This lesson plan is designed to help students explore *SAH Archipedia Classic Buildings*, a publicly accessible website that will feature more than 100 of Mississippi's most significant buildings. Students will learn about the architectural style of courthouses that were related to the murders of Emmett Till and three civil rights workers; students will also compare and contrast the consequences of violent and nonviolent protest.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON PLAN**

**PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

Students will understand and articulate the national historic significance of the courthouse squares in Tallahatchie and Neshoba counties, Mississippi, in relation to the civil rights era. Students will develop and practice reading and writing skills required by the Common Core State Standards.

**For the Teacher**

Communities across our country have many homes, public buildings, and other historic places that can help us understand the cultural, social, economic, and political history of our states, regions, and nation. In essence, places can tell us the stories of our people if we work to understand the “language” in which those lessons are conveyed.

These vital repositories of the history or prehistory come in many shapes: American Indian mounds that suggest the story of indigenous North American peoples; colonial structures that relate the early struggles of European settlement and then independence; classical mansions of the antebellum period that suggest the wealth and politics of “King Cotton” as well as the tragic institution of slavery; wooden dogtrot houses or barns that convey a sense of the yeoman farmer; sharecropper cabins that help relate the continuing influence of agriculture as well as the development of unique cultural contributions like the blues; cotton gins, grain elevators, schools, railroad depots, covered bridges, factory buildings, warehouses, military facilities, and numerous other structures suggest developments in transportation, education, industry, and government that have greatly impacted Americans—the possibilities are nearly limitless.

This lesson will help students understand that our buildings and other places can help us appreciate the rich, and often challenging, history of our nation. As students study the courthouse squares in Tallahatchie and Neshoba counties they will understand the architecture of the spaces as well as the civil rights lessons that the buildings help relate. Students will ultimately be empowered to see their home communities through new eyes—eyes with a greater ability to understand the stories behind our local built environments.

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Background

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in educational facilities violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Much earlier, in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896, the Supreme Court had determined that the equal protection clause was not violated as long as equal conditions were provided to both blacks and whites. The Brown decision overturned that “separate but equal” standard. Although it applied specifically to public schools, the Brown decision also implied that other segregated facilities were unconstitutional and dealt a heavy blow to white supremacist policies in the segregated South.

Across the South, many white Southerners turned to “massive resistance”—resorting to violent means—to negate the Supreme Court’s ruling. The Ku Klux Klan, which was founded not long after the Civil War, experienced a resurgence. White supremacist groups like the White Citizens Council were formed. Often referred to as the “country club Klan” by its critics, the White Citizens Council included judges, legislators, governors, and other high-ranking elected officials who officially denounced violence while promoting stringent economic and social retaliation against civil rights supporters. State governments created “state sovereignty commissions” which were funded by state tax dollars and worked to prevent civil rights activism and legislation. And local individuals took the stance that they would fight to preserve the segregated “Southern way of life” by any means necessary.

The violence that followed “massive resistance” is evident in two nationally prominent events that occurred around or in courthouses in the state of Mississippi: the 1955 Emmett Till murder trial took place in the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi, and events preceding the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers took place in and near the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Background information for the Emmett Till murder trial

During the summer of 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year old African American youth from Chicago, was visiting relatives in the Mississippi delta. On August 24, after a day of working in his uncle’s cotton field, Till and several others went to the nearby small town of Money, Mississippi, where Roy Bryant and his wife, Carolyn, both white, operated a small store. Exactly what occurred in the store is uncertain, but Carolyn Bryant claimed that Till was “fresh” with her—a behavior black men were strictly forbidden from displaying to white women in the Mississippi of the 1950s.

Roy Bryant learned of the events at his store after returning home from an out of town trip. Bryant recruited his half-brother, J.W. Milam—and likely others, according to the later FBI investigation—to punish Till and enforce the racial status quo of the Mississippi delta.

