

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
April 8, 2014

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Freedom Summer Will Reunite Activists of Diverse Backgrounds

Jackson, MS – Fifty years ago, Larry Rubin, a Jewish man from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was fighting for civil rights in the Deep South.

“I was a SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] organizer off and on between 1961 and ’65, first in Georgia and then in Mississippi,” Rubin recalls. “It never occurred to me not to work in the Movement. My parents transmitted to me their belief that by definition, what a *mensch* does is fight for justice.”

Mensch is the Yiddish word meaning “a good person.” Larry Rubin is one of many *mensch*es, Jewish, Christian, black, white, male, female, Southern and Northern, who fought for change in the sixties—and who will be returning to Mississippi this June to commemorate 50 years since Freedom Summer.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer 50th Anniversary event will reunite activists of diverse backgrounds, and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is organizing a special program for Jewish activists who played a role in the Movement and contemporary Jewish activists who want to make a difference in the ongoing work of civil rights.

From **June 25-29, 2014, at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi**, activists, elected officials, students, scholars, and veterans of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer will gather to mark Freedom Summer’s 50th anniversary. Events will commemorate the achievements – and shortcomings -- of Freedom Summer, but as activists, Freedom Summer volunteers are people who generally look forward, not backward. This will not be a typical commemoration, but a launching pad for social action focused on four closely-related issue areas: Education, Workers Rights, Healthcare, and Voting Rights within Mississippi and the nation.

The ISJL is collaborating with national Jewish organizations committed to social justice. The organizations will offer programming to honor the legacy of Jewish volunteers, who played a historically significant role in the Movement, with a contemporary Jewish presence.

“The history of Freedom Summer inspired Malkie and me to offer programming that will give participants an authentic experience in the state in which the campaign occurred, exchange ideas with local and national activists, and most importantly show that Jewish activism is still alive and well, not just a story from 50 years ago,” say ISJL staff member Rachel Myers.

“We're excited that Bend the Arc is participating in the commemoration of Freedom Summer and the role of Jewish activists in the Civil Rights movement,” says Stosh Cotler, CEO of Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice, a New York based organization. “The hard-won victories from that summer-including the Voting Rights Act- are in jeopardy today, making it meaningful and even urgent for all of us to come together, learn, and continue the vital work of protecting the right to vote. It is especially poignant to gather together in Mississippi, where Freedom Summer culminated.”

While in Mississippi, Jewish social justice advocates will have the opportunity to learn from veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and fellow advocates about the work that lies ahead. Programming will provide the space for people to learn about Jewish activism during Freedom Summer and the work of Southern Jewish communities today. The experience will include learning, networking and collective action.

“This event will commemorate Freedom Summer by discussing tactics and strategies for meeting today’s injustices,” Larry Rubin says. “Economic inequality is greater today than it was in 1964. Voter suppression laws are rampant. The Freedom Summer 50th is planned to be a watershed event in planning for the ongoing civil rights struggle ahead, and I hope Jews and all other activists will attend this important gathering.”

For additional information or to schedule an interview with the ISJL staff and Mississippi co-coordinators of this project, Rachel Myers, Museum Project Coordinator and Malkie Schwartz, Director of Community Engagement, please call 601-362-6357. Also find updates to the schedule on our website- http://www.isjl.org/museum/freedom_summer50th.html

For more information about the Freedom Summer 50th conference visit: <http://www.msfreedomsummer50th.com>

*Later this year, October 19th-26th, young Jews interested in the South and Civil Rights will have another opportunity to visit this part of the country through **TENT**, a week long traveling seminar hosted by the ISJL in partnership with the Yiddish Book Center. More information here <http://www.tentsite.org/2014/south>*

Draft schedule of Jewish summit programming included as additional page in this press release file.

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Draft Schedule of Jewish Programming*

as of 3/31/2014

Thursday June 26th 2014

7:00	<u>Gathering Dinner</u> This will be a chance for Jewish participants to get to know each other. Organizations will have a chance to share about their current social justice work.
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Friday June 27th 2014

12:00-1:00	<u>Lunch and Learn at the ISJL Office</u>
5:00	<u>Shabbat Service and Community Discussion at Beth Israel Congregation</u> Celebrate Shabbat with local Jewish community members. We will facilitate a conversation between scholars, veterans, and Jewish social justice professionals about the experience of being an “outsider” when working within diverse communities

Saturday June 28th 2014

9:00-10:30	<u>Breakfast Discussion</u> Discuss current initiatives being led in Mississippi and exchange ideas about similar work going on across the nation
10:30-12:00	<u>Tour of Jackson</u>
2:15-3:30	<u>Session #4</u> Topic may be determined themes of interest from participating organizations or veterans
4:30-6:00	<u>Call to Action</u> Final meeting where participants will reflect on the weekend and make plans for how to move forward.

* These activities will be open to all conference participants and are planned to complement the main workshops at [Mississippi Freedom Summer 50th](#).

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