

Breach of Peace:

Portraits of the 1961 Freedom Riders



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM *of* ART

Guide for Educators

WWW.MSMUSEUMART.ORG

Made possible with the
generous support of:



About BREACH of PEACE

In May, 1961, more than 300 people were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, and made civil-rights history for the courage they demonstrated as “Freedom Riders.” The Riders, who were originally sponsored by CORE (the Congress on Racial Equality) to make the journey south from Washington, D.C., came from all over the country in order to enforce the recent Supreme Court decision which ruled that segregation of interstate transport and facilities was unconstitutional. The Freedom Rides of 1961 not only resulted in the federal desegregation of the public transportation system, but were also significant for the people of Mississippi: the Rides heightened public awareness about inequality in Mississippi, and, during their time in prison, the Freedom Riders shared with one another the history of civil disobedience and tactics on how to effectively and peacefully change the system. Upon their release from Parchman Prison, the Riders went on to lead desegregation efforts across the state in places such as Jackson, McComb, and Greenwood.

After seeing the official mug shots of the Riders from negatives obtained by the opening of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission files in the 1990s, nationally-recognized photographer and journalist Eric Etheridge began his quest to meet the Freedom Riders, discuss their stories during and after the Freedom Rides, and to photograph them again, as dignified subjects of beautiful black and white portraits. These portraits, juxtaposed with the original mug shots and quotations from the Riders, were published in a compelling book, *Breach of Peace*, in 2008. 2011 marks the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Rides, and in honor of the brave individuals who risked their lives in order to change the course of history, the Mississippi Museum of Art has installed a 54' long installation of contemporary portraits taken by Etheridge along with prints of the original 329 mug shots from the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission files.

About the GUIDE for EDUCATORS

The Mississippi Museum of Art hopes its Guide for Educators will trigger meaningful dialogue by focusing on portraiture as a lens through which to understand the Freedom Rides in the larger context of the civil rights movement, and through which to understand the importance of the individuals—not the stereotypes associated with the entire group—who bravely confronted injustice and changed the course of history. We hope time spent looking at visual clues in the portraits will challenge students to think critically about issues of identity, social justice, and civic participation.

This guide is intended for use in conjunction with a visit to the Museum. However, if that is not a possibility, it is nonetheless a useful guide for learning in and through the arts in any classroom.

In this guide, you will find an essay by artist Eric Etheridge, biographical sketches of 5 Freedom Riders, images of both their mug shot and their contemporary portrait, and suggestions for ways to thoughtfully use these images in the classroom. In addition, the [Mississippi Department of Archives and History](#) has developed an excellent resource for educators that is a wonderful complement to our Guide for Educators.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS at the MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART

The Mississippi Museum of Art believes that visual art can launch extraordinary thinking among learners of all ages. In a world inundated with visual stimuli, the Museum believes that an essential component of a child's education is to learn to process this imagery in a thoughtful and critical way. The Museum's school programs, which encompass programs at the Museum, in the classroom, and in the greater Mississippi community, seek to encourage rich encounters in the visual arts through active participation, critical thinking, and cross-curricular connections.

ABOUT THE FREEDOM RIDES

Narrative by Eric Etheridge

Reprinted with permission from the [Mississippi Freedom 50th Anniversary Committee](#).¹

In early 1961, the leaders of the Civil Rights movement were pondering the question, “WHAT NEXT?” 1960 had been a break-out year, the year of the sit-ins. On February 1, four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, had walked into a Woolworth’s, sat down at a lunch counter, and sparked a campaign that spread like wildfire and successfully desegregated many businesses in cities and towns across the South.

Now civil rights leaders were looking for ways to build on that success. *How do we continue to up the ante? How do we put even more pressure on the system?* The Freedom Ride was James Farmer’s answer. Farmer, the newly installed head of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, knew that in late 1960 the Supreme Court of the United States had ruled that segregation in bus and train stations and airports was illegal. Farmer also knew Southern stations were still segregated and that the federal government was making no effort to enforce the law. So, he and his colleagues envisioned a demonstration ride through the South by a small group of people, integrating stations along the way as they went, trying to draw some attention to the situation.

On May 4, 1961, thirteen riders—men and women, blacks and whites—left Washington, D.C. on two buses. Their final destination was New Orleans on May 17, the seventh anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education. The Riders made their way through the upper South without much incident. But when they entered Alabama on Mother’s Day—Sunday, May 14—all hell broke loose.

A bus arriving in Anniston was set upon by the mob, its tires slashed. It was forced off the road, at which point a firebomb was thrown into bus and its door blocked, preventing the Riders from getting out. They almost burned to death before finally managing to escape. Later the same day, when the second group of Riders got off the bus at the Birmingham station, they were attacked by a mob and viciously beaten for several minutes before the police showed up. When asked why the police had been absent, Chief “Bull” Connor said he had given them the day off to spend with their mothers.

These two attacks would have ended the Freedom Rides if not for reinforcements from the Nashville Student Movement. They quickly made their way to Birmingham. After a few days, the reconstituted Riders were traveling to their next scheduled stop, Montgomery. Once again, the police were nowhere to be found when the Riders arrived at the station, and they were left alone to face the mob. John Lewis was hit in the head with a wooden Coca-Cola crate. Reporters were attacked, and a lawyer from the U.S. Department of Justice was hit in the head with a pipe and knocked unconscious while trying to rescue several Riders.

At this point, calls to suspend or end the Freedom Rides were issued from pretty much every corner of the Establishment. On the NBC Nightly News, David Brinkley said the Riders “are accomplishing nothing whatsoever and, on the contrary, are doing positive harm.” Former President Harry Truman said the Riders were “meddlesome intruders who should stay at home and attend to their business.” “The Freedom Riders have made their point,”

¹ Etheridge 2010

editorialized *The New York Times*. “Now is the time for restraint, relaxation of tension, and a cessation of their courageous, legal, peaceful, but nonetheless provocative action in the South.”

The Kennedy Administration, less than five months old and preparing for a summit with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, was desperate to get the photographs of beaten and bloody Riders off the front pages of newspapers around the world. The President’s brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, asked the Riders to consider a “cooling off period.” “We’ve been cooling off for three hundred and fifty years,” answered James Farmer. “If we cool off any more, we will be in a deep freeze.” Realizing he would have to accomplish his aim via another avenue, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy turned to U.S. Senator James O. Eastland, who pledged no harm would come to the Riders in Mississippi. He also made clear that his promise did not exclude mass arrests.

