

Wilson College Leap Summer Bridge Program
Social Justice Research Assignment
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Using the personal letters and other material from the Freedom Summer archival collection of Pat Vail, Wilson College class of 1963, explain what was happening to Pat during the spring and summer of 1964, how her story connected to the history of Freedom Summer, and how this is related to the broader theme assigned to your group. Make use of the primary sources in Pat's collection as well as secondary sources and current information.

Conducting Research:

- View the Freedom Summer documentary and read the Pat Vail Wilson Magazine article *The Making of a Civil Rights Activist* for background
- Carefully read the letter and supporting documents assigned to your group, taking notes about how Pat's experience relates to what you learned in the documentary
- Develop a thesis statement and begin to find supporting evidence
- Research secondary sources to find more information about the history of the event and connect how the primary documents from Pat's collection are relevant
- Research secondary and primary sources to find more information about the broad theme assigned to your group

Prepare an Oral Presentation (using Google slides or other presentation software) that addresses the following:

- A summary of the Pat Vail letter and supporting document(s) assigned to your group
 - How Pat's experience relates to the bigger story of Freedom Summer
 - Discuss your broader theme and how it is or is not still relevant given the experience of civil rights workers and minority groups 50 years ago
 - Explain what you would want to know more about if you did further research – what questions do you have?
 - Include an annotated bibliography
 - Include direct quotes and/or audio/video clips in your presentation
- Meet with your personal librarian for guidance on secondary sources

- Arrange a 20 minute mini-conference with Amy Ensley at the Hankey Center to preview your outline
- Reserve a study room in the library to run through your group presentation at least twice before the due date

American Experience: Freedom Summer documentary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRcF8VkiCo8>

June 25, 1964 broadcast of a special CBS News report, anchored by Walter Cronkite
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkPWof07xRA>

Note to Educators:

This assignment was created for a First Year Seminar course for incoming freshmen students in a Summer Bridge Program called “Leap”. This program was funded by a Title III federal grant to Wilson College in 2017 – 2019. The students were on campus for only two weeks and the classroom work consisted of two hours per day of math and language arts skills plus two hours per day devoted to this research assignment. Given the extremely compressed time frame, the assignment was designed to provide a fast introduction to the topic of social justice and it assigned students to groups with pre-determined topics and primary source materials. A longer time frame would have allowed students to spend more time exploring topics and ideas on their own.

The first year of the Leap program was 2017, several years after the murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner and the founding of #BlackLivesMatter. Donald Trump had been in office for less than one year. The general topics were all issues that had been in the news during the previous five years including: Police Brutality, Income Inequality, Terrorism (International and Domestic), Voter Suppression, Abuse of Power, White Supremacy, and Taking a Stand – the Role of Citizen Activists.

Outline of course sequence:

First class meeting: Students were asked to write down everything they knew about Civil Rights.

Students watched the PBS Documentary Freedom Summer with the instructor stopping the film at specific time-stamped spots to provide background information and to emphasize moments that would be relevant to Pat Vail’s experience.

The students were then randomly assigned to seven groups and given the materials for their group including:

The Wilson Magazine article about Pat Vail’s experience during Freedom Summer

Each group is given one letter written by Pat along with one or two supporting documents from her archival collection that together, illustrates one of the broader themes.

The letters are arranged in chronological order so that when the student groups present their research, the story of the summer unfolds in order.

Group 1

Materials:

Pat's March 14 letter

"The Upbeat Generation" from the Plain Dealer

Students for a Democratic Society pamphlet

Broader Theme: Income Inequality

- How does income inequality and poverty issues galvanize young people into becoming activists for social justice causes

Group 2

Materials:

Pat's May 28 letter

Memo to Parents of All Mississippi Summer Volunteers

Broader Theme: Police Brutality

- Police Brutality - Police brutality and Black Lives Matter; use of cell phone video today to capture evidence; use of riot gear, militarization of police equipment

Group 3

Materials:

Pat's June 22 letter,

"Some Civil Rights Workers Scared but Won't Quit" from the Dayton Daily News,

letter from Senator Joseph S. Clarke

Broader Theme: Terrorism

- Terrorist KKK bombings of homes, businesses and churches vs. "Radical Islamic Terrorism". Lynchings vs. Beheadings.