Early in the morning of August 28, 1955, Bryant, Milam, and unidentified others drove to the home of Emmett Till’s uncle, Mose Wright, where Till was staying. Till was abducted and never seen alive again. Initially, Bryant and Milam claimed they wanted to scare Till to teach him a lesson, and that they had released him unharmed.

Bryant and Milam were arrested for kidnapping but authorities in LeFlore County declined to prosecute them. Tallahatchie County, where the Till’s body was found, charged Bryant and Milam with first-degree murder instead. Emmett Till’s badly decomposed body had been recovered from the Tallahatchie River on August 31. Mose Wright identified the body by a ring inscribed with the initials of Emmett’s deceased father, Louis Till. The young man had been severely beaten, shot in the head, and bound in barbed wire before being dumped in the river with the large metal fan from a cotton gin tied around his neck.

Till’s body was shipped to Chicago where his mother, Mamie Bradley, decided on a funeral with an open coffin. Thousands of people viewed Till’s mutilated remains during the visitation; millions more saw photographs of his tortured body in Jet magazine.

The trial of the accused killers began on September 19, 1955, in the Tallahatchie County Second District Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi. Over 100 journalists were in attendance, and the details of the trial made headlines in newspapers across the country as well as in some foreign countries. Major television networks flew film to New York each night for broadcast.

Although some eye witnesses testified, and Mose Wright identified Milam and Bryant as the men who kidnapped Till from his home, the all-male, all-white jury only took 67 minutes to return a “not guilty” verdict.
Many historians cite the Emmett Till murder and trial as the catalyst for the modern civil rights era. The verdict received international coverage, and the story inspired poets and songwriters to produce works about the case. Many who became active in the civil rights movement recount being inspired to action by Till’s death.

Additional background information on the Emmett Till murder and trial can be found at websites listed in the Internet Resources section below.

**Background information for the Neshoba County civil rights murders**

Nearly nine years after the Emmett Till murder and trial, “massive resistance” continued in many areas of the South despite consistent court rulings and executive actions to protect the rights of African Americans.

The struggle for civil rights continued in Mississippi, and in 1964, the murders of three civil rights activists—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—brought attention once again to the need for progress. These brutal killings by members of the Ku Klux Klan forced the federal government to aggressively pursue the Klan, helped solidify broad public support for the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts in Congress, strengthened the resolve of blacks to fight for their rights as citizens, and proved to the white elite that violent resistance was counterproductive.

By the summer of 1964, racial tension seemed to be boiling over in Mississippi:

- In 1961, Freedom Rides and sit-ins brought activists into the state, resulting in bitter and often violent confrontations.
- In the fall of 1962, the University of Mississippi, known as Ole Miss, was forcibly integrated, leading to a bloody campus riot.
- In June 1963, Medgar Evers, Mississippi’s first National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) field secretary and a leader of nonviolent protests throughout the state, was assassinated at his home in Jackson.
- In 1964, state authorities braced themselves for Freedom Summer, several months when numerous civil rights activists, mostly white college students from the North, would arrive to run voter registration and education projects highlighting racial discrimination across Mississippi.

As these events unfolded Mississippi’s Ku Klux Klan gained strength. In Neshoba County, a group of men, apparently led by local preacher and sawmill owner Edgar Ray Killen, began to meet and re-form the Klan in that county. Killen was also instrumental in recruiting members from Lauderdale County, which included nearby Meridian, for a chapter there.

Killen’s violent plans focused on Mickey Schwerner, a 24-year-old New Yorker, who, along with his wife Rita, had been sent by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to Meridian in January 1964 to begin educating local blacks on their civil rights, specifically their right to vote. Schwerner quickly began making trips to black communities in the area to set up Freedom Schools, where African Americans would be taught how to register to vote and instructed in their other rights as citizens.

In April 1964, Schwerner and James Chaney, a 21-year-old African American from Lauderdale County, visited Mount Zion Methodist Church seven miles east of Philadelphia, Mississippi. They planned to set up a Freedom School there later in the summer. On June 16, the Neshoba County and Lauderdale County Klan chapters brutally attacked leaders of Mount Zion Methodist and set the church on fire.