On May 24, undeterred by numerous calls to stand down and unaware of the backroom deal that had been cut, 27 Riders left Montgomery in two buses for the trip to Jackson. Many of them thought they might die there or along the way. “We did not believe we would make it to Jackson,” recalls Dave Dennis. “We were prepared, mentally, to expect the worst. We weren’t ready to give our lives but were not afraid to die.”

On arrival they found not an angry mob but a station full of police, who quickly arrested the Riders and carted them off to jail on charges of breach of peace, a law that many Southern cities liked to use on such occasions. For the Kennedy Administration and Mississippi officials, it must have seemed like the problem of the Freedom Riders had finally been solved. “I feel wonderful,” said Governor Ross Barnett. “I’m so happy everything went off so smoothly.”

The Riders, however, recognized the arrests for what they were—a strategic mistake. They adeptly abandoned their original destination of New Orleans and instead adopted the tactic of “Jail—no bail.” They refused to pay their fines or bail out and instead invited new Riders to come to Jackson. This was the Gandhian tactic of using the system against itself and forcing the nation and federal government to confront and address segregation.

People from around the country instantly responded, and an ad hoc Freedom Rider organization quickly sprung up to send Riders into Jackson via three primary staging cities—New Orleans, Nashville, and Montgomery. In the 113 days between May 24 and September 13, 328 people—blacks and whites, men and women, and a few teenage boys and girls—came from all parts of the country to Mississippi.

Within three weeks of the first arrests, the Riders had filled Jackson’s city and county jails to overflowing. They thereby earned themselves a six-week stay in maximum-security cells at Parchman Penitentiary, the state’s infamous Delta prison farm, about three hours north.

After Parchman, however, came success. In September, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued new regulations mandating an end to segregation in bus and train stations. The Freedom Riders won.

But the Rides were also successful in two other important ways. They helped jump-start the movement in Mississippi, which had seen only one sit-in action in all of 1960. Forty-three Mississippians participated in the Rides. For many it was their first exposure to the Rides, but it would not be their last.

The Riders came out of Parchman educated in the history and strategies of the movement and would go on to lead campaigns in Jackson, McComb, Greenwood, and elsewhere. The Rides also demonstrated to the movement itself that “nonviolent direct action” and “jail—no bail” offered a successful way forward. These tactics would be used

again and again in campaigns over the next few years and lead the civil rights movement to its signal victories—the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Additional Resources

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE FREEDOM RIDES AND LARGER CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

[The Mississippi Department of Archives and History Freedom Rides Teacher Guide](#)

A well-researched teacher guide with comprehensive primary source information and curriculum suggestions for grades 4-12.

[PBS Resource: *Eyes on the Prize*](#)

Another great source for background and contextual information about the Freedom Rides.

INFORMATION ON THE MISSISSIPPI STATE SOVEREIGNTY COMMISSION

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was created by the Mississippi State Legislature in 1956. Its mission was to protect the sovereignty of Mississippi and neighboring states from the encroachment of the federal government. The Sovereignty Commission maintained extensive files on suspicious individuals who might be a threat to states' rights, including the Freedom Riders. Upon the dissolution of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission in 1973, these files were sealed until the 1990s, when they were finally made available to the public.

[The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Archives](#)

[The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: An Agency History](#)

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES: CHOOSING TO PARTICIPATE PROJECT

A wonderful resource for encouraging students to consider their personal responsibility as a citizen of the United States. “Democracy is a work in progress. It is shaped by the choices ordinary people make about themselves and others. Although those choices may not seem important at the time, little by little, they define an individual, create a community, and ultimately forge a nation...”

[Facing History and Ourselves *Choosing to Participate* Project](#)

FREEDOM RIDERS

A documentary telling the story of the Freedom Riders will be released by PBS in May 2011. Watch excerpts from the movie:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/watch>

LOOKING AT ART

The following is meant to assist educators with helping students respond thoughtfully and critically to works of art. When looking at works of art, the students' experiences are most rewarding if they are encouraged to respond imaginatively and if they understand that there are no wrong answers.

Establish a protocol, or a thinking routine, to provide structure to the dialogue around a work of art. Research shows that thinking routines make students more comfortable to engage in unfamiliar dialogue and encourage active participation among all learners. Creating a “culture of thinking”² helps facilitators meet learning objectives and also assists in building students' vocabularies so that they can become more conversant and descriptive with visual prompts. To read more about thinking routines, [click here](#).

If you do not currently use a protocol in your classroom, please use the Museum's, which students encounter when visiting MMA. Use this routine with each work of art before incorporating the various discussion questions and additional activities you find in this guide.

When confronting a new work of art, walk your students through the following.

SEE-CONNECT-THINK-WONDER

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

As students identify what they see, we recommend that you point to what they are noticing in the work. Continue to ask these questions until all possible answers are exhausted.

CONNECT: What do you already know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

This is an opportunity for students to draw from their prior knowledge (other disciplinary content, personal experiences, etc.) and make connections to it. Students can collectively pool information during the “connect” portion.

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does this work make you feel? Why?

This is a chance for students to express an opinion about the image. Here, you might push them to support their claims through the elements of art—[composition, shape, form, color, and texture](#).

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

This encourages students to use their imaginations and to think about other factors that they would like to know about the work. This would also be an appropriate time to introduce other “contextual” factors about the life and work of the artists, historical events that were happening at the time this work was created, etc.

² Ritchart Summer 2007

THINKING ABOUT PORTRAITURE

Art can be a powerful tool through which to understand history and social change. Thus, using the portraits of the Freedom Riders can launch rich and meaningful dialogue with your students. Consider both images of the individual Freedom Rider, and also the composite of the 329 mug shots, which carries a number of associations and stereotypes. Before you get started exploring the lives of the individual Freedom Riders, take a few moments to discuss portraiture with your students.

THINK ABOUT...

