

Explanation of **DVDs**

Foundations of Infrastructure. Community, Contradictions and Local Leadership Training.

Miles of Smiles (excerpts) about the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids. These people provided an important communications link between North and South, and within the South. Think American Revolution Committees of Correspondence. The Porters carried black newspapers to the south, without which the southern blacks IN MISSISSIPPI would have known NOTHING about the plans of CORE, SCLC and SNCC. Yes, the local NAACP chapters existed in Mississippi but they depended on the porters for a great deal of information in order to coordinate with each other and with the northern strategists. **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored (excerpts). An autobiographical dramatization of segregated life in Mississippi. Many black residents fled to Chicago during the Great Migration (its height was between 1910 and 1940) but many remained. The movie illustrates what community meant. I have always insisted that the foundation of any social movement is community. I think we haven't had one on the scale of the Southern Freedom Movement in the last 50 years because global capitalism has managed to really destroy community. And ironically, the segregation of the south encouraged rural black middle and working class to form relationships that didn't exist after segregation was undermined. **COMMUNITY**

The Barbara Johns Story (excerpts). This documentary tells an important story about contradictions. In 1951, Johns, as a high school student, led a boycott to demand a NEW SCHOOL, not integration. She and the adult helping her needed help and appealed to the NAACP (New York). Since 1930, Charles Houston had implemented his plan to overturn Plessy v Ferguson. By 1951, they were looking for test cases and saw in the Johns story a good one. But Johns and her community did NOT want integration with the white school — they wanted a black school that was equal to the white one in terms of facilities. But they failed in their boycott and needed outside help. The price of that help was to abandon their goal and join the NAACP in their goal. **CONTRADICTIONS**

You Got to MOVE (excerpts) is a documentary about the Highlander Folk School. Myles Horton started this school in Tennessee in 1932. It trained the labor leaders of the thirties, the civil rights leaders of the 50s and the environmental activists in the 70s. It still exists but, I think, lost its way after Horton died. If you are interested in learning more, I highly recommend The Long Haul, an autobiography told to Judith and Herb Kohl. I have a copy I can give you. **LOCAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The Southern Freedom Movement

DVDs to illustrate an idiosyncratic version of this story

1954 -- Brown

The overturning of Plessy was important NOT because it forced schools to desegregate — it didn't ("with all deliberate speed"). It was important because it signaled to black activists in the south that the federal government was capable of coming down on their side. This is important because the entire strategy to break open the DEEP South (Alabama and Mississippi in particular) was to leverage the intervention of the federal government.

1955-6 — Montgomery (My favorite line from the movie - "you can't kill all of us")

BOYCOTT full length

BOYCOTT excerpts

It is not a coincidence that the Montgomery Bus Boycott started right after the Brown decision. The story highlights the PREPARATION that was made before King ever moved to Montgomery. Local leaders: JoAnn Robinson, E.D. Nixon, Ralph Abernathy et al. The Boycott was important for all of the following reasons.

- **Browder v. Gale** ended up at the Supreme Court which affirmed lower courts' ruling that bus segregation was unconstitutional.
- The boycott was of international interest so many Americans (who were in India (studying nonviolent philosophy and tactics under Gandhi) came back to the US and made a bee line to Montgomery. Bayard Rustin was key to the success of the Boycott and to King's learning how to integrate his christian theology with Gandhi's not so much christian Satyagraha. Thereby making King a natural national leader for the movement.
- **King created the SCLC** - an organization of pastors who supported nonviolent direct action. SCLC provided money and leadership development to the creation of SNCC - cue the next DVD.....

1960 — Sit-ins

WHEN WE WERE WARRIORS excerpts

HISTORY OF SNCC

The importance of research, theory, strategy and tactics

In 1960 there were sit-ins in over 50 cities and HCBUs. This was no coincidence. In 1960, sixteen African colonies became independent. The civil rights movement was not an American movement but an international one (see Bandung Conference, 1954).

