of Freedom

“After that summer, I realized that this was what my life had to be about.”

Ruth Koenig, 2005.

It was a summer that changed the lives of millions. A summer that opened the eyes of a nation. A summer that helped propel the movements of the late sixties. The three short months of June, July and August 1964 proved to be critical in the Civil Rights Movement and brought awareness of the racial inequality in the south to people around the country. It was a summer that held true to its name; it was a summer of Freedom.

When Ruth Koenig volunteered for Freedom Summer, she did not anticipate the effects the summer would have on her life. She was a 23-year-old physical education teacher working in Washington State, originally from a small town in New York. Growing up in an almost all white community and living far from the south her entire life, Koenig did not realize the severity of the problem in Mississippi. When an old teacher gave her a brochure on Freedom Summer, Koenig decided she wanted to help. She agreed to dedicate her summer to the cause in Mississippi by registering disenfranchised black voters. She had no idea how the experience would influence her life and change her views forever.

Before she left for training in Memphis, Ruth Koenig began to understand her summer would be meaningful. Some of her family members discouraged her from going, and the consequences and implications of her choice to help that summer began to sink in. However, the true significance of those three months did not hit her until later as she heard of three volunteers being killed by white supremacists and witnessed first hand the state of oppression in Mississippi. Koenig had never witnessed severe discrimination before that summer. Her youth had been far removed from the turmoil and inequality that

brewed in the south. “I lived with the naïve notion that surely everybody wanted and got the same things in life” (Koenig 2005). After that summer of 1964, Ruth’s outlook changed and her naiveté was wiped out. It was when she returned home that fall that she knew she had to dedicate her life to something bigger than herself.

The Freedom Vote

“What we have discovered is that the people who run Mississippi can only do so by force. They cannot allow free elections in Mississippi, because if they did, they wouldn’t run Mississippi.”

-Allard Lowenstein (Freedom Vote Organizer), 1963 (Williams 228).

In 1962, several local civil rights groups in Mississippi joined forces with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and NAACP to form the Council of Federated Organizations in an effort to gain the vote for blacks in Mississippi. COFO’s first major step in this effort was to organize a project called the Freedom Vote in the fall of 1963. Mississippi segregationists had claimed for years that the black population simply had no interest in voting. The Freedom Vote project sought to fulfill two main goals: To prove to Mississippi whites and the federal government that black population did have an interest in voting and to give practice on casting ballots to people who had been denied that right their entire lives (Williams 228).

The Freedom Vote was a mock election in which Freedom Party candidates were put up against the Democratic and Republican candidates. Bob Moses (the project’s head organizer) and Allard Lowenstein recruited sixty white students from Harvard and Stanford to come help get the Freedom Vote publicized and accomplished. The students went door to door informing people of the election and encouraging them to cast a ballot in the mock election. On the day of the election, 93,000 people voted in the mock

election. However, the battle was just beginning. Now that black Mississippians had proven that they had both the desire and impetus to vote, COFO had to work to help them gain the real power to vote in the real elections. The Freedom Vote was a step in the right direction and brought more awareness to the voting problem in Mississippi. The organizers and participants decided that the following summer they would launch a much bigger project to register black voters all over Mississippi and establish a real Freedom Democratic Party.

The Need for Freedom Summer

“Only when metal has been brought to white heat can it be shaped and molded. This is what we intend to do in the South and the country, bring them to white heat and then remold them.”

-Bob Moses, November 1963 (Gitlin 146).

Even after the Civil Rights Bill passed in July 1964, few changes were actually being made in the south. White segregationist attitudes persisted and little integration was actually occurring. Many Mississippians simply refused to integrate. The following is a news brief from the *Tupelo Journal* on July 8, 1964:

JACKSON, Miss., July 7 (UPI)—The Robert E. Lee Hotel, which closed its doors to the public rather than integrate, today offered free rooms to State legislators for the rest of the week (Tucker 17).

Although some businesses did integrate and the blacks of the south were able to garnish a few rights, the bill did little to remedy their poverty and powerlessness. Todd Gitlin, author of *The Sixties*, writes: “But most of SNCC now thought desegregation a bourgeois business at best; symbolically, what good was the right to eat a hamburger when the Negro couldn’t afford one in the first place?” (Gitlin 146). While the Civil Rights Bill

was a step in the right direction, terror still reigned in the south and the blacks remained impoverished and without a voice. SNCC realized that it needed to strike at the root of the problem.

