

## Mississippi Department of Archives and History

# Learning Lagniappe: Educator Extras Speak Now: Memories of the Civil Right Era

[http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/speaknow/](http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/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 protester, the Citizen’s Council, hate crimes, Emmett Till, and the KKK.

### **Suggested Classroom Activities:**

Have students conduct similar interviews with family and friends.

*For more lessons and activities based on the Digital Archives and other collections visit the Classroom Materials page on our website at*

<http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/>

### **Search Directions:**

- Go to [http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/speaknow/](http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/speaknow/)
- Click on: *List Interviews*
- Click on: The name of the person you are interested in hearing about
- Then click on: *View Transcript* to read the interview or the *Play* icon to listen to the interview

*Teacher Discussion Guide on Reverse*

## Teacher Discussion Guide

Use images from the MDAH Digital Archive entitled “Speak Now: Memories of the Civil Rights Era,” (found at [http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/speaknow/](http://mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/speaknow/)) to lead your class in a discussion analyzing and interpreting the following images.

### 1. Click on AU975 Pauline Knight-Ofosu.

- a. What was Ofosu’s definition of a Freedom Rider? Knight-Ofosu was a student of the Bible and believed that the Freedom Rides were an event orchestrated by God. She believed that it wasn’t conjured up by one person but was something that people were compelled to take part in. (see page 1)
- b. What connection did Knight-Ofosu make between the Freedom Rides and the Bible? She references a story about two brothers who very different but who put aside their differences to bury their father together. For her, the moral of this story was that anyone can put aside their differences because love heals all wounds. (see page 1-2)

### 2. Click on AU 976 Thomas Armstrong.

- a. What happened to Armstrong when he was thirteen years old? How was this discrimination? Armstrong walked up to a window to order ice cream and was told to go around to the side window. There he saw a sign that said “Colored Only.” Next to that window was a fifty gallon metal drum garbage can full of garbage with flies swarming around it. Disgusted, he left. (see page 1)
- b. Put yourself in Armstrong’s place. How would you feel if this happened to you?

### 3. Click on AU 977 Claude Liggins.

- a. Liggins discusses an experience he had in a restaurant when he was a young boy. How was he discriminated against? He went to a doctor in downtown Lake Charles, Louisiana. His grandmother gave him 25 cents to get a snack while they waited. He went to a nearby restaurant, sat down at the counter and ordered a hamburger. Then a man came in and told him he couldn’t sit down where he was and he was made to stand up against the wall. (see page 1)
- b. On a bus ride another incident of discrimination occurred. What happened? African Americans had to stand in the back of the bus even if there were seats in the front. When he was about sixteen, Liggins sat down in the front of the bus when the rear was completely filled. The bus driver told him to move to the back but Liggins refused. Although other African Americans on the bus urged him to avoid trouble and just move, the only white person on the bus said he had a right to sit where he liked. (see page 2)
- c. What African American woman from Alabama does Liggins’ experience remind you of? This situation was the same as the one Rosa Parks faced in 1955 when she sat in the white section of a Montgomery, Alabama, bus and was subsequently arrested. This event led to a major bus boycott by African Americans in the city and today it is seen as an important catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement.

### 4. Click on AU994 Judge Mary Libby Payne.

- a. What happened to Payne after she got her law degree from Ole Miss? Although Payne graduated first in her class in 1955, she couldn’t find a law firm to hire her as an associate or a partner. This was due in part because she was a woman with no experience and if she got pregnant there was no such thing as maternity leave (she would have to be let go or fired). (see pages 1-2)
- b. Is this a form of discrimination? Why or why not?