The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Through the Work of Medgar Evers

Objectives: Using primary sources from the personal papers of Medgar Evers, students will learn about Evers' leadership and the risk African American Mississippians were willing to take on the road to achieve civil rights. Students will research biographical details of Evers life and work to create a timeline; analyze documents to gain insight into Evers' work with the NAACP and the repercussions African Americans faced as they challenged Mississippi's segregation laws; and make connections between literature and history by reading Eudora Welty's short story, "Where is the Voice Coming From?"

The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Through the Work of Medgar Evers is adaptable for grades 9-12.

Curricular Connections		
Common Core Language Arts	Grade 8	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8; W 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9; WHST 4, 5, 8, 9
	Grades 9-10	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8; W 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9; WHST 4, 5, 8, 9
	Grades 11-12	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; W 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; WHST 4, 5, 8, 9
Social Studies	Mississippi Studies	4a; 4b; 4c; 6a
	U.S. History from Post-Reconstruction to the Present	4a; 4b; 4c; 4d; 7a; 7c
	Minority Studies	2a; 2c; 4a
	African American Studies	1c; 4d; 4b
	Problems in American Democracy	2b; 2d; 5d

"I have learned that MDAH is a remarkable teacher resource. The staff is very teacher friendly and eager to help. I encourage teachers to come to the archives in Jackson and use the treasure trove of primary sources to enhance lesson plans or at least make use of the online sources for teachers."

Connie Rodgers teaches ninth grade academy, honors Mississippi studies, and honors world geography at Southaven High School in Southaven, Mississippi. Her twenty-three years of experience includes teaching multiple AP and honors courses in Mississippi and Arkansas.

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Materials: *Evers Biographical Sketch*; large butcher paper or individual copy paper; markers; *Evers' Biographical Sketch Reading Comprehension Questions*; Medgar Evers Resource Packet; "Where is the Voice Coming from?" short story (available in various Welty short story collections at your local library or bookseller); "Where is the Voice Coming From?" *Background*; Internet; "Where is the Voice Coming From?" *Analytical Questions*; political cartoon; newspaper article; *I Rolled with Ross!*

Procedures:

Activity One: Biography of Medgar Wiley Evers

1. Distribute *Evers Biographical Sketch* for students to read.
2. Distribute a blank sheet of copy paper for students to make a timeline of Evers' life or large butcher paper and markers to small groups to make one timeline.
3. Distribute the handout *Evers Biographical Sketch Reading Comprehension Questions.*
4. Working individually or in groups, have students complete the timeline and questions together after reading and discussing the biographical information.

Activity Two: Primary Source Packets

1. Divide students into small groups and distribute one primary source packet to each group from the Medgar Evers Resource Packet.
2. Distribute the *Primary Sources Guided Questions* handout (located in Resource Packet) to each student.
3. Have students examine the documents to gain insight into Medgar Evers' work for various civil rights organizations in Mississippi and learn about the repercussions African American Mississippians faced as they challenged segregation.
4. Discuss the topics in the packet and worksheet questions as a class.

Activity Three: "Where is the Voice Coming From?"

1. Provide background information about when and why Eudora Welty wrote the short story using the "Where is the Voice Coming From?" *Background* and handout.
2. Access the short story "Where is the Voice Coming From?" in Welty short story collections such as *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) or the *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays & Memoir (Library of America, 102)* (The Library of America) available at your local library or booksellers.
3. Make copies and distribute to class. Students will read the short story silently and answer questions on the student handout titled "Where is the Voice Coming From?" *Analytical Questions.*
4. At teachers discretion, students can also listen to Dr. Rush Rehm's interpretation of "Where is the Voice Coming From?" available at https://eudorawelty.org/resources/.
5. As a class, discuss the worksheet questions, the reason Eudora Welty wrote this story, and why *The New Yorker* (in 1963), asked her to change the names and location in the story.

Extension Activities:

1. Provide the political cartoon to students for analysis.
2. Provide the following resources:
   - 1963 newspaper article from *The Jackson Daily News* entitled "Thousands attend Evers parade".
   - Exerpt from the book *I Rolled with Ross!* by Erle Johnston.

