

# The Foner Freedom Summer Papers

## Objective

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in the Foner collection (letters, newspaper clippings, etc.) to establish a coherent unified story of the events that transpired during Freedom Summer, including the murder of three civil rights workers as the story unfolded in the news as well as other acts of violence committed against the volunteers.

The *Foner Freedom Summer Papers* lesson plan is adaptable for grades 9 - 12.

| Mississippi Department of Education Curricular Connections |  |               |
|--|--|---------------|
| Common Core<br>Language Arts                               | Reading Standards for Informational Text Grades 9-10       | 4; 5; 6; 7; 9 |
|  | Reading Standards for Informational Text Grades 11-12      | 4; 5; 6; 7    |
|  | ELA 9th Grade  | 2c; 2f; 3e    |
|  | ELA 10th Grade   | 2c; 2f; 3e    |
|  | ELA 11th Grade   | 2b; 2f        |
|  | ELA 12th Grade   | 2b; 2e        |
| Social Studies   | Mississippi Studies 9th Grade                              | 4b            |
|  | U. S. Government   | 5b            |
|  | World Geography  | 4b            |
|  | World History from the Age of Enlightenment to the Present | 5c            |
|  | U.S. History Post Reconstruction to Present                | 4b, c         |

## Objective:

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in the Foner collection to establish a coherent unified story of the events that transpired during Freedom Summer, including the murder of three civil rights workers as the story unfolded in the news as well as other acts of violence committed against the volunteers. **This lesson may be adaptable for several grade levels and specific subject matter.**

**Materials:** Thomas Foner Freedom Summer Papers (letters, newspaper clippings, etc.); Internet access.

## Procedures:

### Activity One: Perspectives on Freedom Summer

1. Read the following letter, *Newsday* articles, and oral history transcript:
  - a. Letter from July, 1964 (nine pages) (**type in “July 1964” in “search for keyword” box**)
  - b. *Newsday* article, “17 are Honored for the Courage it Took to Wait” (**type in “17 are Honored” in the “search for keyword” box**)
  - c. *Newsday* article “Help Sought for Youths” (**type in “Ex-CIA Boss” in “search for keyword” box**)
  - d. Oral history transcript with Charles Moore, Greenville, pages 4, and 7-9 found at: <http://zed.mdah.state.ms.us:81/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=95884>.
2. Identify the three points of view and discuss the way people of varying viewpoints and perspectives perceived the events of the Freedom Summer. Pay special attention to the way that different generations, parents and their children, related to what was happening.
3. Using the sources provided, write an essay comparing and contrasting the different perspectives on the events of Freedom Summer. Include specific examples from at least two of the sources and cite them.
4. Discuss the role of civic responsibility today and its role during the 1960s.

### Activity Two: Language and Letters

1. Read Foner’s five letters in sequence (**click on “Browse Series 1 Images” under “Series 1 Correspondence, 1964”**).
2. How did his description of the events in Mississippi change as he stayed there longer?
3. What details did he use to evoke how violent the situation was becoming?
4. Discuss his audience for the letters and the impact that has on his writing.
5. Analyze Foner’s tone and style as the letters progress.

### Extension Activities:

1. Read Eudora Welty’s “The Demonstrators” from *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* and “Where is the Voice Coming From?” and discuss the way that Welty’s fictional accounts of the time overlap with what is depicted in Foner’s letters and the newspaper articles.
2. Analyze “Letter from Birmingham Jail” available from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change website at <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-birmingham-city-jail-0> and discuss how it addresses similar themes and concepts.
3. Read the *Washington Post* article in the Foner Collection entitled “Air is Somber in Tinselled City In Mississippi” from December 6, 1964. Then choose an article discussing the murder of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner from a Mississippi newspaper. Analyze the tone of each article and infer

the journalist's position on events.

4. Watch *Murder in Mississippi* with your students. This film revolves around three people – a Mississippi African American and two northern Jewish students participating in the 1964 Freedom Summer. Their efforts to help African Americans to register to vote made them targets in the fight for civil rights in Mississippi. The film climaxes with the death of the three workers in Neshoba County at the hands of white supremacists. Their disappearance and deaths brought the FBI to Mississippi and put the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi on the national stage. Produced by Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc., 2008. *Color, 97 minutes. High school to adult.*

*This film can be borrowed free of charge from the Mississippi History on Loan Collection.*

*Go to the MDAH website at <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/mississippi-history-on-loan-film-collection/> or contact the Outreach Programs Coordinator at 601-576-6997.*

5. Continue to explore Freedom Summer and other events related to the Civil Rights Movement with *Civil Rights in Mississippi*. The six-day unit includes close readings of autobiographies, fiction, and informational texts; the use of primary sources such as newspaper articles, images, and interviews; multi-media components such as documentaries, feature films, and music; and research and writing projects of various lengths completed both as individuals and within groups. Throughout the unit students are encouraged to analyze the persons and events of the civil rights era and make connections between the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s with those of minority groups today.