The half hour documentary is one of four documentaries based on a book — A Force More Powerful, which has its own website. It tells the story of the Nashville Sit In. This was the most important of all the sit-ins because out of it emerged battle hardened college students who provided crucial leadership in the creation of SNCC and in the success of the Freedom Rides. Diane Nash, John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, James Bevel among the most important.

Key moments in the documentary:

- They seized the historical moment (Greensboro sit started before the Nashville students were ready, but they went ahead because it was the moment)
- They researched which issue would get the most buy-in by the local population. They learned the middle class black women were particularly upset by being allowed to shop at Woolworths, but not sit down and rest at the lunch counter.
- They were prepared — months of nonviolent direct action from James Lawson
- Lawson learned from Gahdhi
- King selected Nashville and sent Lawson there because of its strong local black leadership and liberal white press; three black colleges from which to recruit black activists
- They had a strategy, sit-ins led to a boycott, then to a silent march, then asking the Mayor whether he thought it was right to segregate on the basis of skin color.
- They had a theory: They anticipated the violence and knew that if they didn't engage in violence themselves, they would get the sympathy of a critical mass of white people (if not active support, unwittingly support the boycott because they were afraid of the violence too)
- When the mayor agrees that segregated lunch counters are not right, the activists don't rub their victory in the faces of the liberal whites. Instead, they quietly integrate the restaurants and then spend the next 10 years integrating all other public places.

King and Ella Baker invited the sit-in leaders to attend a conference at Shaw University (Baker's alma mater) to create a student organization — SNCC.

1961-63 Freedom Rides

FREEDOM RIDERS PBS

The sit-ins were successful in desegregating the upper south, but failed in the deep south. Mississippi and Alabama were so cut off from the rest of the country and the world that the state governments and local thugs could kill and lynch with impunity. In spite of being terrorized, local leaders managed to create a small but very important network of adult and youth organizations, the most important of which were the NAACP local chapters. That was the deep south's black connection to the rest of the country. But these local leaders couldn't get any traction with the local black population because the local population was terrorized.

National leaders debated what to do about this. **CORE** came up with the idea of the freedom rides because they had seen the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation be effective at desegregating the interstate busses in the upper south. CORE put out a call for volunteers. Two integrated buses would leave Washington DC and end up in New Orleans on the anniversary of the Brown decision.

The Supreme Court had just ruled in **Boyton v Virginia** that segregated restaurants at bus stations serving interstate buses was unconstitutional. So the strategy of the two Freedom Rides would be to go to Alabama and Mississippi and test whether the federal government would feel compelled to intervene when the interracial groups of riders walked into the bus stations cafe and the predictable violence erupted.

When the thugs fire-bombed one of the two buses outside of **Anniston**, the picture of that bombing became an international sensation. This embarrassed the Kennedy administration. How were they supposed to persuade the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa to join with the US against the USSR when pictures (worth a thousand words) showed that the US is hypocritical with all its democracy talk!

So.....Kennedy made a deal with Alabama and Mississippi governors to end the violence. The states could arrest the freedom riders if no violence was done to them.

But the freedom riders of the two buses had already flown to New Orleans. CORE was done with freedom rides. That is when Diane Nash and her SNCC comrades saw that giving up on the rides was such a demoralizing defeat of the strategy of nonviolent direct action that they had to figure out a way to keep the rides going. They couldn't count on provoking violence to get attention and support for their cause. What they could do is fill up the Mississippi jails so that it would become a serious economic burden that MS would cry uncle. CORE and SCLC and SNCC cooperated in recruiting white and black activists to

Over 300 freedom riders from all over the nation ended up in Parchment prison - Mississippi's notorious state prison. The state thought that making their prison stay miserable would discourage the activists from ever returning to the state. Instead, these activists were able to get to know each other, learn from each other — they became radicalized and doubled down on their commitment when they actually saw how bad the situation was in Mississippi. When released, they went back home committed to go back.