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Evers Biographical Sketch

Medgar Wiley Evers

Medgar Wiley Evers was born near Decatur, Newton County, Mississippi, on July 2, 1925. He was the son of James and Jessie Evers of Newton County. The couple had five other children: Charles, Elizabeth, Eva Lee, Gene, and Mary Ruth. Evers attended elementary school in Decatur and high school in nearby Newton. In 1943, he left the eleventh grade to enlist in a segregated port battalion of the United States Army, which was later deployed to England, France, and Belgium during World War II. Between 1946 and 1948, Evers completed his secondary education at a laboratory high school affiliated with Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, Lorman, Jefferson County, Mississippi. In 1948, Evers enrolled at Alcorn where he was active in campus activities and sports. He married classmate Myrlie Louise Beasley of Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi, on December 24, 1951. With financial assistance provided by a football scholarship and the GI bill, Evers graduated from Alcorn with a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1952.

Soon after graduation, Evers and his wife, Myrlie, moved to Mound Bayou, Bolivar County, Mississippi. There, he worked as an agent for the Magnolia Mutual Life Insurance Company. The couple's first child, Darrell Kenyatta Evers, was born on June 30, 1953, and their daughter, Reena Denise Evers, was born on September 13, 1954. While living in Mound Bayou, Evers organized branches of the NAACP in the Delta and began recruiting new members. He also helped to promote a boycott of gas stations refusing to provide restrooms for African-Americans traveling in the Delta.

Evers applied for admission to the law school of the University of Mississippi, Oxford, Lafayette County, in 1954, but his application was denied. However, his attempt to enroll attracted the attention of national NAACP officials, and in December 1954, Medgar Evers became Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP. After opening the NAACP field office in Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi, in January 1955, Evers began traveling across the state to encourage parents of African-American students to file petitions with local school boards. The petitions requested the enforcement of the landmark 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in *Oliver L. Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et al.*, which ordered public-school desegregation. Evers collected affidavits from victims of racially motivated incidents and monitored and reported on state and local activities of the White Citizens' Councils. He also investigated the lynching murders of African-Americans, including Emmett Till in 1955 and Mack Charles Parker in 1959.

Although previously unaffiliated with any religious denomination, Evers became a member of the New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson in 1956. He bought a new home on Guynes Street (now Margaret Walker Alexander Drive) in Jackson in 1957. Because the public schools in Jackson remained segregated, Darrell and Reena Evers began attending Christ the King Catholic School in the late 1950s. A second son, James Van Dyke Evers, was born in 1960.

Upon the invitation of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Evers attended the first meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1957. Evers was elected as secretary of the SCLC but was unable to serve because of conflict-of-interest issues with the NAACP. In 1961, Medgar Evers, Aaron Henry, and others established the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), which was responsible for coordinating the activities of various affiliated civil-rights organizations operating in Mississippi.

In 1958, in Meridian, Lauderdale County, Mississippi, Evers attempted the integration of a bus that was bound for Jackson. Initially removed from the front seat of the bus by police officers, Evers later re-boarded it, only to be assaulted by a white taxicab driver who had forced his way onto the bus. However, Evers managed to return to Jackson--at the front of the bus.

Evers was cited for contempt of court in 1960 for publicly denouncing as a mockery of justice the trial, conviction, and sentence of Clyde Kennard. During the late 1950s, Kennard had unsuccessfully sought admission to the segregated Mississippi Southern College (University of Southern Mississippi) in Hattiesburg, Forrest County.

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By the early 1960s, Evers was promoting acts of passive resistance by African-Americans to hasten the end of segregation in Mississippi. He staged "sit-ins" at public libraries and parks, on buses, and at lunch counters, especially in Jackson. During 1961, Evers assisted the Freedom Riders who planned to integrate buses traveling through Mississippi. He also organized the picketing of white-only businesses in Jackson. Evers endorsed other forms of passive resistance such as the community-wide boycotting of buses in Jackson. He even called for boycotting the Mississippi state fair, which had segregated days for African-Americans. Evers assisted James Meredith in his attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962.

Medgar Evers also sought to end public-school segregation through the courts. When the Jackson school board ignored integration petitions filed by Evers and several other complainants, the petitioners were included in a 1963 federal district court lawsuit to integrate public schools in Mississippi.

By May 1963, the NAACP was demanding that Jackson mayor Allen Thompson hire black workers, integrate public facilities, and remove white-only signs from public buildings. After Thompson rejected the demands of the NAACP, Evers filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission in order to receive equal airtime on a local television station. He called for a community-wide boycott of white-owned businesses in Jackson.