DEFINE: What is a portrait? As a class, come up with a collective definition. [e.g. *portrait: an attempt to capture the likeness or character of a person by focusing on facial expression.*] Brainstorm examples of portraits [e.g. yearbook pictures, driver's license photos, baseball cards, wedding portraits, the *Mona Lisa*, pictures of presidents.]

PURPOSE: Why are portraits made? Together, brainstorm ideas about the purposes of portraiture.

CANDID OR FORMAL? Is there a difference between a candid portrait and a formal portrait?

ART? The mug shots were taken as a way of documenting the subject's arrest whereas the contemporary photographs were taken with each of the subject's consent. Are both the mug shot and the contemporary portrait works of art in their own right? What about when looked at together?

SOCIAL CHANGE? Do these images function as agents of social change? If so, how?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

EIMIH

Have your students research stories of important figures in history and to find a portrait of that person. After learning the story, ask your students to explain why they do or do not think that the portrait captures the individual's likeness.

EIMIH

Ask your students to think about where they will be in twenty years. In groups, have your students share their future selves with one another and then collectively decide how each student's likeness should be captured via portraiture. Will the portrait focus solely on the face? If not, what will surround the person? What three things will the portrait try to convey about the person?



HELEN SINGLETON

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

Helen Singleton, Los Angeles, California, August 19, 2005

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: HELEN SINGLETON

For Helen Singleton, segregation and racism did not impact the day-to-day of her youth, growing up as she did in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Rather, it was when she would travel to Virginia to visit her grandmother that the inequities of “separate but equal” policies and the realities of racism became all too real. She and her mother would make the journey to Virginia without stopping, since they were not allowed to use the restaurants or the bathrooms along the way.³

In 1958, Helen left with her husband Bob for college at UCLA in Los Angeles. Though far from the center of the civil rights movement, Helen and Bob kept close watch of the events that were happening in the South, galvanizing support for the sit-ins happening across the country and participating in civil rights demonstrations in Los Angeles. After the first Freedom Ride left from Washington, D.C. in 1961, Bob, UCLA’s NAACP president, began organizing a Freedom Ride from Los Angeles. The plan was to fly from Los Angeles to New Orleans, then board the train to Jackson. Though Bob was steadfast in his belief that Helen should not participate because of the immense dangers involved, Helen was determined.⁴

On July 30, 1961, Helen, Bob, and fourteen others boarded the train to Jackson. Immediately upon arrival and entering the “whites only” waiting room of the train station, all sixteen were arrested. Taken to Parchman penitentiary, Helen, then 28 years old, was placed on death row where she would remain for a month. She was separated from the others in her group because of both her race and her gender,

After her release from jail and the federal enforcement and subsequent desegregation of the interstate transit systems, Helen and Bob returned to Los Angeles where they have lived ever since. Helen went on to finish her bachelor’s degree at UCLA in Fine Arts and to get her Master’s degree in Public Policy Analysis and Administration from Loyola Marymount University. She worked for years at UCLA developing courses and symposia on the arts and humanities, and later she was a policy analyst at RSA, a Public Policy Research and Consulting Firm.⁵ She retired in 1999.

Helen and Bob continue to speak about their experiences as non-violent activists during the 1960s, urging young people today to recognize their own responsibility in protecting their civil liberties. Bob, recognizing the power of the individual to make incremental steps forward, says “as we look over time we saw that we pushed the pendulum...” while Helen speaks of the need to be proactive, “You cannot sit and wait for someone else to make a big speech or to inspire you. You’ve got to inspire yourself.”⁶

³ Anderson 2008

⁴ Anderson 2008

⁵ Singleton Freedom Riders n.d.

⁶ NBC Los Angeles 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: SINGLETON

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in the pictures? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

MIH

SUBJECT: In 1966, Attorney Robert F. Kennedy said:

Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation ... It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is thus shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Does the story of Helen and Bob Singleton support Robert Kennedy's belief in the power of the individual to create change? Why or why not?

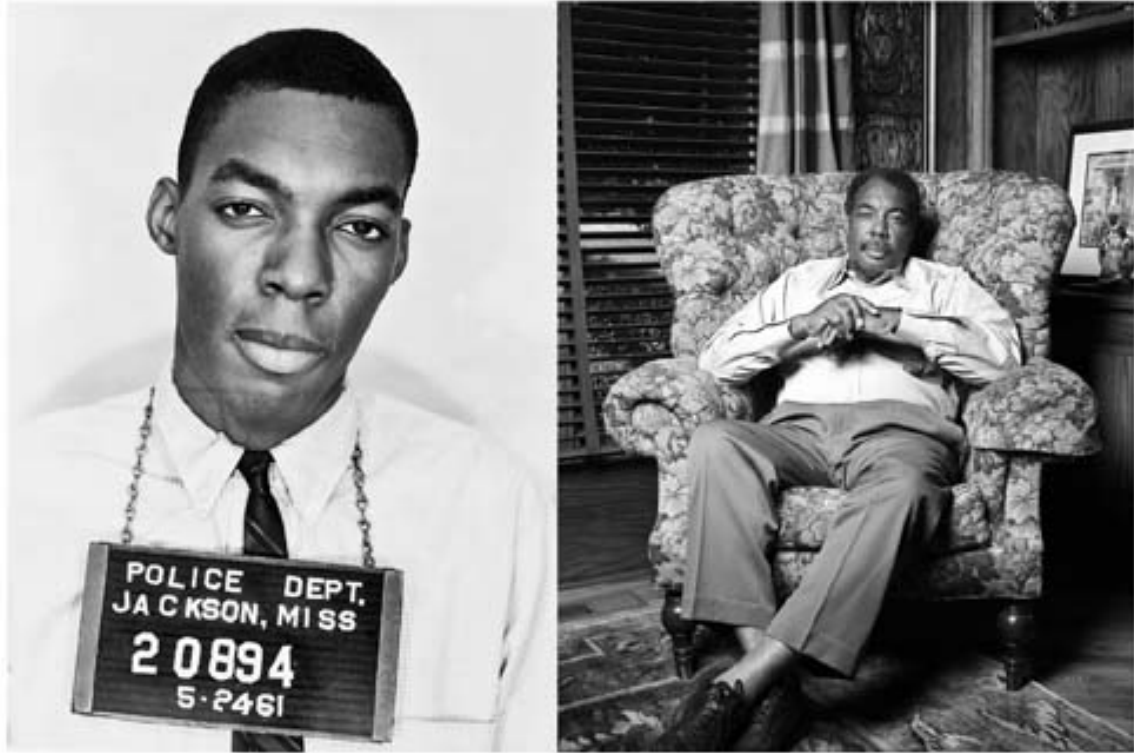
EIMIH

ARTISTIC CHOICE: Think about how Eric Etheridge chose to capture Helen Singleton in 2005 at the age of 72. What did he choose to depict and what did he choose to omit? How does this affect the mood of the portrait?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