*The unit is adaptable for grades nine through twelve and is available on the MDAH website at <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/>.*

## *Letter Transcripts*

Access Thomas Foner's letters online in the MDAH Digital Archives at <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital/archives/series/foner>. Go to "Series I: Correspondence, 1964" and click "Browse Series I Images."

### **Letter 1:**

Dear Mom and Dad,

As I write this letter I hear the chanting of freedom songs lilting through the air. It's about 9 o'clock at night; I arrived about three in the afternoon. Soon I will go to a Medgar Evers memorial sermon. I have been interviewed by reporters from several newspapers (check the Herald Tribune this week) and the reporters seem sympathetic to our just cause. I realize more and more the real and true danger I face this summer but my determination is stronger than ever in the face of this grave challenge.

Love,  
Tom

P.S. Send me the number of Hampshire Lodge pronto

### **Letter 2:**

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am now in Mississippi stationed in one of the most explosive areas Madison County. Here the population is 75 percent Negro! Also here the Negro population is more militant than in any other area in Mississippi. The conflict here has taken on most of the aspects of a colonial war!! The night that I got here several houses were fired into and our Freedom House (I was inside it) was bombed by the night riders. The next day the police arrested about 20 Negros! In the course of the following day the cops smacked into one of the SNCC workers while he was driving and arrested him. The police also handcuffed a gentleman who had attempted to register a few days ago and shot him dead!!! Three SNCC staff member two white and one Negro (I had become good friends with all three in Ohio, one was my roommate) have disappeared for the last three days and the police don't have them so the KKK must have killed them! If they didn't kill them the cops did. You must have heard about this by the time this letter gets to you. As of now the FBI has taken no action at all!!! Our phones are tapped; after the bombing we made a frantic call to COFO headquarters, but the operator cut us off, not letting us tell them what happened. We get threatening phone calls at all hours. I was almost arrested when I was escorting some white Northern ministers to freedom house. The only thing that saved me was that when the police found out the men were ministers. The police told me to leave town and go up North or else. The local police (who are all alcoholics) have a local torture chamber called the "hot house." A small room in which they fit ten or so freedom fighters (it is used for Civil Rights works or Negros in or out of the movement only). The police then fill the room with hot stifling steam. Add to this that everyone is piled on top of each other and you get a good idea of democracy in our great country. Where are the federal marshals, where are the federal troops!!! Must we all die before the federal government is forced to do its job? The Negro people here have gained a militancy and a class conscience that is truly revolutionary. We have a boycott of white stores that is

100% affective! Since 75% of the population is Negro, the white population is learning that there are stronger weapons than billy clubs, guns, and bombs. Four white stores have closed and two have integrated their workers and professional staff so that they could no longer be boycotted. The other white stores have tripled their prices to make up somewhat for their large losses. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sent us a telegram commending our handling of the boycott. The other day a Negro gentleman, about 70 years old, came in to Canton from the rural area of Madison County. He is a poor tenant farmer and he had heard that a COFO worker had been arrested and that we were trying to raise bail money. Though he did not know even the name of the person in jail he brought with him his life savings, \$250 dollars, to be used for bond money (bond was \$500 for a trumped up vagrancy charge) knowing full well he might lose that money since many times the police don't give the money back. We had a mass meeting in a church last night with the police outside continually honking their horns. At one point a Negro girl, only seven years old, got up and said, "I have love in my heart and freedom on my lips." Another Negro child got up and asked, "Why do the white folks hate the black folks?" At the end of the meeting an old, old Negro man with a cane got up and said, "I've been living in this state 94 years and it ain't had freedom yet. I always knowed that the South would change some day but I didn't dream that I would live to see it start changing now!"

### **Letter 3:**

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm going to relate to you, among other things, the incidents that have occurred in one eventful day in one area of Mississippi.

Allen Dulles, Dick Gregory, and James Farmer arrived in Jackson today, and I was part of their COFO escort. They left for Meridian soon after. Also today two children were poisoned by candy thrown from a white man's car, one died. Two COFO volunteers were jailed on a trumped up rape charge. Forty M-1 rifles and a thousand rounds of ammunition were stolen from the local National Guard armory. As I write this letter, a Negro church is burning down the street; the fire department is nowhere to be found. Two other volunteers have just been arrested. Last night a Negro freedom worker was shot by white hoodlums. He was taken to the white University Hospital and was released about an hour later with the slug still in his head. Also last night Reverend Smith's house was shot into about 1:30 AM by white men. The Negro guards fired back as the men got into a city truck. As you can see there is what is tantamount to a race war going on down here. This is but one area, and but one day in this long hot summer. It is heartening to hear that the North is mobilizing a strong protest movement in our defense.