An unknown arsonist firebombed the Evers home in late May 1963, but no family members were injured. Evers and several hundred demonstrators continued the picketing of white-owned businesses in Jackson, although many were arrested by police officers for restraint-of-trade violations.

Early in the morning of June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was assassinated by white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith of Greenwood, Leflore County, Mississippi. More than four thousand people attended the Evers funeral service at the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street in Jackson on June 15, 1963. Over twenty-five thousand people viewed the remains of Evers prior to his burial with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on June 19, 1963. The murder of Evers, widely covered in the print media and on television, elicited a tremendous outpouring of sympathy, concern, and outrage that was expressed in the numerous cards, letters, and telegrams sent to Myrlie Evers from individuals throughout the world. The NAACP posthumously awarded Evers its highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, on July 4, 1963. It was accepted on his behalf by Myrlie Evers. Charles Evers succeeded his brother as Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP.

On June 23, 1963, Byron De La Beckwith was charged with the murder of Evers. The first murder trial of De La Beckwith began in January 1964, and it ended in a mistrial in February. The second murder trial of De La Beckwith began in April 1964, and it also ended in a mistrial later that month.

In 1990, a Hinds County grand jury indicted De La Beckwith for the 1963 murder of Evers. This was primarily due to the continuing efforts of Myrlie Evers-Williams to seek justice for the murder of Medgar Evers; the journalistic research of *Clarion-Ledger* staff writer Jerry Mitchell in the records of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission; the legal research of Hinds County assistant district attorney Bobby DeLaughter; and the willingness of Hinds County district attorney Ed Peters to re-prosecute the case. De La Beckwith was subsequently arrested at his home in Signal Mountain, Hamilton County, Tennessee, and he pleaded innocent at his arraignment in 1991. Despite objections from De La Beckwith's attorneys that he was denied a speedy trial, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled four to three that a trial could proceed in 1992. De La Beckwith was convicted of the murder of Medgar Evers in 1994, and the Mississippi Supreme Court affirmed the murder conviction in 1997. The United States Supreme Court refused to hear De La Beckwith's appeal in 1998. De La Beckwith died in prison in 2001.

Archives and Records Services, "Evers (Medgar Wiley and Myrlie Beasley) Papers," Mississippi Department of Archives and History, http://opac2.mdah.state.ms.us/phpmanuscripts/z2231.php?referer=http://zed.mdah.state.ms.us.

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NAME_____ **DATE**_____

Evers' Biographical Sketch Reading Comprehension Questions

Using the* Evers' Biographical Sketch *answer the following questions.

1. What are the most important facts to know about Medgar Evers' early life? Give three to four examples.

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2. Describe one way in which Medgar Evers challenged segregation laws and segregation culture in Mississippi.

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3. What is the legacy of Medgar Evers? _____

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“Where is the Voice Coming From?” *Backgound*

Eudora Welty is the author of numerous novels and essays, including the short story, “Where is the Voice Coming From?” Welty wrote the story out of anger the evening after Medgar Evers was assassinated. The short story was published a month later in *The New Yorker* on July 6, 1963. When the story was originally published, *The New Yorker* (working with Welty) replaced all references to Evers and Jackson, Mississippi, to mask the location and names of those involved. On the 50th anniversary of the murder of Evers, *The Clarion Ledger* published the original story with all names and locations included.

Access the short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?” in Welty short story collections such as *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) or the *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays & Memoir (Library of America, 102)* (The Library of America) available at your local library or booksellers.

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NAME_____ **DATE**_____

"Where is the Voice Coming From?" *Analytical Questions*

Using the short story* "Where is the Voice Coming From?" *answer the following questions.

1. What is the historical background to this story? _____

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2. Why do you think Eudora Welty uses such strong racially charged language in this story? _____

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3. How do the husband and wife interact in the story? How does this relate to a theme in the story? Cite and analyze specific spots in the text that supports your answer. _____

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4. List the main themes in the short story. _____

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5. Provide two to three examples of symbolism in the story. _____