MIH

As a class, brainstorm other events in history where a group chose to participate and thus "pushed the pendulum" as Bob Singleton said, to change the course of events. (See [Facing History and Ourselves](#) to find examples.) Once you've made a list, brainstorm a list of issues where you believe action is currently needed. After the class has developed this second list, have them choose one of the issues on the list and spend a few moments writing a journal entry detailing how those affected might choose to participate, pushing the pendulum towards a positive resolution of the issue.



HANK THOMAS

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

Hank Thomas, Stone Mountain, Georgia, May 10, 2007

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: HANK THOMAS

Hank Thomas grew up in St. Augustine, Florida, where segregation was all too real. From an early age, Thomas was always challenging everyday inequities he encountered—sitting in whites-only seating and challenging [Jim Crow laws](#) from time to time—but it was not until he was a freshman at Howard University in Washington, D.C. that he became fully immersed in the civil rights movement. He credits the [sit-ins in at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina](#), as the incident that spurred his involvement: “Greensboro was the spark. We were all talking about it, discussing it. At Howard it took us maybe two to three weeks to get organized and go in on our first demonstration in Maryland and in Virginia.”⁷

Thomas was first arrested in Maryland for sitting in the whites-only section at the movie theater. While it was his first arrest, it would certainly not be his last, as he would participate in protests and demonstrations in front of the White House, the United States Capitol, and many other places. In 1961, his roommate was planning to participate in the first Freedom Ride scheduled to leave D.C. on May 4, 1961. At the last minute, the roommate was unable to go, so Thomas took his place. Of his decision Thomas said: “I always wanted to go where the action was. That’s what happens when you’re 19. You don’t think too much about what the consequences gonna be.”⁸

The bus left DC as scheduled and first encountered trouble in Rocky Mount, South Carolina, where both John Lewis and Thomas were arrested. Thomas escaped by outrunning the Ku Klux Klan, rejoining the bus, and pressing on.⁹ Nearing Alabama, the riders learned that a mob was waiting for them in Anniston. Apprehensive but determined they pushed on, arriving on May 14, 1961—Mother’s Day. Met by a mob, many of whom were members of the KKK, the Riders stayed on the bus while windows were knocked out and tires were slashed. Finally, the mob threw a fire bomb inside, forcing the riders to exit the bus. Thomas was the first to exit, and as he escaped the smoke, a mob member asked, “Are you ok?” But, before he could answer, the man took a baseball bat and hit him over the head.¹⁰

Still undeterred, Thomas joined the next bus 10 days later to ride to Jackson, where he was arrested upon arrival at the bus station. He went to Parchman, the notorious Delta labor prison, and recalls: “Some of the guards in Jackson would tell us, ‘Y’all get up there at Parchman, they’re gonna straighten you all out. And there ain’t no Robert Kennedy or John Kennedy gonna do anything about it.’ And people began to think that.”¹¹ In Fall, 2010, [Hank Thomas returned to Parchman](#) to visit where he once was held prisoner.

Finally he was released. Thomas finished school at Howard University and then became a field secretary in Alabama for CORE in 1962. In 1963, he entered the U.S. Army and did a tour in Vietnam from 1965-1966, receiving a Purple Heart award. Ironically, as he fought in Vietnam, there were still places in his own country where he could not sit down for a bite to eat. Upon his discharge from the army, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia and became involved in the franchise business. Today, he lives with his wife in Stone Mountain, Georgia, and owns two McDonald’s and four Marriott hotels.¹²

⁷ Thomas n.d.

⁸ Thomas n.d.

⁹ Thomas, A Letter from Hank Thomas 2010

¹⁰ Gross 2006

¹¹ Etheridge, Breach of Peace 2008

¹² Etheridge, Breach of Peace 2008

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: THOMAS

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What do you notice in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

MIH

LABELS: When Hank Thomas, along with his fellow riders, arrived in Anniston, Alabama, they were confronted by an angry mob that had preconceived notions about them. What types of labels had been placed on them by members of society? How are these similar or different to the way Hank might have described himself?

EIMIH

VISUAL CLUES: If you haven't already, spend some time thinking about the contemporary portrait of Hank Thomas. What information can be gathered from paying attention to the visual clues surrounding Hank Thomas? What influence do they have on how you interpret the portrait of Hank Thomas?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

Give your students two blank index cards. On both, have them write their names in the center. On the first, have them draw an identity chart—draw lines from their name in the center—using only adjectives and labels that they would use to describe themselves. Essentially, if someone asked them to tell about themselves, what words or associations would they use to do that (personality traits, family life, afterschool activities, etc.)? Next, have the students take the second card and use only adjectives and labels that others in society would use to describe them. After this is complete, have your students see how their own description of self compares with how society might view them. In a journal, have your students spend a few minutes discussing this comparison and how it makes them feel. Ask your students to write about what this says about identity—one's sense of self—and how identity is shaped.



CHELA LIGHTCHILD

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

Chela Lightchild, Las Vegas, Nevada, May 21, 2007

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: CHELA LIGHTCHILD

Chela Lightchild was born Marcia Rosenbaum on May 23, 1938 in New Jersey, and was living in Los Angeles where she worked for the Fellowship of Reconciliation and studied Gandhi and nonviolence.¹³ She first learned of the Freedom Rides when attending a play called, “Fly, Blackbird”, a musical about civil rights. After the performance, Martin Luther King, Jr. told the audience about the Freedom Rides that were going to begin soon, and Lightchild signed up immediately.¹⁴

The train left Los Angeles bound for New Orleans one week later. Lightchild went against the wishes of her family, who feared for her safety and for her social acceptance once she returned. In fact, “her grandmother told her no nice Jewish boy would marry her if she went down there and returned an ex-con.”¹⁵ Lightchild, however, was determined and speaks of a journey to New Orleans that was made with relative ease. Upon arriving in New Orleans, she and her fellow passengers underwent an intensive two-week training session where they learned tactics of non-violence. The training included role-playing, where the activists would train to withstand tormenting without reacting. Once the training was complete, they boarded the train from New Orleans to Jackson.