On June 21, 1964, Schwerner, Chaney, and another young white New Yorker named Andy Goodman—a Freedom Summer volunteer who had arrived in Meridian the day before—visited Mount Zion to investigate the damage and offer support to the victims.

Leaving Mount Zion so they could be back in Meridian by four p.m., the group turned west onto Highway 16 heading into Philadelphia so they could intersect Highway 19 to Meridian. As they drove toward Philadelphia, Cecil Price, a Neshoba County Sheriff Deputy and Ku Klux Klan member, spotted the car. Price recognized it as a CORE vehicle and turned around to pursue it. He caught up with the young men just at the Philadelphia city limits when one of their tires blew out in front of First Methodist Church. Price waited for Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney to change the tire and then arrested them, with the assistance of two state highway patrolmen.
Around four p.m. the group drove up Beacon Street, probably turning left on Center Avenue, then right onto Myrtle Street, where the men were booked into the Neshoba County Jail on charges of speeding.

According to testimony, none of the men was allowed a phone call. And Price delayed the process of releasing the men as long as possible to get word to the Klan that he had three of their most wanted targets in his jail.

While Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman waited in the jail, according to later testimony, Preacher Killen, after hearing from Price, drove down to Meridian to gather a group from the Klan chapter there. Eventually Killen’s group included seven Lauderdale County Klansmen plus Klansmen from the Neshoba chapter who met them on the north side of the square. One of the men, James Jordan, later stated in his confession: “Reverend Killen came from around the corner, told us that he would take us by and show us the jail and then we would be told where to wait until they were released. He got in the car and we drove around the jail and then he took us to the spot we were supposed to wait.” According to some testimony, not all of the men understood at this point that the purpose of this meeting was to kill the civil rights workers; some expected that they would beat up the men to scare them.

By ten p.m., the men were in place. Klan members were waiting south of town on Highway 19 for the civil rights workers to be released, after which the Klansmen intended to chase them down and kill them.

Deputy Price then came back to the jail and told Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney that they could post bond and go.

As the civil rights workers drove past, three cars of Klansmen drove off to catch them before they reached the county line. After a high-speed chase, Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman were taken to a dirt road near Highway 19. There the three men were each gunned down. Their bodies were taken to a farm southwest of Philadelphia, past the Neshoba County Fairgrounds, where a pond was in the process of the being built. They were buried in the middle of the dam that was under construction, and to sidetrack investigators, their car was taken northeast of Philadelphia and burned.

The story of the missing civil rights workers grew slowly in the national consciousness. Soon reporters began to arrive in Philadelphia looking for answers, especially after the Tuesday when their burned-out car was discovered. Many local people speculated that the whole matter, including the burning of Mount Zion Methodist Church, was an elaborate hoax, perpetrated by the black community and CORE to gain sympathy from the nation for their cause. As proof that the men had burned their own car and then gotten out of the county, these people pointed to the fact that no bodies had been recovered.

While white Mississipians were in a state of denial, the rest of the nation grew more aware of the violence of racial hatred in the South. It was not until August 4, over six weeks after the civil rights workers’ disappearance, that an unknown informant led the FBI to where the bodies of the three men were buried in the earthen dam.

The FBI’s investigation of the murders, once the bodies were finally found, continued to be hampered by the close-knit society of the city of Philadelphia as well as Neshoba County. The Neshoba County courthouse square remained the center of activity, both for local Klansmen and for the FBI. Klansmen enforced the local code of silence. However, the FBI’s case proceeded slowly forward and 19 men, including Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Price, were arrested in December 1964. The trial was scheduled for a federal court in Meridian, and the men were charged with violating the civil rights of Schwerner, Chancy, and Goodman. (Murder, at that time, could not be tried in a federal court unless committed on federal property.)

The federal civil rights trial ended in October 1967 when seven of the 13 defendants were found guilty of violating the civil rights of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney.

During the trial, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led two marches in Philadelphia to commemorate the sacrifice of the three civil rights workers. In both cases, the peaceful marchers were met with violent attacks.

