

**Research Proposal:
Searching for Civil Rights Stories in the Mississippi Delta**

Introduction:

This is a community-based research project carried out by the students in SOC 474/574 COD 574, Spring semester, 2008.

The course instructor and principal investigator is Dr. Alan Barton of the Division of Social Sciences.

The graduate students registered in the course who will be conducting this research are Eric Atchison, Susie Shorter, Emanuel Edmond, Barbara Scott and Lola Nelson.

Undergraduate students participating in this project are Kendra Johnson and Tonya McNeil.

The Project:

The motivation for this project is to support the development of the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area by identifying and elaborating stories from the Civil Rights movement. The researchers will focus on the mid-Delta communities of Cleveland, Shaw, Indianola, Greenville, Clarksdale and Shelby. The researchers will document a story from their community, and develop a proposal as to how the story can be incorporated into local educational activities and into tourism activities.

Research Questions:

How did local residents and institutions in Delta communities affect the Civil Rights Movement in the United States? What did the Civil Rights Movement mean to local residents and institutions?

How can Civil Rights stories be incorporated into educational programs to educate local residents about Delta heritage?

How can Civil Rights stories be marketed to tourists to increase awareness of the Mississippi Delta's heritage and to benefit local communities?

Research Topics:

The research will focus on stories in the Delta communities of Clarksdale, Shelby, Cleveland, Shaw, Greenville and Indianola. Local stories related to the Civil Rights Movement, such as the Liberty House in Clarksdale, Amzie Moore in Cleveland and school integration in Greenville will be studied by students in the course. These will be compiled and organized to highlight the potential for the story as a means of educating local residents about Delta heritage and marketing the story to tourists.

Data Collection:

Data collection will be through interviews with community leaders and residents familiar with the Civil Rights Movement in their community. An effort will be made to locate and interview

individuals who participated directly in the activities being studied. Subjects will be identified through local networks.

Interview Questions:

Examples of questions that will be asked during interviews:

What role did members of this community play in the Civil Rights Movement?

How are stories about the civil rights movement talked about in your community?

How could these stories and others be effectively promoted in the area? Outside the area?

What benefits would civil rights tourism bring to your community?

What negative impacts would civil rights tourism bring to your community?

Who would benefit most from civil rights tourism in your community?

Would a civil rights tourism project in your community improve race relations? How or why not?

How were you directly involved in the Civil Rights Movement?

What were the effects of your actions on the community? On the state? On the country? How long did it take to see these effects take root?

Describe the project you were involved in. What were your goals? What obstacles did you face? How successful was the project? Is the project continuing today?

Who was involved in your project? What race were they? How old were they? What obstacles did you encounter in working with people from different backgrounds, racial groups, ages?

General demographic information on subjects: age, race, income category, place of birth, place of residence

Conclusion:

By interviewing local residents about their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, we hope to compile some little-known stories that might serve to highlight the important role the Mississippi Delta played in the Civil Rights Movement. We want to assess the potential for these stories in educating local residents about their own heritage, and in attracting tourists to these communities to learn more about civil rights and the Civil Rights Movement.