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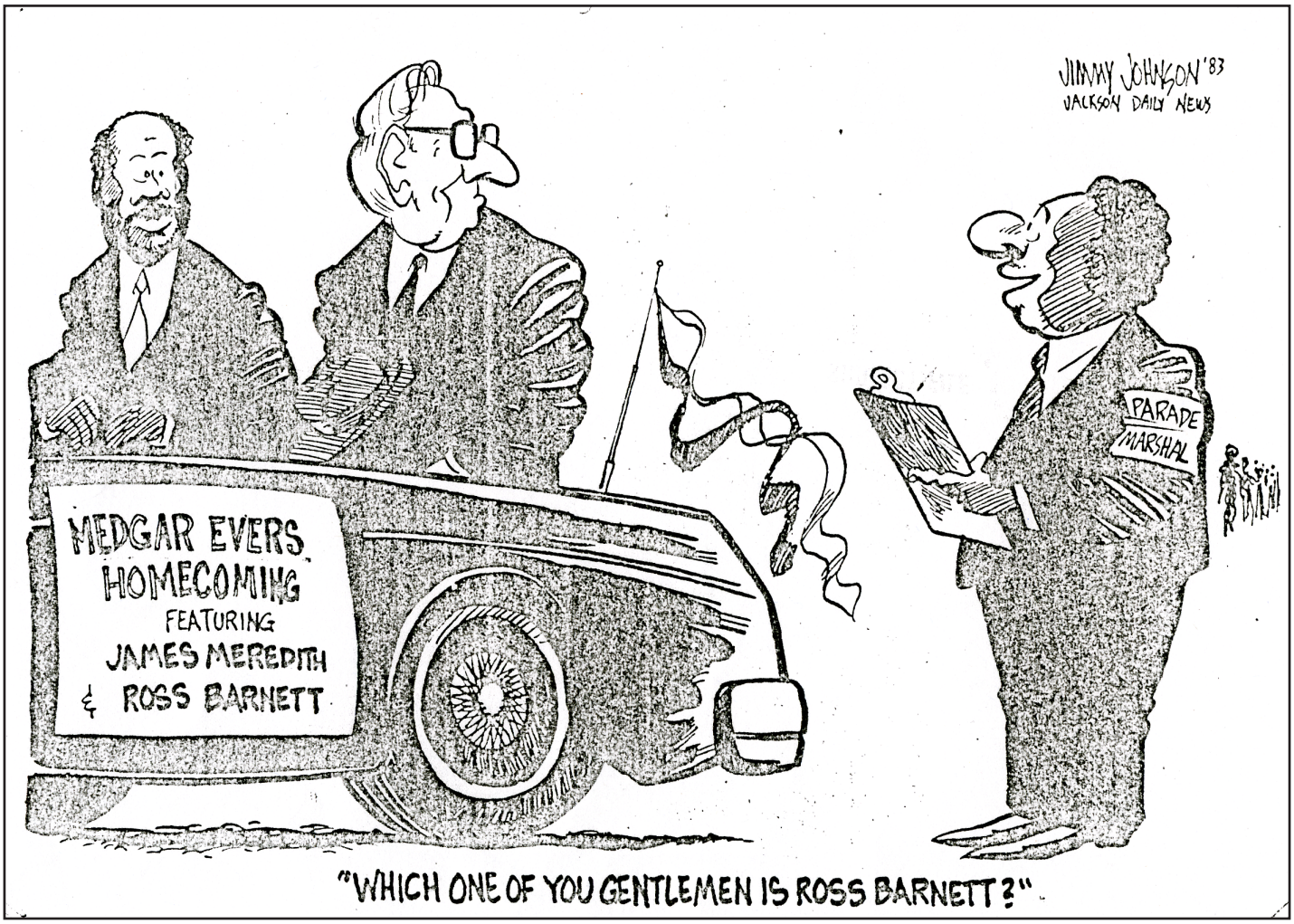

June 3, 1983. MDAH Archives and Records Services. Used with the permission of **Jackson Daily News.**

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Thousands attend Evers parade

By JOHN WEBB
JACKSON DAILY NEWS Staff Writer

With an intensity reminiscent of rallies 25 years ago, emotionally charged blacks met Sunday in a north Jackson church to reaffirm goals of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, later crowding the streets for a parade in his honor.

Thousands thronged the sidewalks of Delta and Northside drives, cheering the procession that included former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali, musician B. B. King, the Rev. Jesse Jackson on horseback and other prominent blacks in Jackson for the annual Medgar Evers Homecoming parade.

"It's a day in history," whispered a cool, almost distant Ali to the crowd surrounding him. "It makes you realize how much progress we've made."

Some of the Homecoming organizers said a symbol of progress might have been the fact that Ross Barnett, the segregationist governor who was in office when Evers was killed in 1963, participated in the parade.