When the train arrived in Jackson, the police officers immediately rushed up to the Riders and arrested them. As they separated the riders by gender and race, they mistakenly sent Chela to the group of black females and an African American passenger, Mary Hamilton, to the group of white females. Although they tried to explain to the officers their mistake, the officers refused to listen. So, Chela Lightchild and Mary Hamilton not only participated in integrating the public transportation system, but they also integrated the patrol cars and the jail: “So, they put me in the car with the black people and took me to the jail and sat me in with the blacks and Mary with the whites and then later when the fingerprints came back they found out they made a mistake. They didn’t like that. So I got a little roughed up and I guess Mary got a little roughed up, because we’d integrated the cells.”¹⁶

Lightchild was released a week later, and spent the next several years continuing to work with the civil rights movement. She went to work for CORE in both New Orleans and Los Angeles.¹⁷ She was arrested several more times, for both her civil rights work and also for her anti-war demonstrations.

In 1971, Chela and her husband worked in the Dominican Republic with the Peace Corps, where they promoted organic farming. During this time, in 1972, she changed her name from Marcia Rosenbaum to Chela Lightchild because she didn’t like having a name that was associated with Mars, the God of War from Roman mythology. She chose Chela, which is derived from Sanskrit, while she was practicing yoga during the 1970s and Lightchild because she is a “child of the light.”¹⁸

She continued to farm and promote organic farming, teaching it in England and returning later to the Dominican Republic to pursue her work. She now lives in New Mexico with her husband.

¹³ Etheridge, *Breach of Peace* 2008

¹⁴ Clericuzio 2008

¹⁵ Clericuzio 2009

¹⁶ Etheridge, *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Rides* 2008

¹⁷ Etheridge, *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Rides* 2008

¹⁸ Etheridge, Personal E-mail 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: LIGHTCHILD

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in the pictures? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

MIH

STIGMA: A social stigma is the shame or disgrace associated with a behavior or action that is deemed socially unacceptable. Take a few moments to discuss whether a mug shot is a visual representation of the stigma carried by the Freedom Riders. Use the mug shot of Marcia Rosenbaum as a starting point.

MIH

VOICE: Think about the composite shot of the Freedom Riders. What is the difference between the composite and the individual portraits? Whose voice is heard in the image of Marcia Rosenbaum compared to the voice in Chela Lightchild's portrait?

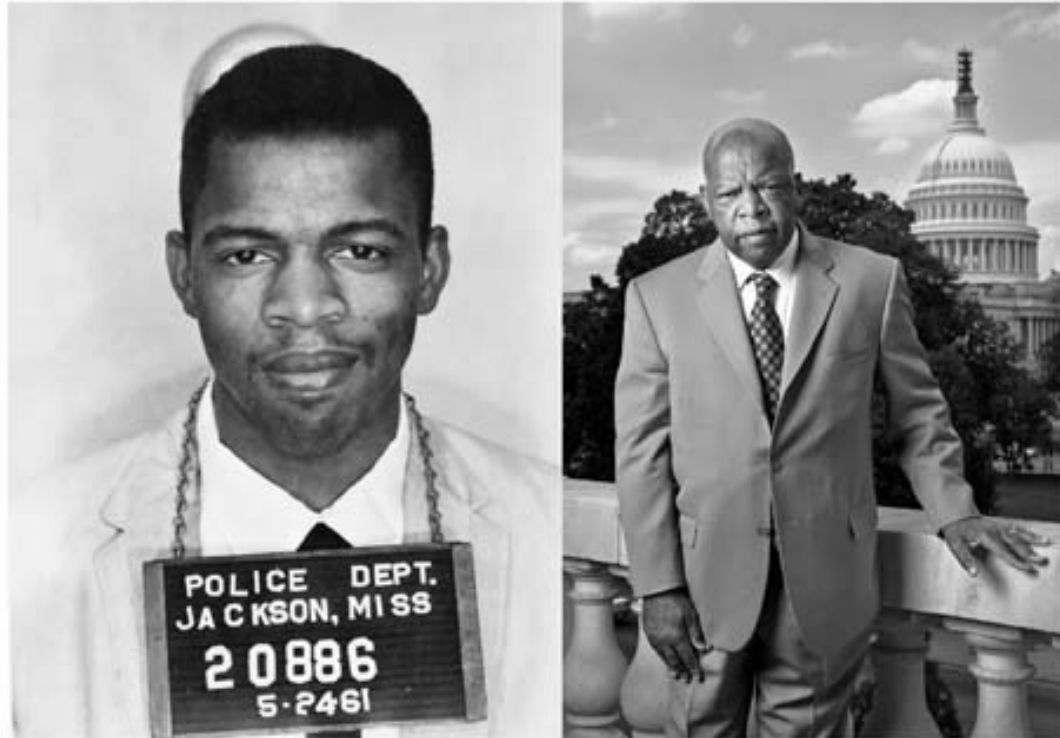
EIMIH

INFERENCE: What can you infer about Chela Lightchild's occupation or interests from looking at her contemporary portrait? What do you see that makes you say that?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

In 1972, Chela Lightchild changed her name from Marcia Rosenbaum because she did not want to be associated with Mars, the Roman god of war. Chela chose her first name while she was practicing yoga during the 1970s, a word that is derived from Sanskrit, and her last name because she says she is a "child of the light". Have your students consider what they might change each of their own names to: research possibilities and have them choose one that they find personally meaningful. Share their choices in small groups.



REP. JOHN LEWIS

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

John Lewis, Washington, DC, July 25, 2007

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: REP. JOHN LEWIS

Congressman John Lewis was born in Troy, Alabama in 1940 into a world that was deeply segregated. As Lewis says, “You had the white world and the black world,”¹⁹ and the two rarely mingled. In 1957, Lewis left Troy for Nashville to attend the American Baptist Theological Seminary. It was in Nashville where he became deeply involved in issues of civil rights and the preliminary sit-ins that were happening at the time. John Lewis encountered the history and tactics of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance, which were being taught in workshops by James Lawson (also a Freedom Rider), a student of Vanderbilt Divinity School who previously spent three years studying Gandhi’s principles of nonviolence in India.

