

FREEDOM RIDE 2001: Sites and Sounds of The Freedom Struggle
Syllabus Summer 2001
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Craig Werner, Afro-American Studies, cwemer@facstaff.wisc.edu, 608-263-2335
Steve Kantrowitz, History, skantrow@facstaff.wisc.edu, 608-263-1844
Tim Tyson, Afro-American Studies, tbtyson@facstaff.wisc.edu, 608-263-5096
Patrick Jones, History, pdjones@students.wisc.edu, 608-263-1868

Overview

Forty years ago this spring, an interracial group of young people piled onto buses and rode south, confronting America's racial caste system and playing a decisive role in the movements that toppled that system. This course marks their heroism but, more importantly, their realistic analysis of the political possibilities of their world. It also seeks to place their efforts into a historical context that helps us to look toward our own prospects. As we head South into the past and the future for 12 days, we will seek to connect history, culture, politics to our own best understandings of community.

The crucial historical context for our discussions includes slavery, freedom and the unfolding possibilities of democracy in the United States. It also surveys the South--a region of the heart, the mind, and America--where democracy has been envisioned, embattled, won and lost with enormous consequences for humanity. We will trace these struggles from the wake of the American Revolution through the freedom movements of the twentieth century to the aftermath of what has been called "the Reagan Revolution." Topics will include slavery, Reconstruction, disfranchisement, and the making of a one-party South at the turn of the twentieth century; the impact of World War II and the Cold War on racial politics in the region; postwar freedom movements and the transformation of Southern and U.S. politics as the country responded to these revolutionary changes.

At the core of "Freedom Ride 2001" lies the revolutionary power of African American culture. History shapes cultures, and cultures in turn make history. We will trace that dialectic, seeking to deepen our understanding of the way that African American self-assertion has confronted white supremacy. Black music has always provided a lively and reliable guide to a range of historical experiences. Topics will include the role of music in black freedom movements; the blues, gospel and jazz impulses in both cultural and historical perspectives; and the impact of African American and Southern cultural expression on democratic possibility in the United States.

Texts

Required texts are at Rainbow Books, 426 Gilman, just off State Street next to Amy's Cafe. These are: Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: the Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*; Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Inside the New Orleans Slave Market*; and Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*. There will also be a course reader, which can be purchased at 1650 Humanities. Students will also need a sturdy notebook for keeping a journal during the trip. While the optional texts are just that, students who have not done so may wish to reader Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come*; Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*; and Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*.

Assignments and Grading

We expect the highest levels of performance from every single student in this course. Grading will be based upon three roughly equal factors. First, each student will keep a journal in which they are expected to write an opening statement; eight to ten substantive entries during the trip; and a concluding assessment of their experience. The content of these writings will vary enormously, but we expect students to attempt to connect the readings to their experiences in an analytical fashion, although it is also fine to include personal observations of any kind and to take notes on films, lectures, and other experiences. The faculty will read and evaluate these journals at the end of the course. Second, students will use their journals, the readings, lectures, films, and other activities to produce an essay of 6-8 pages (1500-2000 words) that analyzes their experience on the trip and connects it to the historical and cultural context. This essay is due on Monday, June 18, by five o'clock; that is, five days after we get back from the South. Third, we will take into consideration the level of engagement and contribution to the life and work of our learning community that each student has displayed during the journey.

Course Schedule

May 29 (Tues): 9:30-12:30, team-building, logistics, faculty introductions. 1:30, Tyson, "The Freedom Rides Forty Years On." 2:30-5:30, Study Hall: Start *Light of Freedom*.

May 30: (Wed): 9:30-10:30, team-building and logistics. 11:00, Kantrowitz, "Politics of Race, 1800-1898." 1:30, Tyson on "Origins of the Freedom Struggle." Break. 2:30, Film: "Eyes on the Prize, 'Awakenings.'" 4:00-5:30, Study Hall: *Light of Freedom*.

May 31: (Thur): 9:30-10:30, team-building and logistics; 11:00, Werner, "Calls and Responses: Music and the Movement." 1:30, Film: "Good Rockin 'Tonight.'" Break. 3:00-5:30, Study Hall: Tyson, "The Civil Rights Movement." Start *Soul by Soul*.

June 1: (Fri): 7:00, GET ON THE BUS. Film: "Freedom on My Mind." (2 hours) Learn songs. Tyson, "World War II and the Idea of Race." Film, "Eyes on the Prize, 'Birmingham'". Craig, DJ "Gospel Warriors on the Freedom Highway." Assignment: Robin D.G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem."

June 2: (Sat) Morning in Nashville. Isaac Freeman, 10-12. Afternoon bus to Birmingham. Werner, "The Soul of Country and R&B". Assignment: "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

June 3: (Sun) Birmingham. Civil Rights Institute. Glenn Eskew. Body of Christ Deliverance Ministry, dinner and evening program.

June 4: (Mon) To Selma. Discussion of Birmingham. "Eyes on the Prize, 'Selma.'" National Voting Rights Museum. Film: "Four Little Girls."

June 5: (Tues): To Hattiesburg. "Eyes on the Prize, 'Mississippi--Is this America?'" Kantrowitz, "The Lower Mississippi Valley from Slavery to Freedom." Assignment, finish *Soul by Soul*. Read Welty, "Where is the Voice Coming From?" Read Jordan Anderson letter.

June 6: (Wed): To New Orleans. Kantrowitz, "Lost Causes, 1865-1965." Werner, "Fire on the Bayou: The Sound of New Orleans." Assignment: start *Sweet Soul Music*. Read Junius

Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road: The Ideology and Influence of Louisiana's German Coast Slave Rebellion of 1811."

June 7: (Thur): New Orleans. To Jackson. Read *Deep Blues*, 95-131. Werner, "Hellhound on My Trail: The Blues Impulse." Continue with *Sweet Soul Music*.

June 8: (Fri): To Clarksdale. Film: "Settin' the Woods On Fire." To Oxford. Film, "Mississippi Blues."

June 9: (Sat): Oxford. Werner, "The Dark End of the Street: Memphis, Music, and 'Miscegenation.'" Assignment: finish *Sweet Soul Music*. Book signing at Square Books.

June 10: (Sun): To Memphis. Film: "The Gospel According to Al Green." Church with Rev. Al Green. Stax Records and/or National Civil Rights Museum. Assignment: *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, pp 139-157.

June 11: (Mon): To Highlander. Tyson, "Ella Baker." Discussion. Film: "You Got to Move." Songs. Nap. Highlander evening program.

June 12 (Tues): Highlander, then home. Werner DJ session on blues, gospel, and jazz impulses. Jones, "The Movement in Milwaukee." Discussion. Songs.

June 15 (Fri): Class picnic and concluding discussion, 12:00-4:00, Picnic Point.