Mississippi blacks needed education and the vote in order to begin their march towards equality. Gitlin writes:

“SNCC’s main idea was to build local power bases for the mass of Negroes, the impoverished ones. For that, it was necessary to get the vote. Again, Mississippi was the key. Negroes constituted a majority in more than one-third of Mississippi’s counties; overall, they were over 40 percent of the state population...Shortly after the March on Washington, SNCC agreed to pursue a ‘one man, one vote’ campaign, and to pour all necessary resources into it” (Gitlin 147).

After 1962, SNCC set out on a movement to organize a large campaign to register black Mississippians to vote. The struggle would not be easy, and the volunteers of the eventual Freedom Summer would face adversity in their quest to give a voice to the silenced.

The Reign of Terror in Mississippi

“There was a young man—Negro—killed in Rankin County last week. His body was found by the railroad tracks near his home...The sheriff did not even talk to his folks and the body was embalmed by the county coroner five hours after it was found. There was no autopsy and the coroner’s jury ruled that he died of ‘unknown causes’”

-Sandra Watts (Mississippi Freedom Summer Volunteer)
 (“Sandra and Suzanne in Mississippi” Letters 1964)

Today in the United States, the word terrorism invokes images of the World Trade Centers collapsing, Osama Bin Laden, and Sadaam Hussein in the minds of many Americans. However, only forty years ago, terror was commonplace in our own country. Images of terror included burned and bombed churches, bodies dredged from the rivers, crosses burning in front of homes, men lynched....Mississippi was a hot spot of domestic

terror. Black members of the community were harassed, physically intimidated and denied rights. The Black community members lived in a perpetual state of oppression and fear. Complacency was expected and anything other than that was punished.

“White Terrorists Suspected of Bombing Natchez Mayor,” “Negro Church Burned as Score Reaches 24,” “Officers Seek Clues To Vicksburg Bombings,” “Flames Destroy Church in Delta,” “Bodies, Church Fires Keep Authorities Busy,” “Civil Rights Workers In Shaw are Undaunted by Bomb Threat...” (Tucker 107-130). These are just a few of the headlines streaming from Mississippi papers in the years around Freedom Summer in 1964. Mississippi was a state set on old southern tradition and seeped in hate. Blacks had no political power, and the men in power were often associated with the Ku Klux Klan and active participants in the racist terror that reigned over the state. When the SNCC and CORE organized the movement to register black voters in Mississippi with COFO, many of the white citizens did not meet the volunteers with open arms. In fact, much of the white community, fearful of losing their positions of power and privilege, actively sought to intimidate and harass the volunteers. The intimidation included increased police forces, artillery and even went so far as murder.

The March on Washington in 1962 also renewed the Mississippi terror. As blacks from around the country organized and became more vocal in their fight for equality, many whites in the south also organized in an effort to “preserve the White Race.” In Mississippi, the white supremacy groups were able to organize as many as 80 cross burnings in a single night (Gitlin 149). Bob Moses (an integral leader in Freedom Summer) looked to find a way to help crack the perennial problem of Mississippi terror. Gitlin writes: “To take a step toward political power...they founded the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party, mostly Negro but open to all races...Moses also decided to import white students from the north” (Gitlin 150). Moses, along with other SNCC and CORE leaders decided that in order to fight the white violence in the south, a “white shield” of volunteers needed to be used to help bring increased media attention to the problem of terror in the south.

As SNCC and CORE geared up for Freedom Summer, so did the state of Mississippi. White Mississippians were afraid not only of the “agitators” invading their state that summer, but also of the changes they were trying to make (Koenig 2005). Jackson mayor Allen Thompson responded to the outcry of the white citizens. Thompson expanded the city’s police force from 200 to over 300 officers and purchased 250 shotguns and a 13,000-pound armored personal vehicle called “Thompson’s Tank” (Williams 229). The state legislature also approved a request from the governor to hire an additional 700 state highway patrol officers and made it illegal to distribute flyers calling for boycott. According to Juan Williams, the author of *Eyes on the Prize*, “The state seemed to be girding for war, and indeed the Jackson newspapers viewed the upcoming Freedom Summer project as an ‘invasion’” (Williams 230). Although the Freedom Summer volunteers adamantly proclaimed non-violence and wanted to affect change by giving the vote to the blacks, many white Mississippians seemed to be anticipating a much more violent and tumultuous summer.