But the 85-year-old Jackson attorney, who rode in a limousine supplied by a black funeral home, said his part in the ceremony meant no change in his own convictions. "Change? What change? There's been no change whatever," he said, adding that he'd been asked three times to join in the parade.

"(Participating in this parade) has nothing to do with my political views. Is it against the law to be in a parade? If they had asked me, I probably would have done this 20 years ago."

The parade consisted of politician-carrying convertibles, military drill teams, horseback riders and floats.

"I'm proud to be a part of this — it' a very significant occassion," said gubernatorial candidate Evelyn Gandy.

James Meredith, the man who integrated the all-white University of Mississippi in 1963, was out of town and unable to attend the parade.

Jackson Assistant Police Chief Ed Swinney said this was the largest Homecoming he'd seen and estimated a crowd upwards of 15,000.

"I think these kinds of events are good for bringing back memories," said Jackson State University student John Avery. "When people start forgetting (the roots of civil rights), we need something to unify us."

Evers, field secretary for the NAACP, was gunned down in front of his home in Jackson on June 12, 1963.

If Ross Barnett was an ironic twist to Sunday's ceremonies, a message from Alabama Gov. George Wallace was in keeping.

"This comes from our longtime 'friend' — and I put that in quotation marks — George Wallace," said a speaker at the memorial service at New Hope Baptist Church on Watkins Drive.

Wallace proclaimed June 3-5 as days for Alabama citizens to honor Evers — "a man who dedicated himself to doing good."

Gov. William Winter issued a proclamation setting aside June 12 as Medgar Evers Day in Mississippi.

But if you can register enough black votes and get blacks to vote for you "anybody can issue a proclamation," charged Bishop H. H. Brookins, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Los Angeles.

As the audience waved their hands and shouted in enthusiastic approval, Brookins' message was that Southern blacks must accept political responsibility and vote. "Shoot them at the ballot box," he said. "When I return to Jackson there *will* be a black mayor.

"There are 3 million unregistered black voters in the South," he said. Brookins cautioned they will "get what they deserve." Calling for a black president, he added "we have the potential to control our destiny."

Evers' widow Myrlie, director of consumer affairs for Atlantic-Richfield Co. in Claremont, Calif., mourned the "gradual peeling away of our gains (in civil rights)."

"I hear his voice," she said, visibly moving the crowd.

"We will reach our goal, but the job will still be ahead of us to guard those goals. We must never once stop in our pursuit of the goals that we set."

Staff photos by Greg Campbell

Myrlie Evers, the widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, wipes tears away during memorial services Sunday at New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson. The services were part of the annual weekend-long Medgar Evers Homecoming.

Charles Evers, brother of Medgar Evers, waves at the crowd during the Medgar Evers Celebrity Tribute Parade along Delta Drive in Jackson Sunday. Riding with Evers is Dr. Marvel Lang, chairman of the annual Medgar Evers Homecoming.

June 6, 1983. MDAH Archives and Records Services. Used with the permission of **Jackson Daily News.**

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I Rolled with Ross!

> Governor Barnett stood in the doorway as the Negro, James Meredith, approached him with a white Department of Justice Attorney, John Doar. The jeering crowd became quiet as Governor Barnett, studying the two men seriously, asked the question that rocked Mississippi with laughter: "Which of you gentlemen is Mister Meredith?" Meredith flashed a grin, but Doar showed no amusement. Vainly he tried to hand the governor an order from the Court of Appeals which restrained him and other state officials from intefering.
>
> Doar proposed they get on with the registration. Then Governor Barnett read a statement confirming his previous position, and he concluded firmly: "I do hereby, finally deny you admission to the University of Mississippi." And after a pause, he started a smile and added: "I do so politely!"

Erle Johnson, *I Rolled with Ross!* (Baton Rouge: Moran Publishing Corporation, 1980), 102.

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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 Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Through the Work of Medgar Evers***

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?

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

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

Directions and Notes	4	3	2	1
Curricular Connections	4	3	2	1
Student Worksheets	4	3	2	1
Interactive Activities	4	3	2	1
Historic Images	4	3	2	1
References and Resources	4	3	2	1

Activity One: Biography of Medgar Wiley Evers	4	3	2	1
Activity Two: Primary Source Packets	4	3	2	1
Activity Three: "Where is the Voice Coming From?"	4	3	2	1
Extension Activities	4	3	2	1
Overall Unit	4	3	2	1

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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