

## Freedom Summer: 50th Anniversary Celebration--Chat Log

### Introductions

**Rachel Myers:** Hi Etta, glad to be here!

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** Hi everyone! My name is Miriam Cantor-Stone, I'm the Education Assistant at JWA, and I'm in Brookline, MA

**Rachel Myers:** I'm in Jackson Mississippi at the Institute of Southern Jewish Life and I'm the Museum Project Coordinator

**Rachel Myers:** Yes it's the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience and I teach about Southern Jewish History

**Rachel Myers:** mainly through outreach programs in public schools

**Rachel Myers:** and I also work with group tours who want to travel to the South

**Elena Solomon:** Hi! My name is Elena Solomon. I'm a sexual health educator and Jewish youth organizer. I'm based in Chicago

**Rachel Myers:** Also Etta, my maiden name is Jarman, we know each other from Brandeis!

**Malkie Schwartz:** Hi All, I'm the Director of the Institute's Department of Community Engagement

**Rachel Myers:** Yeah the name change thing is confusing

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** And I love ISJL, I'm originally from TX and I've studied a lot of Texas Jewish History

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** and I visited the ISJL headquarters in MS when i was a freshman in high school

**Alachua Haskins:** Hi there! I'm Alachua and I'm an Education Fellow at the ISJL

**Beth Kander:** Hi, this is Beth Kander - also ISJL - communications realm :)

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** I'm loving all the Southern representation! :)

**Rachel Myers:** It's hot here

**Rachel Myers:** like air conditioning is on hot

**Kate Koester:** Hello! I work with Livnot Chai - a Jewish social justice program for high school students in Seattle. We are planning a trip to New Orleans in February and I am excited to incorporate materials from JWA!

### What do you already know about Freedom Summer?

**Elena Solomon:** Not much on my end!

**Alachua Haskins:** I know it was in 1964.....I think

**Beth Kander:** I've attended the memorial service in Neshoba County, MS, for the Chaney/Schwerner/Goodman

**Kate Koester:** A group of college students went to Mississippi to help with voter reg and to set up schools.

**Rachel Myers:** It was a movement organized for voter registration and education in Mississippi

**In which quadrant would you place yourself and why: 1) Jewish participation in Freedom Summer was motivated primarily by the Holocaust; 2) Jewish participation in Freedom Summer was motivated primarily by Jews feeling like outsiders themselves and empathizing with southern African-Americans; 3) Jewish participation in Freedom Summer was motivated primarily by Jewish values of social justice; or 4) Jewish participation in Freedom Summer was motivated primarily by some other experience or values.**

**Leah Oppenheimer:** 2 -- always outside

**Kate Koester:** 3

**Alachua Haskins:** 2

**Elena Solomon:** 2

**Beth Kander:** 3

**Rachel Myers:** 1/3

**Malkie Schwartz:** 1 and 2

**Leah Oppenheimer:** I know from reading that until the 30's Jews were also considered "black" and not insiders at all

**Beth Kander:** I selected 3 because whether or not Jews felt like outsiders (New York Jews may well have not), the social justice element still matters. Empathy is important, but action even more so...

**Elena Solomon:** I was struggling between 2 and 3, but I think I'm missing the cultural piece at the time. I know Jews were involved in the socialist movement a several decades prior, and that may have carried over into their involvement as well

**Rachel Myers:** I wouldn't say "primarily" by the holocaust but many had direct familial connections to the injustices in Europe

**We then read two excerpts from primary source documents, one by Heather Booth and the other by Vicki Gabriner, both involved in Freedom Summer as young women. You can find them in the PowerPoint provided.**

**What values or experiences do Vicki and Heather identify as influential? Where/how did they learn those values?**

**Rachel Myers:** I like the "secular tradition"

**Elena Solomon:** Social justice, as a secular Jewish practice

**Beth Kander:** Personal identification/commitment to engage

**Malkie Schwartz:** Heather's experience as an outsider within the Jewish community is striking

**Alachua Haskins:** Social justice started in their families. Whether they knew it was a Jewish values or not, they both recognized that that was where it started. In their Jewish families.

**Beth Kander:** The ability to relate one situation to another (personal family history, Holocaust, etc); a commitment from a young age to take a stand against wrongs, whether impacting your "group" or another.

**Rachel Myers:** Yeah...jewish moms

**Malkie Schwartz:** self interest--a need to fulfill a promise to themselves

**We then went into two break-out sessions to discuss two different primary source documents: Rita Schwerner's CORE application and excerpts of interviews of Freedom Summer volunteers in Oxford, OH explaining why they are going south. We asked participants to think about which reasons in these documents are most resonant with you? Which sound like reasons you might decide to be a volunteer in Freedom Summer?**

#### **BREAK OUT GROUP 1:**

**Rachel Myers:** I think being a northern transplant here, the line from Rita's quote about the distorted accounts and getting a first hand account was really important then and still important today!

**Leah Oppenheimer:** I am with the white girl : not enough liberty, not enough beauty

**Alachua Haskins:** I agree with Rachel -- I made a note of that line too

**Rachel Myers:** and being able to report it back to Northern Jews

**Elena Solomon:** I think the "negro boy"'s quote about open hate being preferable to hypocrisy - that resonates with me.