Although the atmosphere in Mississippi was tense, the volunteers continued with courage. Even after three volunteers disappeared one evening after having been arrested, most of the volunteers remained steady in their dedication to the cause. Andrew Goodman, a twenty-year old summer volunteer from Queens College; Michael

Schwerner, a white man from Brooklyn and co-founder of the Meridian CORE office; and James Chaney, a twenty-one year old black Mississippian CORE worker, all disappeared on June 20, 1964. The three men had been arrested earlier that evening on their way to investigate the burning of a black church. The men were released later that night, but disappeared shortly after their release. The disappearance got national media attention. However, Rita Schwerner (wife of the missing Michael Shwerner) said:

“It is tragic that white northerners have to be caught up in the machinery of injustice and indifference in the South before the American people register concern. I personally suspect that if Mr. Chaney, who is a black, native Mississippian, had been alone at the time of the disappearance, that this case, like so many others would have gone completely unnoticed” (Williams 231).

Although the disappearance of the men had been an effort to cast a spell of fear over the other volunteers and discourage them from entering Mississippi, according to Ruth Koenig, it had the opposite effect. Koenig said that the majority of volunteers were even further motivated to help the cause after the disappearance of the three men. They realized the severity of the problem and were prepared to help (Koenig 2005).

After the murders of the three volunteers, the terror in Mississippi did not subside. That summer, 35 churches were burned to the ground, thirty homes and other buildings were bombed, eighty people were beaten, thirty-five shot people were shot at, and a thousand people were arrested (Gitlin 151). Koenig reminisced about one night when the freedom workers came together at a church: “There we all were, white and black holding hands, singing freedom songs, and we just didn’t know. Maybe that church would be gone the next day. Maybe it would be burned, maybe bombed” (Koenig 2005). Despite the violence existing in the south, the majority of Freedom volunteers stared their opposition in the face and persisted in their goal to register voters.

The Volunteers

“You felt you were a part of a kind of historic moment; that something very profound about the whole way of life in a region was about to change, that... you were...making...history and that you were in some way utterly selfless and yet [you] found yourself.”

-Anonymous Freedom Summer volunteer, 1985 (McAdams 3)

While the movement to register black voters in Mississippi started as a small effort led by Bob Moses, SNCC and CORE quickly realized that more volunteers would be needed to make a significant impact. They scoured college campuses around the country looking for young men and women willing to donate their summer to the cause. According to Doug McAdam, author of *Freedom Summer*, Freedom Summer marked the first widespread entrance of whites into the Civil Rights Movement. While whites had been involved in other civil rights activities before that summer, the Mississippi project was the first to bring over 1,000 white activists together for a single cause (McAdam 7). The volunteers that came to Mississippi that summer were young, energetic and optimistic. As Koenig said, “Most of the volunteers with me in Holly Springs were white, from out of state, and were the ones who could afford to take a summer off to come to Mississippi.” McAdam writes:

“...several generalizations can be made about the volunteers. By and large, they were the sons and daughters of American privilege. They came from comfortable, often wealthy families, some of them patrician. They applied to the project while attending the top elite colleges and universities in the country. The volunteers had known few limits in their lives, least of those imposed by race or class” (McAdam 11-12).

Despite their privileged backgrounds, the volunteers were steadfast in their beliefs and determined to make a difference in Mississippi this summer.

Unlike many of the movements of the later sixties, the Freedom Summer volunteers were generally not radical. McAdam states, "...they remained reformers rather than revolutionaries, liberals rather than radicals" (McAdam 12). Koenig went to Mississippi with a desire to make a change and fight for equality. In addition, the relatively short duration of the project gave her the ability to do so. "I wanted to find something with meaning; something where I could fight for equal human rights. But I knew I only had the summer to do it" (Koenig 2005). The short duration of the project was tailored to the needs of student volunteers. The largely white make-up of the volunteers also helped to bring increased media attention to the project and intensify efforts to make serious changes in Civil Rights to the south.

Five-sixths of the volunteers that summer were white. According to Gitlin, the white volunteers "did draw the media spotlight—and the white heat as well" (Gitlin 151). The murders of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman earlier that summer "brought Mississippi terror screaming into the headlines for the first time" (Gitlin 151). The affluence of the volunteers, along with the sheer size of the project helped bring to light the severe inequality and poor treatment of blacks in the south to the entire nation. For the first time, the injustices of Mississippi were broadcast into homes around the nation and a new and renewed commitment to the Civil Rights Movement began.