In 1959, the participants of the workshops in Nashville began to test the approach of non-violent resistance through sit-ins. The approach, according to Lewis, was to begin by removing the physical barriers that prevented blacks and whites from co-existing. The students would walk into a lunch counter, be refused service, and then leave. But in February of 1960, the students galvanized support for the first major sit-in in Nashville. The day after, John Lewis was arrested for the first time. But, the arrest did not slow him down: the students continued to participate in sit-ins, ride-ins, swim-ins, and every other kind of “in” you can think of.

In May 1961, John Lewis was one of the original Freedom Riders. Although they faced many obstacles along the way and were attacked in Birmingham, Alabama, Lewis felt that it was important to continue on to Mississippi: “We felt that it was important that the ride be continued and we decided that it was important to travel through Alabama, through Selma, Highway 80, on into Mississippi...it was like taking the gospel of the civil rights movement into different parts of the South and it was important that it go into a state like Mississippi,” which had seen little activity to date. Upon arrival in Jackson, they were immediately arrested, and chose “jail, no bail.”²⁰

Though initially imprisoned in the Jackson City jail, as more riders came to Jackson the city jail became overcrowded. The Riders were soon transferred to Parchman Prison and placed in maximum security where conditions were much harsher. Reflecting upon that day in 1973, Lewis remembered the intimidation tactics used by the prison guards: “We arrived there and one of the guards said, ‘Sing your Freedom songs now, we have niggers here who will eat you up; sing your Freedom songs...’”²¹

After his release from Parchman, John Lewis returned to Nashville and enrolled in Fisk University, where he would pursue a degree in philosophy and religion. While at Fisk, Lewis became the leader of the Nashville student-led movement, continuing the effort to desegregate dining facilities as well as other institutions, including the YMCA. In 1963, Lewis finished his studies at Fisk and was elected as chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and moved to Atlanta. Between the years of 1963 and 1966, John Lewis was arrested forty-four times for the various demonstrations in which he participated.²² Lewis stood with Martin Luther King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during his famous “I have a

¹⁹ Lewis 1973

²⁰ Lewis 1973

²¹ Lewis 1973

²² Lewis 1973

dream” speech in 1963, and he was an important figure in both the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964 and of the marches in Selma in 1965. ²³

From 1981 to 1987, John Lewis served on the City Council of Atlanta. In 1987, he was elected to the House of Representatives by the 5th congressional district of Georgia (of which Atlanta is part.) He has served in that position ever since. In 2008, the United States elected its first African American president. On Obama’s election, John Lewis remarked: “If someone had told me this would be happening now, I would have told them they were crazy, out of their mind—they didn’t know what they were talking about...I just wish the others were around to see this day...To the people who were beaten, put in jail, were asked questions they could never answer to register to vote...it’s amazing.”²⁴

²³ Lewis 1973

²⁴ Hearn 2008

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: LEWIS

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in the pictures? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

MIH

SYMBOLISM: In his contemporary portrait, John Lewis stands in front of the United States Capitol, which is home to the legislative branch of government. Why do you think Etheridge chose to take the photo there? Is it simply because he is a United States Congressman? Do you think it's because the Freedom Riders were attempting to change an oppressive law, and, after fifty years, John Lewis now helps to create laws?

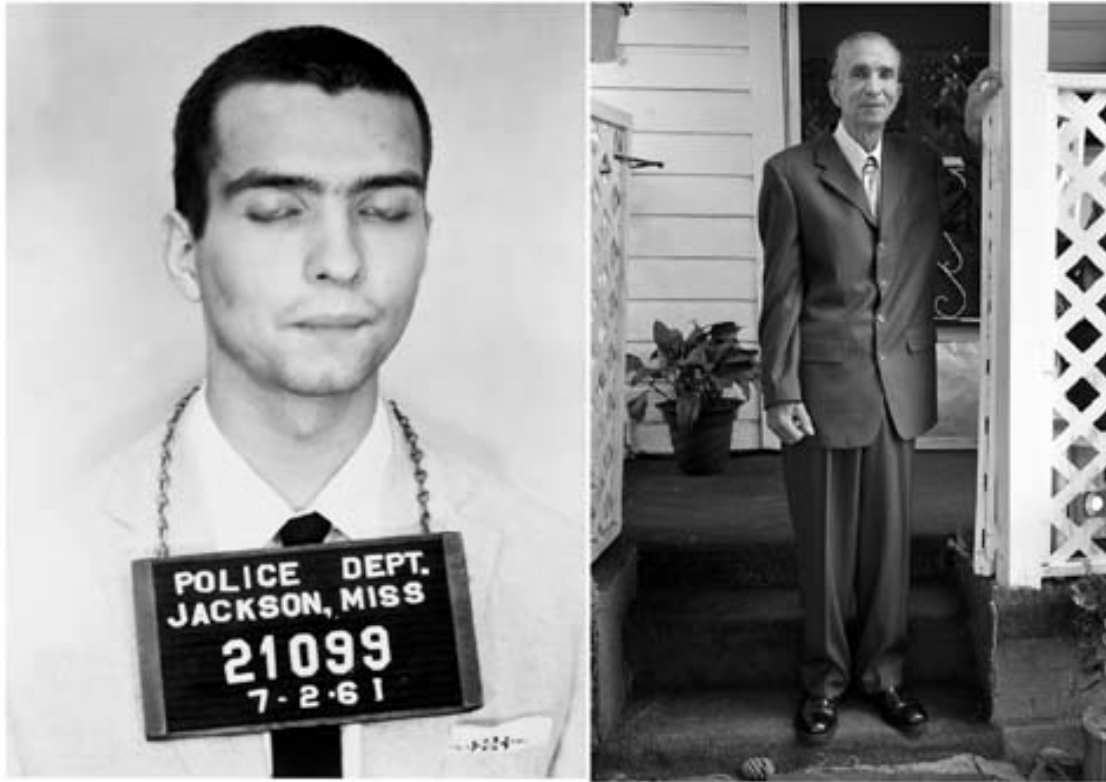
MIH

BARRIERS: Lewis speaks of how the initial focus of the Civil Rights Movement was on removing physical barriers that prevented African Americans access to equal opportunities and rights. This included all of the Jim Crow laws that ruled supreme through the mid-20th century. Then, he says, the plan was to turn attention to social barriers. What were some of the physical barriers that Lewis and others sought to remove? Is this in some way suggested in his contemporary photograph? If so, how?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

