



## **Live the Legacy Podcast**

Live the Legacy podcast captures bold conversations between civil rights icons and today's student activists. These conversations bridge the past and the present in order to move forward together. Listen today on our [website](#) or your favorite podcast app.

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### **Season 3- Bonus Episode: Freedom Summer 1964**

In this bonus episode, AGF's Director of Programs, Caroline Smith, dives into our legacy story and its roots in Freedom Summer 1964.

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## **Transcript**

Mo: Welcome to this special bonus episode of the Live the Legacy Podcast, a project brought to you by the Andrew Goodman Foundation. This podcast exists to highlight the ways in which young people throughout the history of this country have been the change makers who have pushed us towards a more just and inclusive democracy. This week's bonus episode is read by our Director of Programs, Caroline Smith, and it's all about the Freedom Summer of 1964. The Freedom Summer Project was designed to draw the nation's attention to the violent oppression experienced by black people in Mississippi who were attempting to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Please listen now as Caroline describes the events of that summer.

Caroline: Freedom Summer 1964 was a movement led by young people. During a time in our troubled history when the South was still deeply segregated. Young people answered the call to make a difference, not just for their futures, but for the generations who would come after them. Whether young people joined the movement because of their parents' activism or because they saw posters on their college campuses, one thing was clear. Young people completely transformed the course of history through their advocacy and their commitment to an equitable future. To understand the pivotal role of freedom Summer 1964, we should first understand why bold action for voting rights for Black Americans was so imperative.

Freedom Summer, or the Mississippi Summer Project, was a 1964 voter registration drive aimed at increasing the number of registered Black voters in Mississippi. Mississippi was chosen as the focus of Freedom Summer 1964 because of its historically low levels of Black voter registration. In fact, in 1962, less than 7% of the state's eligible Black voters were registered to vote. Black Americans often faced violence and intimidation when they attempted to vote and poll taxes and literacy tests were designed to silence Black voters. So with this in mind, over 700 mostly white volunteers joined Black people in Mississippi to fight against voter intimidation and discrimination at the polls.

Like most things in history, the events of Freedom Summer 1964 didn't happen in a vacuum. By 1964, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. Freedom Riders had started their direct action against segregated public transportation in 1961. Southern organizers were staging sit-ins to protest Jim Crow laws, and Dr. Martin Luther King had given his *I Have a Dream* Speech at the August, 1963 March on Washington as 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. Despite the progress being made, though, the South remained a hotspot for racial segregation, especially at the polls. In June, 1964, volunteers and organizers arrived in Mississippi after getting training in Oxford, Ohio. Former chairman of the Andrew Goodman Foundation's Board of Directors, Robert Masters, remembers this time all too well. In the first season of our podcast, he talks about meeting Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner for the first time, as they learned voter registration tactics and safety protocols together from Civil Rights leader Robert Bob Moses.

Volunteers were constantly reminded of the high probability of being arrested and the need to have enough money for bail. However, no one could have foreseen the horrors that awaited three such volunteers in Neshoba County. Only one day after arriving in Mississippi, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, both young Jewish volunteers from the north, accompanied a young Black Mississippian, James Earl Chaney, to investigate a bombed church that was set to be a site for one of their freedom schools. On June 21st, 1964, all three men disappeared on their way to investigate the church. Their burnt out car was found three days later near a swamp.

For the next 44 days, a missing person search and national media attention completely gripped the nation. The amount of national attention their disappearances garnered was unusual, and it was because two of the volunteers were white. In fact, as federal investigators searched for Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney, they discovered dozens of other bodies in the swamps of Mississippi. All were Black and all were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, but none of their disappearances captivated the national news cycle like the disappearance and murders of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney. Federal investigators eventually found all three of the men's bodies 15 feet below an earth and dam on a local farm on August 4th, 1964. Neshoba County Sheriff Cecil Price and the Ku Klux Klan were responsible for their disappearance and their brutal murders.

State and local law enforcement refused to investigate the murders of the three men, forcing the United States Justice Department to pursue charges. Ultimately, only seven of the 21 men responsible for their murders were convicted, and none of them served more than six years in prison. Goodman, Schwerner, and Cheney weren't the only ones to suffer at the hands of white supremacy that summer. In total 1,062 people were arrested. 80 Freedom Summer workers were beaten, 37 churches were bombed or burned, and 30 Black homes or businesses were bombed or burned.

Despite the incredibly horrific events that happened to many Freedom Summer volunteers and organizers, their efforts truly helped shape history. By the end of the three months, more than 40 Freedom Schools had been established, serving upwards of 3,000 students who not only received a comparable education to their white upper class peers, but also knowledge on how to exercise their right to vote. Their efforts are widely recognized as the driving force behind the pressure placed on President Lyndon B. Johnson to eventually sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ended segregation in public places, banned employment discrimination and prohibited discriminatory voting practices.

In 1966, Robert and Carolyn Goodman created the Andrew Goodman Foundation to carry on the spirit and the purpose of their son Andrew's life. Today, our work mobilizes young people to continue the legacy of Goodman, Schwerner, and Cheney on college campuses and in their surrounding communities across the country. We believe the movement of young people that propelled Freedom Summer didn't end in 1964, but continues on today and will tomorrow through the spirit of young people who persistently fight for equitable voting rights.

Mo: This concludes this week's episode of the Live the Legacy Podcast. If you wanna learn more about the events of Freedom Summer 1964, you can visit our website at [andrewgoodman.org](http://andrewgoodman.org). A special shout out to Tabeek Music for all of the music that you heard on today's episode, and if you like today's episode, please leave us a review or subscribe. It helps people find us that much easier. Until next time, this has been your host Mo Banks. Thanks so much for listening.