A Commitment to Non-Violence: Training the Volunteers

"The only reason that I will not hit back is because then I will be in the hospital two weeks instead of one, and will be useless to the movement during that extra week."

- Anonymous Freedom Summer Volunteer in a letter to his parents (Martinez 34-5)

Before being sent to Holly Springs, Mississippi, Ruth Koenig, along with other volunteers, attended a weeklong training session. Volunteers were trained in Oxford, Ohio and Memphis, Tennessee. At the training, the volunteers agreed to a policy of non-violence. If they were beaten, they were supposed to protect themselves the best they could, but not fight back. If they were arrested, they were instructed to go to jail and not argue with police officers. Volunteers were shown the best methods of protection when beaten and exactly what to say when arrested (Koenig 2005). All of the volunteers were also required to bring 500 dollars in bail money in case they were arrested (which a great percentage of volunteers were) (Williams 230).

The training of the volunteers sought to prepare them for the difficulties and violence some of them would face while working in Mississippi. According to Koenig, the training also taught the volunteers conduct and how to avoid possible violence. Proper attire was discussed and rules were outlined about walking alone. For safety reasons, white women were not to be seen alone with a black man and all of the volunteers had to sign out before leaving the Freedom house (Koenig 2005). The volunteers also had to agree to non-violence for both ethical and practical reasons. The volunteers were committed to the cause and listened carefully to the rules established at training. They knew that keeping the summer project non-violent was essential. Koenig stated: “The volunteers were definitely the type of people to be in the vanguard of defying authority, but this was not an authority we questioned” (Koenig 2005). The training successfully helped prepare the students for the summer that lay ahead.

The volunteers were warned of the dangers lurking in the rural areas of Mississippi where they would be working. The small towns of Mississippi were often controlled by white supremacists and the police were often KKK members. James Forman, the executive director of SNCC at the time, gave the volunteers a strong warning at training in Oxford, "I may be killed. You may be killed. The whole staff may go" (Williams 230). Jess Brown, a black Mississippi lawyer also warned the volunteers about the often-racist police force:

"If you are riding somewhere, and a cop stops you and starts to put you under arrest, even though you haven't committed any crime, go to jail. Mississippi is not the place to start conducting constitutional law classes for the policemen, many of whom don't have a fifth grade education" (Williams 230).

The F.B.I also informed the SNCC and CORE leaders that they would not serve as a protection service for the volunteers that summer. The volunteers were trained extensively in order to cope with the lack of protection and danger they would face in Mississippi.

Holly Springs, Mississippi: Freedom Summer in Action

"Well guys- finally- we've gone- we've arrived- we're at our destination."

-Ruth Koenig, in a letter to her
parents upon arriving in Holly Springs, 1964

Ruth Koenig spent her summer working in Holly Springs, Mississippi, a small town in northern Mississippi. Her summer there would prove to be a watershed for her later activism and changed her views forever. Ruth was responsible for teaching the children in the Freedom School. She also worked with a volunteer who was a nurse by

going door to door conducting a health survey of the local black population. Koenig reminisced about the sense of support she felt from the local black population:

“Elderly black men would often sit down by the courthouse and watch us. We didn’t talk to them [out of fear of white supremacists] but we knew they were watching out for us. If anything happened, we knew the rest of the volunteers would know right away” (Koenig 2005).

Koenig felt that she was doing something important, and the local black community affirmed her notion by welcoming her and her fellow volunteers (Koenig 2005).

The volunteers in Holly Springs did not stay with local families, like in many of the other communities. Instead, the volunteers stayed in the local black college. They would congregate in what they called the “Freedom House.” Koenig shared how the freedom volunteers felt the generosity and appreciation of the local black community. The local people helping the volunteers owned little and risked their homes and safety by helping the volunteers. Koenig reminisced about finding bags of potatoes left on the Freedom House porch and families who had almost nothing making large meals for the volunteers (Koenig 2005).