A letter from the president of the Jackson Mississippi Junior Chamber of Commerce has been brought to my attention; it says in part, "how could anyone vote to give our federal government such power?" It is interesting to note against this report a report on the powers the Mississippi legislature has given the state government. The legislature has passed bills to prohibit the distribution of leaflets calling for economic boycotts; to prohibit picketing of public buildings; to allow police to restrict freedom of movement of individuals and groups; to treat as adults juveniles arrested in a civil rights case; to sterilize parents of two or more illegitimate children. There are bills to outlaw economic boycotts of economic businesses that discriminate, to outlaw passive resistance in demonstrations, bills to legalize freedom schools and community centers, to punish teachers, parents, or civil rights workers who "entice" minors "to violate the laws and ordinances of the state" by participating in civil rights activities, to revoke the charter of integrated Tougaloo College, etc. This is just a partial rundown of Mississippi's

efforts to curb the activities of her “happy” Negroes and their supporters. Apparently the power exercised by the state government doesn’t worry the local Jaycees. It also seems these new bills or the not-so-new wave of terrorism haven’t worried the Justice Department or any other Department of our federal government. I realize this is election year and President Lyndon Baines Johnson does not want to upset his cousin Governor Paul Burney Johnson but that hardly seems reason enough to let innocent people get killed, or turn up missing in a “democratic” country. Mississippi is as integral a part of our United States as any other part is. None of us are free while Mississippi is a carbon copy Union of South Africa. That is why I have definitely decided that I shall stay in Mississippi after the summer is over to work for the freedom of our country, my freedom and yours as well as the Negro freedom.

There is a place in Mississippi called Liberty.

There is a place in Washington called Justice.

My address has not changed and will not be changed. Start sending me my traveler’s checks. Show this letter to the kids at the camps so that they can gauge what is happening here.

Love,  
Tommy

#### **Letter 4:**

Dear Mom, Dad, Eric, Naomi, and anyone else. My assignment has been changed from Meridian to Philadelphia. I am one of a triumvirate of directors in this troubled county, in this troubled state. Altogether we are six workers at this point, but as we did this summer, we intend to get local people to become COFO workers. It is a great honor to be working here because COFO has handpicked its best workers for this project. It is also a great risk what with the daily intimidation and threats of worse to come. Last night around 3 o’clock in the morning a group of robed Klansmen woke up an old Negro lady and told her to tell us to get out of the state “if we wanted to stay healthy.”

I hope you’re not worrying about me; I am experiencing people; doing a wonderful thing.

We don’t get mail delivered to us in Philadelphia (they refuse to bring it to us) so send my mail to 2505 ½ Fifth Street, Meridian, MS. Send me a camera, John \_\_\_\_\_ address at Wisconsin, the \_\_\_\_\_ address, and the wristwatch you promised to buy for me. Also send the new Hispanic American Report magazine. Also get me a subscription to the N.Y. Times. I hope you can do these things because they are all important to a greater or lesser degree.

Love,  
Tom

#### **Letter 5:**

Dear Mom and Dad,

As I write this letter I sit on the roof of our headquarters observing a sunset of such beauty and magnitude that I cannot even begin to describe it. The hills of red dirt, the pine woods, the mountains and slave shack silhouetted against the blood red sun and clouds, all this and the rest of it takes one's breath away. Now and at all such times I feel myself possessed with a deep melancholy; a heartrending feel for the poor downtrodden blacks and white toilers of this state; both equal victims to a system that they neither created, understand or flourish under. Someday this will all be changed. When you and I are gone and forgotten people a new generation of black and white people, yet unborn, will walk hand in hand.

There have been incidents of violence and intimidation but they are hardly worth noting at a time such as this. I only know that I must carry on in the struggle that other people have died in and that I may die in; the fight for a social order that cares about the honest hard working people of the world and at the same time insures their human dignity. This is worth any sacrifice to me.

Love,  
Tommy

# MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS

## TEACHER EVALUATION

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE LEVEL \_\_\_\_\_

LESSON TITLE \_\_\_\_\_ **The Foner Freedom Summer Papers** \_\_\_\_\_

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?
2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?
3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?
4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?
5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:  
\_\_\_multi-day unit                      \_\_\_multi-week unit                      \_\_\_other
6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

|                                      |          |          |          |          |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <u>Directions and Notes</u>          | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Curricular Connections</u>        | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Historic Images and Documents</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>References and Resources</u>      | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |

***The Foner Freedom Summer Papers Lesson Plan***

|                             |          |          |          |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <u>Activity One</u>         | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Activity Two</u>         | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Extension Activities</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Overall Lesson</u>       | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement.  
Comments may be entered in the space below.

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