MIH

Have your students spend time researching the philosophy that underpinned the civil rights movement, that of nonviolence and civil disobedience. In 1849, Henry David Thoreau wrote the essay *Civil Disobedience (Resistance to the Civil Government)*, which inspired the likes of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Spend time exploring Thoreau's essay as well as its influence on Gandhi and King. If desired, talk about Thoreau's essay in the context of the revolutions spreading across the Middle East and how many, such as Egypt, utilize the tactics of nonviolence resistance.



PETER STONER

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

Peter Stoner, Jackson, Mississippi, April 22, 2007

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: PETER STONER

Peter Stoner was raised in Berlin, Pennsylvania and in 1961, was a student at the prestigious University of Chicago studying chemistry. Early in 1961, Stoner visited New Orleans, where he witnessed the institutionalized racism and inequality that existed in the deepest parts of the South. Disheartened and unsure of what he could do, he returned to Chicago where he shared what he saw in New Orleans with his fellow classmates. When the Freedom Rides were announced, Stoner saw his chance to challenge these inequalities by riding in support of the enforcement of the recent Supreme Court ruling, which claimed that interstate travel and related facilities could not be segregated. Stoner recalls of the South: “I just felt it was a system of organized oppression, and people in the South were victims of the law.”²⁵

Thus, Stoner set out to do what he could to challenge the law. In July 1960, Stoner took a bus to Montgomery, Alabama to join one of the Freedom Rides as it made its way to Jackson, Mississippi. Stoner arrived in Jackson on July 2 and was immediately arrested. He says he feels fortunate that none of the law enforcement hurt him, but rather herded them off to prison. As he entered Parchman, however, Stoner says he was fearful of what might happen to him. To his surprise, conditions were not terrible. He says there was water and food, and he was placed in a room full of about sixty other men.²⁶

Stoner was released from prison after about six weeks, and rather than returning to Chicago to finish at the University of Chicago, he stayed in Mississippi to continue the struggle for civil rights. In 1961, he enrolled at Tougaloo Southern Christian College, from which he graduated in 1963. During his time at Tougaloo, he invested his time in helping African Americans register to vote. He participated in demonstrations across the state, and, while in Greenwood, he was arrested another time for his activism.²⁷ After graduating from Tougaloo, Peter Stoner began working full time for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and, in 1964, he went to Hattiesburg to help African Americans register to vote. During his time in Hattiesburg, he was arrested five times and was incarcerated for a time at the Forrest County work camp. While at the work camp, he helped with construction projects and recalls being beaten several times by officers.

Stoner settled permanently in Jackson with his wife in 1964, and he has called it home ever since. Since then, he received both his Master of Science and Doctorate in Chemistry from the University of Southern Mississippi.²⁸

²⁵ Mohamed 2008

²⁶ Mohamed 2008

²⁷ Bishop 2004

²⁸ Etheridge, Breach of Peace 2008

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: STONER

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in the pictures? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

COMPARE: Compare the expression on Peter Stoner's face from the mug shot and the contemporary photo. How are they similar?

EIMIH

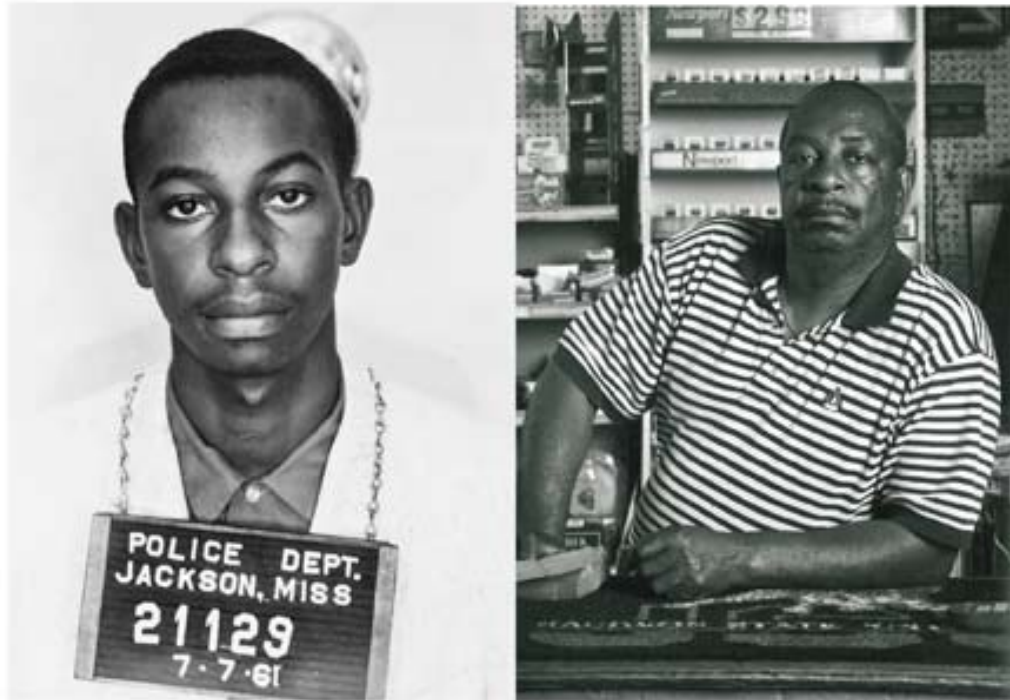
ARTISTIC CHOICE: How has the artist chosen to depict Peter Stoner? Think about visual clues: Why is he photographed in this particular environment?

EIMIH

MOOD: What is the mood of the image? What do you see that makes you say that?

EIMIH

LIKENESS: Is the image reflective of what you know about Peter Stoner? Why or why not? Given what you know, how would you depict him differently?