Despite the warmth of the black community in Holly Springs, much of the white community was not as welcoming. Freedom volunteers were arrested and Koenig shared a story of friends that were chased for miles down a dirt road by an unmarked car full of men trying to physically intimidate (and possibly more) the volunteers. The police force, which did nothing to protect the volunteers or uphold the law, did not hide their antagonism for the volunteers. Koenig also shared a story of being pulled over by a white police officer. Upon being pulled over, Koenig and her fellow volunteers asked the officer why they had been pulled over. The officer blatantly replied “I’m not sure yet,” and then proceeded to investigate the car. Upon his surveillance, the officer found a

broken tail light and proceeded to arrest all of the volunteers in the car. Koenig's account of police working against the Freedom Summer efforts is just one example of the many misuses of power by white Mississippi authority figures (Koenig 2005). Police officers were also accomplices in the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman at the beginning of the summer.

Freedom Summer had many goals and objectives. On a larger scale, the summer of voter registration hoped to give the black voters political power that would eventually lead to gaining other rights. With the use of the white volunteers, the project also aimed at increasing awareness and media attention to the problems in the south (Williams 231). With less than 5 percent of the black population registered to vote in Mississippi, the main goal of Freedom Summer remained to register black voters and establish the Freedom Democratic Party (McAdam 21).

Even after the efforts of the volunteers that summer, in the 1964 presidential election, in Marshall County (where Holly Springs was located), there were 4,342 eligible white citizens, of which, 4,229 were registered voters. There were also 7,168 eligible black voters, of which only 177 were registered to vote (Tucker 7). Although the Freedom Summer volunteers had not been overwhelming successful in registering large numbers of black voters, the movement that summer brought an awareness to the problems in Mississippi and started a continued movement to gain the black vote all over the South.

Freedom Summer and Oregon

“Controversy is growing over whether the student CORE group will be allowed to solicit funds [for Freedom Summer] on campus Monday, the day scheduled for Alabama Governor George Wallace’s speech.”

-“CORE Seeks Approval to Oppose Wallace,” Oregon Daily Emerald article, January 9, 1964

Eugene, Oregon was not a racially diverse city in the 1960s. In fact, there were very few black families living in the area at the time. The 1960 census showed that only 179 blacks lived in the Eugene proper area. The black population was also relatively new to the area. “The black residents of Lane County are relative newcomers; few of them have lived in the area more than 25 years” (Hogg 14). There was also a history of racism in the area. In 1948, when the Ferry Street Bridge was built, the white community forced the black community living near the bridge to vacate in order to remove the “eyesore” in the view of the bridge (Hogg 15). This racial tension became known in early 1964 George Wallace came to the University of Oregon campus.

On January 13, 1964, Wallace, the Alabama governor and known segregationist, came to speak at McArthur Court. CORE solicited the University to allow them to collect funds at the event to help support the Freedom Summer project in Mississippi. CORE wished to fundraise for Freedom Summer at an event that was clearly in opposition to their cause and beliefs. However, despite the ASUO approval of the request to solicit funds at the Wallace speech, President Flemming denied CORE the right to collect funds inside McArthur. Flemming claimed the CORE representatives inside McArthur court would pose a “security” threat (“Permission to Solicit Funds Denied CORE” 1964).

Apparently, Freedom Summer had effects on the University Oregon even before the summer of 1964.

Three University of Oregon students traveled to Mississippi for Freedom Summer in 1964, Laura Bock, Sandra Watts and Suzanne Maxson (“Sandra and Suzanne in Mississippi” 8). The three women recounted their experiences and brought awareness of the racial inequality in the South to the University campus. Sandra and Suzanne wrote letters during their summer in Mississippi that were shared with many people on the University campus. In the letters, Maxson and Watts shared their insights on the program:

“It is seen now that it is not enough to get Negroes registered to vote. Far more important and serious are involved and the movement is going to have to move into these areas and not settle for a main program of just voter registration” (“Sandra and Suzanne in Mississippi” 8).

The students brought their new gained knowledge back with them to the UO campus, and their ideas on expanding the goals of the Freedom Summer project helped to inspire a greater and more involved Civil Rights Movement on campus. Laura Bock’s archives also demonstrate the overwhelming support and effect she had on the University campus. Her involvement with CORE, SDS and SNCC fanned her activism from Freedom Summer into many areas on campus and in the Eugene community.

