

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History

# The Mudcat

The Mississippi History Newsletter for Students

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## Bob Moses: A Leader of Youth in the Civil Rights Movement



*Bob Moses speaks with a student at the Old Capitol Museum on February 5, 2014. Both were participants at the Freedom Summer National Youth Summit.*

Dr. Robert Moses was a key figure in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and an important organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He was born on January 23, 1935, in Harlem, New

York. After attending Harvard University, he returned to New York to teach high school math. On a trip to Virginia to visit family, he started participating in **sit-ins** at lunch counters and eventually

moved to Atlanta where SNCC headquarters was located.

Moses began traveling throughout the rural South to recruit for SNCC. He also helped register African Americans to vote, especially in Mississippi. Moses believed that empowering African Americans to vote would help combat racial inequality. In August of 1961, he organized SNCC's first voter registration drives in rural Mississippi in Pike, Amite, and Walthall counties. In many places, such as McComb, Moses faced

backlash from people who opposed attempts to register African Americans to vote.

Moses continued to promote the vote and in 1964 was one of the representatives of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention. This party was created to give African Americans a voice in politics and challenge the all-white Democratic Party. Moses left SNCC in 1966 and returned to teaching math but continues to be a proponent of civil rights today.

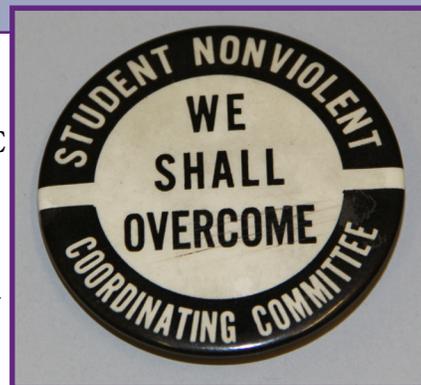
## Students Organize for Civil Rights

SNCC was founded in 1960 to educate student protest groups and encourage them to work together. During the Civil Rights Movement, SNCC organized **direct action protests** and helped register African Americans to vote. By 1963, SNCC included representatives from a variety of protest groups and a staff that came from all over the

country. Most workers were young college students and a large majority of them were African American. Fannie Lou Hamer, the vice-president of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, said, "The reason I respect SNCC is it was the only organization that did the hard work that had to be done in Mississippi." This included working to inte-

grate public facilities, like hospitals and libraries. In 1964, SNCC led and financed the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project to register African Americans to vote and educate them about their political rights.

As the Civil Rights Movement came to a close, SNCC focused on other social issues like



*SNCC button, circa 1960s. Museum Division, MDAH.*

the Vietnam War, but by the mid 1970s it was no longer active.

# The Burglund High School Walk-Out



McComb's African American Burglund High School was the center of the area's Civil Rights Movement in 1961. After the arrival of Bob Moses at the SNCC headquarters in McComb, students took part in a nonviolent direct action protest. Some were arrested, including Brenda Travis, a fifteen-year-old Burglund student.

On October 4, 1961, Travis tried to return to school after spending time in jail for the pro-

test. The principal denied her re-entry. News of Travis' expulsion spread and other students at Burglund walked out of school in her support. They carried signs for SNCC and marched on City Hall where they were arrested. Bob Moses and other adults were arrested for "contributing to the delinquency of the minors."

While the boycott continued, SNCC opened the alternative Nonviolent

High School and taught students who were expelled. The school closed when Moses and other SNCC faculty went to trial for their arrests. After the trial officials wanted the students to sign pledges renouncing civil rights ac-



**Headlines from the McComb Enterprise-Journal in the days following the Burglund walk-out. Images from Archives and Records Services, MDAH, used with the permission of the McComb Enterprise-Journal.**

activities before re-entering Burglund High School. Many would not sign and attended classes at Campbell College in Jackson instead.