**Malkie Schwartz:** a broad sense of "we"--not separate from other humans and a recognition that none of what was going on--North/South --we are a part of it all.

**Rachel Myers:** That last part about "keeping silent" is reminiscent of the American reponse during WWII

**Elena Solomon:** And definitely the last white boy's statement about keeping silent.

**Malkie Schwartz:** involved for my own freedom--destinies tied together

**Alachua Haskins:** I think the "Southern white boy"'s quote is very honest.

**Elena Solomon:** The question is, and perhaps you'll get to this later on, but what happened between then and now? Why don't mainstream Jews consider social and racial justice as part of our need to connect with the world?

**Leah Oppenheimer:** yes we don't have to go South anymore- look on TV down the block, anywhere-

**Leah Oppenheimer:** Racism is structural

**Elena Solomon:** Yes, I agree that we've come a long way since our immigrant days and that Tikkun Olam versus racial justice is very different.

**Malkie Schwartz:** I think Elana's question can be posed to young students as well

**Rachel Myers:** It's a big question, I think now we have more to lose. The reason students were so instrumental to the Civil Rights Movement is because they didn't have business/families like adults

**Rachel Myers:** I think young people are more burdened today

**Elena Solomon:** Interesting first comment, but - are young people more burdened? In what way? I'm not sure I agree.

**Leah Oppenheimer:** My students are totally disidentified from the social "other".

**Rachel Myers:** It's just a thought, a little less free spirit

**Leah Oppenheimer:** Yes I totally agree- but engaging them is very difficult.

**Elena Solomon:** Yes! :)

**Elena Solomon:** Etta - interesting point. I like that a lot.

## **BREAK OUT GROUP 2:**

**Kate Koester:** The reasons that resonant most to me are: -  
need to be active and not passive (Rita)-  
I couldn't not have come (SWB).-  
Can't keep silent when facing atrocities (WB)

**Kate Koester:** I would have loved to and been totally scared at the same time

**Beth Kander:** Recognizing we all have a responsibility; calling attention to the wrongs more pronounced in the South but present too in the North; ensuring no more children (or adults) are murdered

**Kate Koester:** I have been reading "Letters from Mississippi" and the students really felt like they were going to do this work and would likely die as a result.

**Beth Kander:** I think I would have participated in Freedom Summer - but it's a very complicated question, especially for Jews living IN the South. Northern Jews got to take a stand, and then (assuming they were not assaulted or incarcerated) go home; Jews in the South had to deal with daily reality/retaliation.

**Beth Kander:** I wonder if people went down with their friends? What did their parents say? Those are things I'd be thinking about as a student...

**Beth Kander:** If we don't hang together, we shall most assuredly hang separately... or something like that.. good job, Miriam:)

**Kate Koester:** Any information about the trainers in Ohio?

**We then listened to an excerpt of Freedom Summer activist Vicki Grabriner. She describes being in a church while another group is waiting outside. These two groups were divided by color, space, and values. With which community do you think Vicki most identifies? What does she have in common with each of the two communities? What do you think were some**

**things that were important in connecting people and forming communities during the Civil Rights movement?**

**Rachel Myers:** Idealistically- the group inside the church. Racially- outside

**Kate Koester:** She seems to feel more connected to people in the church.

**Alachua Haskins:** I think it's interesting that she described the people outside as the "white people." She obviously feels so separate from them, so ideologically in a different place

**Beth Kander:** The shared struggle united them

**Elena Solomon:** The people in the church - especially as a Jew, and how powerful the church community affected her.

**Leah Oppenheimer:** She identifies with the community of struggle.

**We then read and responded to a letter by a young woman named Sylvie who went to Oxford, OH to be trained as a volunteer during Freedom Summer. In the letter, she tells her family her fears and frustrations of working in the South during this tumultuous time.**

**Etta King:**

<http://linoit.com/users/jwaeducation/canvases/Voices%20of%20Freedom%20Summer>

**Rachel Myers:** we respond as her dad?

**Elena Solomon:** I'm also wondering this.

**Etta King:** Yes.

**Elena Solomon:** It might be more helpful to know more about her Dad to think of how he would react - not sure if you have that information.

**Elena Solomon:** I see. Very interesting - thanks.

**Kate Koester:** Thank you for this! I was thinking that these might be good lessons in incorporate in Feb for Black History month and/or during Pesach to talk about Freedom.

**Malkie Schwartz:** appropriate for all ages--thanks for putting it together!

**Beth Kander:** Great resource. If we can be of help with info from ISJL/on the ground in MS, let us know

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** <http://jwa.org/teach/livingthelegacy>

**Etta King:** <http://jwa.org/teach/profdev/meetups>

**Miriam Cantor-Stone:** Thank you all so much for coming!

**Alachua Haskins:** Thank you!!!!

**Elena Solomon:** Thanks so much for your time! Wonderful lesson.

**Beth Kander:** Thanks!

**Kate Koester:** Thank you!