Freedom Summer not only brought awareness and a sense of responsibility to the UO campus, it also heightened involvement in the civil rights movement and other forms of activism. In 1965, the Eugene CORE set out to raise 750 dollars by April 30 (CORE Newsletter 1965). The fundraising was in part a response to the efforts of the previous summer in Mississippi. CORE sought to raise money to help organize an effort to register

black voters in Louisiana. “The situation in Louisiana is now as tense as it was in Mississippi last summer, but there is little publicity and no apparent interest by the government. A major confrontation is brewing...” (CORE Newsletter 1965) Even in the distant state of Oregon, the activities in Mississippi the previous summer influenced a movement to continue to fight for equality in other areas as well.

CORE operated in two locations, one on campus and the other in the Eugene community. Ronald Paul Finne presided over the campus CORE office during the 1964-1965 school year. Finne came to the University of Oregon from Reed as a graduate student in sociology. Although Finne did not directly participate in Freedom Summer, his participation in the Civil Rights Movement as an individual led to his affiliation with CORE. The summer preceding Freedom Summer, Finne participated in the March on Washington. Interested in civil rights and equality for all since the late 1950’s, Finne marched on Washington then returned to Oregon. Finne’s dedication to social problems led him into sociology where he fought for the war on poverty and joined CORE.

Looking back, Finne describes the UO chapter of CORE as being more inclusive than the city’s. Eugene’s CORE consisted largely of older professionals interested in politics. “It was about values and generosity of spirit,” Finne said of the UO CORE volunteers (Finne, 2005). This philosophical underpinning of the Congress led to a conduit for values to manifest in actions that would allow the black community equal rights. The UO chapter of CORE focused on values and ideals while the downtown group concentrated on politics. In addition, the students of CORE were more connected to the black community and ultimately, closer to Freedom Summer. The students of the University focused intensely on grassroots efforts and centered themselves locally. They

accomplished this two ways: by staging local sit-ins where community members either stood for or against civil rights and second, by raising money for those UO students going to Mississippi for the summer (Finne 2005).

Ruth Koenig, although not from Oregon originally, moved to Eugene in 1966 for graduate school. Her effects on the community were great and her Freedom Summer involvement became important and integral in the later activist movements that spawned from Freedom Summer. Koenig became actively involved in the antiwar movement. Her continued presence in Eugene and constant involvement in grassroots activism and causes has had a lasting and beneficial effect on the community (Koenig 2005). She adopted a child from foster care, helped a friend put on a production about the Civil Rights movement and was involved in the renaming of Centennial Boulevard into Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (Koenig 2005).

The Effects of Freedom Summer

“...Mississippi stood as the living embodiment of the potential for inhumanity and injustice inherent in that system.”

-Doug McAdams, 1988

For Ruth Koenig, Freedom Summer marked the beginning of a life in activism. She left Mississippi that summer shocked at the potential for human brutality, and awakened to the inequality and racism in the South. That summer spurred her later involvement in both the anti-war and environmental movement (Koenig 2005). Koenig was not alone in being effected by the summer in Mississippi.

Freedom Summer not only individually inspired the volunteers. It had a larger effect in serving as a sort of organizational tool of young activists with similar views and dedication to social equality and justice. Doug McAdam writes:

“Its significance [Freedom Summer] lies both in the events of the summer and the cultural and political consequences that flowed from it. The events of the summer effectively resocialized and radicalized the volunteers while the ties they established with other volunteers laid the groundwork for a nationwide activist network out of which the other major movements of the era—women’s, antiwar, student—were to emerge” (McAdam 5).

Not only did that summer in Mississippi have lasting and powerful effects on the Civil Rights Movement, it awakened a generation that would inspire the later movements of the 1960s. It was part of the impetus for a broader counterculture that emerged in the following years and inspired other non-violent movements nationwide (McAdam 4-6).

Although the main goal of Freedom Summer was to register black voters, the volunteers knew that was a small part of their presence in Mississippi that summer. In reality, the thousands of volunteers that flooded the small communities all over Mississippi inspired the local black population. Juan Williams writes: “...the volunteers brought a sense of hope and support to black Mississippians. Through the many freedom schools, freedom clinics, freedom theaters, and other efforts renewed their sense of pride and self-worth” (Williams 236). The majority of the Freedom Summer volunteers found themselves dedicated to a progressive political agenda. According to Doug McAdam, the summer volunteer veterans were also among the first to “catch the political and cultural wave of the Sixties” (McAdams 199). For Ruth Koenig, Freedom Summer marked the beginning of a life dedicated to changing the world, one small step at a time.