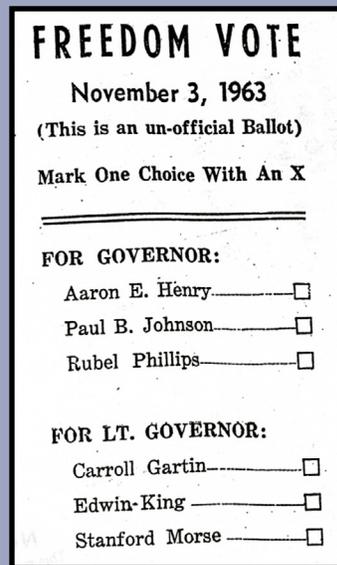
## About the Buttons...

Buttons with short messages that expressed one's opinions were popular with protesters during the 1960s. MDAH Museum Division has a large collection of buttons from the Civil Rights Movement.



## The Freedom Vote Campaign

COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, included leaders from CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference), the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and SNCC. In 1963, the organizations worked together to develop the Freedom Vote Campaign. This was a mock election to show the nation that African



*A Freedom Vote Ballot for the Henry-King mock election. Archives and Records Services, MDAH.*

Americans desired to vote without any outside pressures or intimidation.

COFO chose African American Aaron Henry,

a well-known NAACP activist from Mississippi, to be the candidate for governor in the mock election. Reverend Ed King, the white chaplain at Tougaloo College, was his running mate. Both candidates faced harassment throughout the campaign. More than 83,000 African Americans voted for Henry and King in the election.

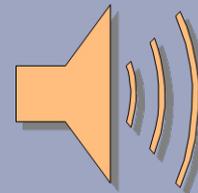
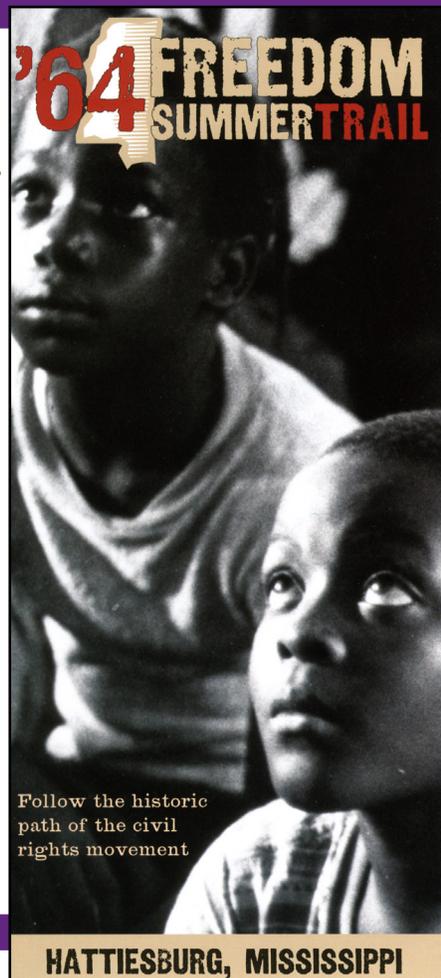
This campaign sought to empower the African American community in the world of politics and voting. It also served as a basis for 1964's Freedom Summer voter registration drive by SNCC in Mississippi.

# Investigate More

You can visit sites and museums across the state to learn more about Bob Moses, SNCC, and the other civil rights events.

In McComb, Mississippi, Summit Street was a business district and blues music hot spot. Before the 1960s and during the time of integration, Summit Street was an African American area with blues and jazz clubs, shopping, hotels, and cafes. During the time of the Burglund High School walkout in 1961, Summit Street faced racial tension and destruction, and many of the business owners were arrested for supporting the Civil Rights Movement. Summit Street is now a spot on the Mississippi Blues Trail. Visit the website at <http://www.msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/summit-street>

Take a civil rights driving tour in a town near you. Jackson, Hattiesburg, McComb, and Philadelphia, as well as Tallahatchie County, are rich in civil rights history. Tours highlight the homes, churches, businesses, and other important sites that played a role in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. Driving tour brochures can be found at local tourism bureaus, highway welcome centers, and even online!



Listen to Bob Moses online on the American RadioWorks website at <http://americanradio-works.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/bmoses.html> This April 24, 1964, speech was given to college students on the west coast, a speech that inspired many of them to join the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement.