Group 4

Materials:

Pat's June 26 letter

letters from Senator Hugh Scott, Congressman Jim Fulton, the White House Associate Counsel Lee C. White

June 25, 1964 broadcast of a special CBS News report, anchored by Walter Cronkite

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkPWof07xRA>

Broader Theme: Abuse of Power

- When people in positions of authority are the ones causing the oppression – police and elected officials

Group 5

Materials:

Pat's July 2 letter

two articles from the Delta Democrat-Times "White Association Disclaims Violence" and "New Racist Organization Terrorizes Several South MS Counties"

Judy Walborn letter to the Billboard

Broader Theme:

- White Supremacy - White Supremacist groups such as Americans for the Preservation of the White Race and the White Citizens Council, Ku Klux Klan vs. the newly named "Alt-Right" and fringe groups

Group 6

Materials:

Pat's July 10 letter

"Students will Seek to Register 200,000 Mississippi Negroes" Plain Dealer article

Broader Theme:

- Voter Suppression - Voter ID laws today vs. voter restrictions and suppression in MS in 1950s and 60s

Group 7

Materials:

Pat's August 6 letter

"Tired of Being Sick and Tired" from The Nation article

Broader Theme:

- Taking a Stand - Role of ordinary citizens and celebrities in bringing attention to causes – for example comedian Dick Gregory, musicians Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, Joan Baez, athletes Colin Kaepernick

Brief Notes on the primary source documents and time-stamps of PBS Documentary

Notes - Pat Vail's Letters to Family

March 14, 1964 –

Expresses feelings about wanting to help improve race relations

May 28, 1964 –

Attending meetings in Boston. Speakers warn of potential of beatings and jail. "The only thing keeping us safe is publicity. The Mississippi police will have to tread more lightly"

June 10, 1964 -

Refers to the meeting scheduled between SNCC leaders and LBJ at the White House to discuss sending Federal Marshalls for the summer who are authorized to arrest local police on brutality charges. Pat compares local police to Nazis and the Red Army. "It's really scary!" Sews care packets into her skirts in case she's arrested.

June 22, 1964 –

In Oxford, Ohio at the training program for non-violent protest. Civil Rights workers had disappeared the night before. Note Pat's mistake in thinking all three were white. Pat points out that the FBI and Justice Dept are refusing to investigate. Nothing in the way of protection between us and the ruthlessness and whimsy of the Mississippi officials. Notes that LBJ ended up refusing to meet with SNCC using the excuse that he was too busy with the war in South East Asia. "They look the other way. We are not safe."

June 26, 1964 –

Pat asks family "Did you watch the Cronkite Special where the three boys died?" (available on YouTube) Notice the reference that the boys were dead. No one knows this for sure yet. The bodies weren't found until August 11.

July 2, 1964 –

Pat's experience living in the black community. Talks about her learning ways to stay safe. The Civil Rights Act was signed by LJB that day.

July 10, 1964 –

Registering voters. Talks about illiteracy, even among the young. Talks about how there is no compulsory education since the Brown decision (good research opportunity).

August 6, 1964 –

Talks about how exhilarating it is to know you will be part of history. Quotes JFK.

Notes - Letters from Government Officials

July 6, 1964 –

Hugh Scott, United States Senator from PA

July 17, 1964 –

Joseph S. Clark, United States Senator from PA

Refers to “armed white extremists” and efforts to get federal marshals to protect the students

July 17, 1964 –

James Fulton, United States Congressman from 27th District, forwards Vails letter to the White House but offers no specific help

July 29, 1964 –

Burke Marshall, Assistant Attorney General of the United States, Civil Rights Division

August 10, 1964 –

Lee C. White, Associate Counsel to the President of the United States

Mentions J. Edgar Hoover was sent to open a new office in Jackson.