HEZEKIAH WATKINS

Left: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Right: Eric Etheridge (born 1957)

Hezekiah Watkins, Jackson, Mississippi, 2007

Archival pigment print

Copyright © the artist

FREEDOM RIDER: HEZEKIAH WATKINS

Hezekiah Watkins was only thirteen years old—a student at Rowan Junior High School—when he was arrested at the Greyhound Bus Station in Jackson, Mississippi. Watching the action of the Freedom Riders from the grounds of Central High School just across the street, Watkins was arrested when his friends decided to enter the bus station. When an officer asked his place of birth, Watkins replied Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Mistaken as a Freedom Rider from Wisconsin, Watkins was immediately arrested and taken to Parchman. After two days, Governor Ross Barnett learned a thirteen-year-old kid from Jackson was in prison and ordered his release. He was returned to the Jackson City Jail where his worried mother retrieved him.²⁹

Even though his involvement in the Freedom Rides was happenstance, his continued involvement in the movement was intentional. Watkins made a name for himself with Jackson law enforcement by constantly challenging Jim Crow laws: he drank from the whites-only water fountain, sat at downtown lunch counters, and participated in staged walk-outs at school.³⁰ During one downtown demonstration, the police showed up and began arresting and carting the protestors off to jail. As the officers worked—loading the demonstrators into wagons and patrol cars—a bakery named Hart's bread and a soda shop called Barq's Root Beer handed out bread and soda to the officers as they used force on the demonstrators. Once released from prison, the activists boycotted both Hart's and Barq's and put them out of business.

Watkins' activism took a toll on his family; his mother, who cooked at the whites-only Primos restaurant, was warned by her employer that her boy needed to stay out of trouble or she would lose her job. She confronted Hezekiah about this, and Hezekiah, who felt terrible about putting his mother in such a predicament but was determined to push on, decided to move out. At the time, he was still a student at Lanier High School.³¹

Hezekiah continued to be involved in the civil rights momentum that was happening around the state. He moved to Canton and lived with a group of around fifteen or so activists. He went to Greenwood and all through the Delta participating in demonstrations along with other activities. In total, he was arrested more than one hundred times for his activism. Watkins recalls the worst instance of brutality during all of this was when he was in jail in Jackson and was beaten by several large officers. His head was gashed open and to this day, fifty years later, he suffers from migraine headaches because of it.

Watkins was drafted into the U. S. military, serving in both Vietnam and Korea. Upon his return he opened the Corner Market and Deli, which he sees as an anchor in the community. His sense of personal responsibility in the community where he lives is as evident now as it was then: "This community [around Corner market] used to be called Dope Corner. It was more drugs on this corner than anywhere else in the city of Jackson, and this was statistics from the Jackson Police Department. And now, it's just the opposite. We've still got some problems here, but we've put a big bite into drugs in this community. So it was something that I wanted to do back then, it's something I want to do now."³²

²⁹ Forrest 2008

³⁰ Watkins 1998

³¹ Watkins 1998

³² Watkins 1998

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: WATKINS

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in the pictures? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONNECT: What do you know about the images? What do the images bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about these images? How do they make you feel?

WONDER: About what do these images make you wonder? What more do you wish to know?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

OCCUPATION: What can you discern about Hezekiah Watkins' occupation from the photograph? What makes you say that? Has Etheridge effectively captured Watkins' likeness?

EIMIH

BODY LANGUAGE: What does Watkins' pose reveal about his personality? What about the expression on his face? How is his contemporary photograph similar or dissimilar to the mugshot taken in 1961?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

As a class, stand up, get moving, and consider how people use body language to communicate a message. Stand in a circle that is large enough where the entire class can see one another. Tell your students that you are going to say an emotion, mood, or descriptive adjective aloud, and when you do, you want them to show that emotion, mood, or other descriptive adjective using body language. Words to use might include: happy, sad, angry, frustrated, shy, excited, stern, mean, goofy

EIMIH

Have your students pretend they are Hezekiah Watkins in 1961 at the age of 13. Ask them to write a journal entry on the first night of their stay in Parchman. Ask them to describe their surroundings, write about how they feel, and what they want to do upon release from prison.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Lisa. *Helen Singleton: Resolute in her Spirit*. Jackson, July 8, 2008.

NBC Los Angeles. *Freedom Riders: "You've got to inspire yourself"* (1 18, 2011).

Bishop, Danielle L. "Biographical/Historical Sketch (Peter Stoner).". *The University of Southern Mississippi-McCain Library and Archives*. April 23, 2004. <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/archives/m168.htm> [accessed February 2011].

Etheridge, Eric. "About the Rides." *Mississippi Freedom 50th*. 2010. <http://ms50thfreedomridersreunion.org/riderhistory> [accessed January 20, 2011].

Etheridge, Eric. *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Rides*. New York: Atlas & Co., 2008.

Forrest, Thomas M. and Ward Schaefer. "Hezekiah Watkins: 'Outside Agitator'." *Jackson Free Press*. July 30, 2008. http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/index.php/print_view/23202 [accessed February 2011].

Gross, Terry. "Get on the Bus." *National Public Radio*. January 12, 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5149667> [accessed January 15, 2011].

Hearn, Josephine. "Black leaders emotional about Obama's success." *Politico*. June 4, 2008. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0608/10858.html> [accessed February 20, 2011].

Lewis, John, interview by Walter and Jack Bass DeVries. *Interview with John Lewis. Southern Oral History Program*. (November 20, 1973).

Mohamed, Maha. "Peter Stoner: 'Will they beat us, Too?'" *Jackson Free Press*. 7 30, 2008. http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/index.php/site/comments/freedom_riders_073008/ [accessed February 15, 2011].

Singleton Freedom Riders. <http://www.singletonfreedomriders.com/bio-helen/> [accessed February 14, 2011].

Thomas, Hank. "A Letter from Hank Thomas." *Mississippi Freedom 50th*. June 19, 2010. http://www.mississippifreedom50th.com/blog/?page_id=24 [accessed February 20, 2011].

Thomas, Hank. "My First Arrest." *Breach of Peace*. <http://breachofpeace.com/blog/?p=6> [accessed February 10, 2011].

Watkins, Hezekiah, interview by Don Williams. *Oral History from the Civil Rights Sites Project: Hezekiah Watkins* (September 17, 1998).