

SPEAK NOW: MEMORIES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

<http://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/conversations/speaknow>

On May 22–26, 2011, seventy-five men and women returned to Jackson, Mississippi, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 Freedom Rides. In conjunction with an exhibit to commemorate the rides, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History offered the Freedom Riders and the public an opportunity to “Speak Now” and record memories of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. Twenty-eight individuals responded, resulting in twenty-six audio recordings and corresponding transcripts and fifty-six digital color photographs. One interview in the collection was restricted by request of participants. The recordings are not traditional oral histories but are instead recordings of individuals recounting their own experiences during an era of cultural, political, and social change. Topics other than the Freedom Rides include African American veterans, Mississippi Freedom Schools, Medgar and Charles Evers, and the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

Subjects that can be addressed within this digital archive:

- Segregation and discrimination
- The Freedom Riders—Washington to New Orleans
- Voting rights and voter registration
- Public transportation
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Life as a civil rights activist
- The Citizen’s Council
- Hate crimes
- Emmett Till
- The KKK

Directions: Use items from the MDAH Digital Archive entitled Speak Now: Memories of the Civil Rights Era found at <http://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/conversations/speaknow> to analyze and interpret the following items. For more information about youth involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, explore <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/freedom-riders/> and <https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/the-mississippi-civil-rights-movement-1955-1970-when-youth-protest>.

Note: Navigate to items by going to <http://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/conversations/speaknow>, selecting List Interviews, and then selecting the designated interview. The interview can be accessed through the audio file or written transcript.

Questions:

1. Select AU976 - Thomas Armstrong.

- a. Who was the civil rights activist who spoke in Jackson when Armstrong was a student at Tougaloo College? What impact did that event have on Armstrong's involvement in the movement?
- b. What was an incident that opened Armstrong's eyes into racial injustices as a teenager? What was the breaking point that led him to fully devote himself to activism?
- c. Why did Armstrong believe it was important for locals to become involved with the Freedom Riders? What did Armstrong think was the impact of the Freedom Riders in Mississippi?

2. Select AU978 - Max Pavesic.

- a. Max Pavesic was a student at UCLA when he was jailed for thirty days for participating in a Freedom Ride from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Jackson, Mississippi. When he and other Freedom Riders were released, they were transported back to Jackson by guards on a truck. Describe what happened during the ride back. What did the driver tell them?
- b. What retribution did Pavesic and other students at UCLA face when word got out about their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement?

- c. Upon reflection on his trip, what did Pavesic realize about his knowledge of Mississippi? Be sure to look at the last paragraph when formulating your answer.

3. Select AU999 - Flonzie Brown Wright.

- a. What event inspired Wright to become active in the movement? What were her first roles in the movement?

- b. When Wright was a young adult, she attempted to register to vote in Madison County, but was denied. What did this inspire her to do? What was significant about her accomplishment?

- c. What were some of the tactics used to deter African Americans from attempting to register to vote?

- d. Why does Wright say the position of Election Commissioner is so important? What did she do in her administration to help Canton's citizens?