### History Lessons in Hattiesburg

#### — [Sandra Adickes](http://www.crmvet.org/vet/adickes.htm)

On August 14, 1964, after a six-week Freedom School session in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, I escorted six black students: Curtis Duckworth, Gwendolyn Merritt, Carolyn and Diane Moncure, Lavon Reed, and Jimmella Stokes to the Hattiesburg Public Library; there an **irate** librarian denied their request for library cards and summoned the police chief who came to close the library.

*What do you think* ***irate*** *means? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

We then went to have lunch at the Kress store, but when a waitress told us she had to serve "the colored, but not the whites who come in with them," we left. The police car that had been following us stopped; an officer got out arrested me, and took me to the Hattiesburg jail. Subsequent **litigation** (*the process of taking legal action*) against Kress for denying me my rights and conspiring in my arrest led to a 1970 Supreme Court decision, *Adickes v. Kress*, in my favor.

In the years since, I have corresponded with people in Hattiesburg and returned there several times. In October, 1999, I went there at the invitation of Dr. Bobs Tusa, archivist at the McCain Library of the University of Southern Mississippi, who has gathered a sizable collection of material about Freedom Summer from former civil rights volunteers and local activists. Dr. Tusa arranged for me to speak to Dr. Neil McMillen's African- American history class and to a meeting of the Mississippi Library Association, whose members, she assured me, had much to learn about Freedom Summer.

*When the author says ‘Freedom Summer’, they’re referring to what incident? (Hint: The incidents she just discussed; there are two.)*

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With the help of activist Peggy Jean Connor, Dr. Tusa also contacted some of the former freedom school students (including four who had gone to the library: Jimmella Stokes Jackson, Carolyn Moncure Mojgani, Diane Moncure Sutton, and Lavon Reed Trotter) and local activists for a reunion luncheon. As I listened to them reminisce about protests and jailings, I realized that these former students and the activists who had been their models were far more valuable than I as presenters to college students and librarians. I "assigned" them to tell something of the "bad old days," and in Professor McMillen's class--divided evenly between black and white students--I acted as moderator while the former students and their elders taught a modern history lesson.

Willie Clark remembered being refused a hamburger at the counter of a white-owned restaurant. An "old white lady" with decent instincts protested, "He's just a baby," and the owner's still hurting reply was, "He's still a nigger."

*What conflict do we see in this last paragraph?*

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Dr. Anthony Harris, now executive assistant to MSU's president, recalled that as a child in 1965, he had **picketed** the courthouse with his brother and a friend in violation of a law prohibiting anyone under eighteen from protesting at public buildings. The police hauled them into a squad car, took them to the station house, and threatened to beat their "niggers' asses." At that moment, "a petite black woman," the Harris boys' mother, burst through the door, demanding her sons. "The police officers," said Anthony Harris, "did what we did when she raised her voice," and let the boys go.

His mother, now Mrs. Daisy Harris Wade, told the students they were blessed because the bad times she and her family had known were over, but resentment over past cruelty still burned. "They murdered Clyde Kennard," she charged.

*One of the Freedom Summer students’ moms said ‘resentment over past cruelty still burned’. What does she mean by this? What is she trying to say?*

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In *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, John Dittmer writes that Clyde Kennard, a Chicago in the late fifties when, because of his stepfather's poor health, he returned to Mississippi to run his family's farm. He then attempted several times to enroll at the all-white Mississippi Southern College (now USM); the president, William D. McCain, befriended Kennard and won his trust, but never admitted him to the college. Kennard's efforts to get a college degree in a white institution attracted the attention of the State Sovereignty Commission (a secret police force created by the Mississippi state legislature in 1956), whose agent Zack Van Landingham directed a dirty-tricks campaign against Kennard that included recruiting compliant black leaders to dissuade Kennard from applying to Mississippi Southern. When Kennard remained determined, he was framed for the theft of twenty-five dollars worth of chicken feed. At his trial, a jury took ten minutes to convict him, and the judge sentenced him to seven years in Parchman Penitentiary.

In 1962, Kennard was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery at the University of Mississippi Hospital in Jackson. The hospital staff recommended parole, but Kennard was returned to Parchman. Hattiesburg business leaders, Vernon Dahmer, J. C. Fairley, and Victoria Gray, struggled for Kennard's freedom. At Tougaloo College, Joyce Ladner organized a student demand for Kennard's release. *Jet* magazine picked up the story, and national leaders including Martin Luther King and Dick Gregory demanded that Kennard be set free. Fearing the unfavorable publicity that would follow Kennard's death in Parchman, Governor Ross Barnett ordered Kennard's release in the spring of 1963. It came too late. Kennard went for further surgery to Chicago, where he died at age thirty-six on July 4, 1963.

*In one sentence, summarize what happened to Clyde Kennard.*

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When the students were invited to speak, one young black woman said, "I thought I got to college all by myself, but now I realize I have been walking on your backs."

The next day, we addressed thirty members of the Mississippi Library Association, covering the same information we had shared with the students, with the addition, of course, of an account of the effort to integrate the old Hattiesburg public library (which has now been replaced by a grand new structure that serves all citizens and has a young black librarian, Alisa St. Amant, on staff). Again, we heard a memorable comment. One of the white librarians, a Hattiesburg native about the same age as the Freedom School alumnae, said that had she known about their struggles, she would have joined them. Then she said, "I'm sorry." Great-hearted Jimmella immediately responded, "It's all right. We knew you didn't understand."

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1. What was the author’s purpose in writing this article?

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1. This article was mainly focused on the past; it focused on things that happened during Jim Crowe era to a specific group of people. What evidence can you find in the text that supports the fact that this author was focused on past events?

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1. How could this article have been strengthened by using future elements?

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