## Want to know more?

### Looking for the ultimate investigation?

**Investigate the civil rights sites in your own community! Here's how to get started:**

1. Talk to long-time residents of your neighborhood to learn about what and where things happened.
2. Go to your local library or historical society to find facts, figures, and photos about the past.
3. See what you can find on the Internet. Some good sites to begin your research include:
  - Mississippi Freedom Trail: This new listing continues to grow as more civil rights sites are identified and commemorated. <http://www.visitmississippi.org/mississippi-freedom-trail.aspx>
  - MDAH Historic Resources Database: Find sites on the National Register of Historic Places and Mississippi Landmarks searchable by city and county. <http://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/search.aspx>
  - Mississippi Blues Trail: Learn about the Civil Rights Movement from music and find the historical marker in or near your town. <http://msbluestrail.org/>
4. Share what you find with your family, friends, and classmates!

# Show What You Know!

## Vocabulary Words

**Sit-in:** an organized and peaceful protest where a group of people refuse to leave a public place.

**Direct action protest:** an action that seeks an immediate result, especially one that is directed against an established authority; oftentimes a strike or picket.

**Delinquency:** failure in or neglect of a duty or obligation.

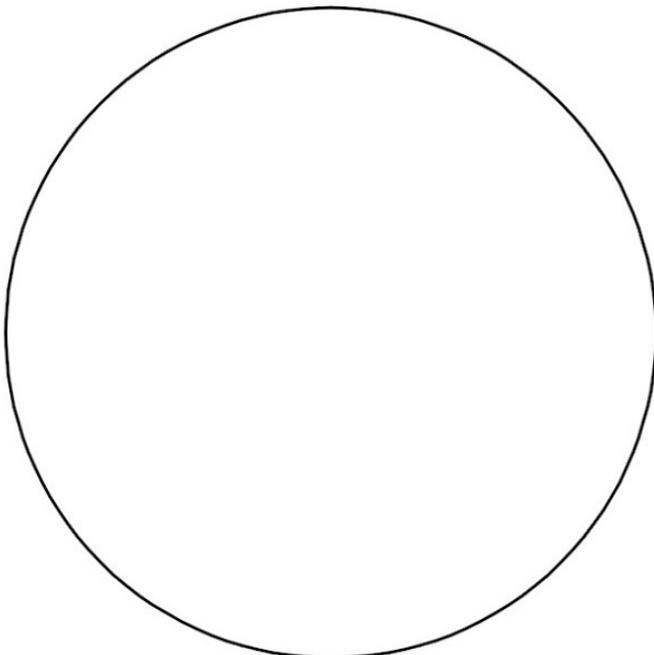
**Racial tension:** dislike between two or more

racial groups.  
**NAACP:** an organization founded in 1909 that works to ensure the “political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.”

**Harassment:** to be troubled or tormented by repeated attacks.

## Design a Protest Button

Use the circle below to write a short message telling others your opinion about an issue important to you. Then safety pin it to your shirt so everyone knows where you stand!



## Word Jumble

Unscramble the letters to reveal civil rights words featured in this *Mudcat*. Then check your answers in the key below.

1. S O B O B S E M
2. T S D E A I R T C I C P T E R O N T
3. M S H S A E A R T N
4. C C S N
5. B S H U R C G G H I L O H U N O D L
6. V O E D O E T R E F M

## Create a Catfish Competition

How would you like to see a catfish of your own creation on the cover of the *Mudcat*? If you're an artist—or even if you're not—craft a cool catfish graphic, send it in to the *Mudcat*, and **YOUR catfish could win a coveted spot on the cover** of the next issue! Send all entries via mail or email to:

Outreach Programs Coordinator  
Museum Division, MDAH  
P.O. Box 571  
Jackson, MS 39205-0571  
Phone: 601-576-6997  
[outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov](mailto:outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov)

Congrats to Sarah G. of Clinton for her winning *Mudcat*!

Answer Key  
1. Bob Moses 2. Direct Action Protest 3. Harassment 4. SNCC 5. Burglund High School 6. Freedom Vote