August 3, 1964 –

James Fulton, US Congressman. Follow-up letter says glad he could help – but how much help did he actually provide?

Notes – Related Articles

Summer 1964 – Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Bombings of homes and churches in the South

May 10, 1964 - Delta Democrat Times

White Association Disclaims Violence Charges as Negroes Point to Five Deaths
Describes the organization Americans for the Preservation of the White Race. Group claims the White Citizens Council is great for state and national work, but this is more of a grass roots local organization. [Compare to Alt-Right groups of today]

June 1, 1964 – The Nation

“Tired of Bing Sick and Tired” feature on Fannie Lou Hamer

June 20, 1964 – The Plain Dealer

Students will seek to register 200,000 Mississippi Negroes.

June 25, 1964 – Dayton Daily News

Civil Rights volunteers scared but won't quit. Photo and quote from Pat.

Judy Walborn letter to the editor of the Billboard Wilson College student newspaper

Describes Judy's experience participating in Sit-ins

Documentary: An American Experience: Freedom Summer Time Stamps

05:00

“You could be killed”

13:00

Mississippi is so far behind the rest of the country. Old plantation country.

14:50

The White Citizens Council – group that fought to keep segregation by harassment and threats.

16:40

Bob Moses and SNCC (pronounced “snick”), the Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. An organization trying to improve the rights of black citizens

Eleanor Holmes Norton (civil rights and women’s rights activist, currently Congresswoman from Washington, DC), talks about the young activists being perceived as foolish and naïve

23:00

Black citizens had to pass a test to be allowed to register to vote. The white clerk decided on the test (which was always ridiculously difficult). White citizens were not required to take a test to register to vote. This is voter suppression.

27:00

The situation in Greenwood, Mississippi.

29:20

Dick Gregory (a famous black comedian at the time) brought food to the region and lots of news coverage

32:00*

The northern, white college students would bring publicity and their parents and colleges would care about what was happening to them – nobody cared about black activists. The families of the white students would presumably have the means to keep them safe. Blacks were not safe.

The white volunteers had three goals:

- Register black voters
- Create Freedom Schools to teach black children about black history and their rights
- Help create the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party because the regular Democratic Party was all white

34:30

The local police departments were militarized (riot control cars, machine guns). Laws were passed that made protesting illegal

36:00

Mississippi will be a tinder box and the volunteers are naïve kids

37:00*

Volunteer orientation in Oxford, Ohio

40:00

The trainers are scaring the volunteers

47:20

Volunteers are told to have their parents contact their congressmen to ask for Federal protection for the volunteers

They are told they could be killed this summer

50:00

Volunteers head to Mississippi on buses. When they arrive in Memphis, Tennessee, they realize the Mississippi Highway Patrol was aware of their presence

53:00

Volunteers were spread all over the state. They lived with black families which enraged the white community

55:00*

Black citizens were not allowed to use the public library. They were not allowed to be educated, but passing a test on the details of the US and state constitution was required to be able to vote.

Freedom schools taught black history, culture, books by black authors. Adults came to the Freedom schools, too.

1:00:30

The former governor of Mississippi is interviewed and refers to the volunteers as "outsiders" stirring up trouble

1:03:00

There are bombings of churches and houses. The same kind of terrorism that is happening today, but it was from Christians rather than Muslims.

1:07:00*

Volunteers wrote home about their fear, expecting a bullet, 65 buildings bombed or burned down, 35 churches, at least 100 people beaten

1:09:20

Discusses the fact that white women were living in the homes of black people and how outrageous that was

1:10:00

There was nobody to help you. The police and White Citizens Council were the Klan

1:15:00

Mississippi officials tried to insist that the disappearance of the three civil rights workers was just a publicity stunt or a hoax.

1:19:00

Famous folk singer Pete Seeger was performing when the bodies of the civil rights workers were found. He made the announcement

1:23:00

Dave Dennis gave James Chaney's eulogy. It was a turning point.

1:28:00

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Pat talks about this in her letter.