1964 - Freedom Summer

FREEDOM SONG

MISSISSIPPI excerpts from Eyes on Prize

FREEDOM ON MY MIND

Freedom Song is historical fiction set in Mississippi in 1962-63

Freedom on my Mind is a documentary about Freedom Summer, 1964

Ella Baker told Bob Moses to go to Mississippi and meet with local leaders there to see what they thought. Moses reported back to Baker that local leaders were firm in their belief that nonviolent direct action in terms of sit-ins, marches, picket lines, boycotts. What they wanted was to vote. This set off a huge debate at the next SNCC national meeting — should they start a voting campaign in MS or stick to the previously successful direct action. Baker settled the debate by explaining clearly to the students that voting IN MISSISSIPPI was direct action.

So, Moses and a few other SNCC volunteers went to Mississippi to help the local leaders register people to vote. Their efforts did not get much traction. The state had created too many obstacles to voting and so much arbitrary enforcement accompanied by real threats of violence that not enough blacks registered to make any difference.

Back to the drawing board. Research revealed that anyone could create a political party in the state. This gave the activists the idea of creating an alternative party to the all-white Democratic Party that monopolized the Mississippi government. But how to do that? The plan for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was to train white volunteers (cue the veteran freedom riders) to be prepared to come to Mississippi and join the local activists who were creating the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. They would follow all the legal steps and processes of a real state party and make it an interracial party. At the end of the summer, they would send delegates from the MFDP to Atlantic City where the national Democratic Party would nominate its candidate for President and Vice President. They would demand, on a national stage, to be seated as the lawful MS representatives, instead of the all white supremacists of the MS Democratic Party

This was a heavy lift as it would involve teaching black residents who had never participated in a democratic process why and how to get involved. CORE community centers and SNCC Freedom Schools proved to be up to the task. The Freedom School Curriculum was written to make academic learning integral to citizenship education. And like all good curriculum, the teachers were instructed to NOT follow it but to use it as a guide.

Songs, Theater, Community Centers, and Freedom Schools were all key parts of the Summer Project, all supporting the political canvassing that the youth and adults participated in all summer. It was transformational. Even though the MFDP delegates failed to get seated in Atlantic City in the fall, the cultural, psychological and intellectual effects that Freedom Summer had on the people of Mississippi changed the state and the nation.

Selma — 1965

led to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and to the creation of the Lowndes County Freedom Democratic Party in Alabama

(fun fact: the symbol of this party was the black panther. Stokely Carmichael was instrumental in Freedom Summer and the creation of LCFDP. He journeyed to the Bay Area in 1966 and gave a speech about LCFDP et al. Huey Newton was in the audience and was inspired by the LCFDP's logo.)

YET.....people continued the fight against poverty and systemic racism. The veterans of the Southern Freedom Movement went back home — to all parts of the country and put what they learned in Mississippi into organizing where they were.

WALKOUT excerpts about the Chicano movement

SCARRED JUSTICE excerpts about the murder of students protesting in Orangeburg, South Carolina

FBI'S WAR ON BLACK AMERICA The Black Panthers

THE WIRE excerpts from the fourth season that has an education theme illustrating how authentic education is consistently thwarted by the imposition of a standardized curriculum within a system that is designed to sort and not educate.

So many campaigns and movements came out of the Southern Freedom Movement — either the activists were inspired by SFM or learned important skills by participating in it.

For example:

- Free Speech Movement
- American Indian Movement
- Gay Rights Movement

One of the most important effects of all this movement building was the transformation of the college curriculum. The 1968 Strike at SF State University resulted in the creation of the first and only Ethnic Studies **Department** in the US. Black and women's studies proliferated within various departments.

There has always been resistance throughout world history. There are moments, however, where the resistance turns into a movement and effects fundamental change in the system. But movements rely a great deal on the right historical context. The Freedom Movement emerged in the mid 1950s and suffered a crushing reversal in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan. The movement could not emerge until McCarthyism was discredited. It rode the international wave of independence and human rights movements and crashed into the brick wall of white liberalism (not wanting to give up its economic status and privileges). It takes another historical moment for us to catch (the wave?) for the economic problem to be addressed. Are we ready? Can we get ready to be ready? or shall we let that wave pass us by?

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