The significance of the events in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in the years from 1964 to 1966, is hard to categorize briefly. The nation clearly saw the evil of white supremacy. These tragedies spurred many citizens to support civil rights action, and changes in race relations slowly moved across the country. One result of these changes can be found in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Additional background information on the Neshoba County civil rights murders can be found at websites listed in the Internet Resources section below.
Opening the Lesson

The label “historic” is applied to many things, from Greek temples to baseball cards. As discussed in the lesson Centers of the Storm: The Lyceum and the Circle at the University of Mississippi, when it comes to buildings, it can be safely said that most are built with a fairly specific use in mind. These buildings may be beautiful, or they may be ugly, but as long as they serve their specific function some people don’t give much thought to the building itself. However, because buildings are designed with an end-use in mind they can relate a great deal about the culture, economics, and politics of the period when the building was used. Buildings can be great teachers of history.

It is important that citizens be able to recognize different building types and their uses so they can be effective advocates for a positive built environment.

On the board, write the following question: “What types of buildings make up a town?” Ask students working individually or in small groups to reflect seriously on this question and write as many answers as they can. Have students share their ideas with the rest of the class and generate a class list answering the question.

When students have generated the class list, explain that courthouses are central to law enforcement as well as to upholding justice and order in communities across our country.
Developing the Lesson

A. Critical Thinking and Interpreting Information

Without identifying the buildings for students, project images of the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi, and the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi (or share websites with each student in a digital classroom).
Ask students to identify which building on their class list of town buildings each of these images would most likely represent.

Once some student speculation has taken place and it is established these are courthouses, project images of: (1) Emmett Till and his mother, followed by an image of a New York, New York, rally protesting Till’s murder (both are available online at the Library of Congress website: http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civilrights/cr-exhibit.html); and (2) the FBI missing persons poster of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner (also available online at http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2009/01/20090106143104jmnamdeirf5.683535e-02.html#axzz2Yl2GGSci).

Explain that these images are connected to the courthouses and ask students to identify some of the details they see in these photographs. Then ask students to continue speculating on how the courthouses may have contributed to the subject of each photograph.

Student speculation is likely to move from “the building is where those things happened” toward “the courthouse is where a trial took place.” (Students may know some details of the two cases.) This transition in students’ critical thinking offers a great opportunity to reemphasize the criteria for National Register status highlighted in Lesson One, and to reemphasize the point that buildings harbor our history.

After students have shared their ideas explain that the courthouses are the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi, where the 1955 Emmett Till murder trial took place, and the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where activity centered in 1964 while the FBI investigated the murder of three civil rights workers. Taking students’ level into account, either explain the events connected with the sites or have students read an overview of the events. Teachers might use the Background section above or encourage students to find websites with additional information.

Architectural Note on Symbolism

The Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi, is in the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture. Leaning heavily on medieval architectural forms, Richardsonian Romanesque was a celebration of American industrial progress through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The style symbolized full participation in the industrial age when it was built in the first decade of the 20th century.

The Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi, exemplifies the Classical Revival style of the early 20th century, which returned to the classical forms of Greece and Rome after more picturesque and decorative styles of the late 1800s. Built in 1928, the courthouse symbolizes a modern building, built during prosperous times, in an architectural style that reminded white Mississippian of the racial status quo in place since the 19th century.

Both the Tallahatchie County and Neshoba County Courthouse lawns feature a Confederate monument. This type of statue was typically erected in the late 19th and early 20th century, but during the civil rights era Confederate monuments often served as important symbols of the racial status quo that civil rights activists sought to overturn and segregationists sought to defend.
B. Listening, Speaking, and Writing Activities

During the era of legal racial segregation, the freedoms of many American citizens were limited due to racism. The Emmett Till murder and the Neshoba County civil rights murders illustrate how some people employed violence to eliminate the freedoms of other citizens because they disagreed with the victims, or viewed the victims through a lens defined by race. Students introduced to these injustices can learn to identify other injustices and to consider effective, peaceful means for addressing their concerns.

1. Have students read two FBI news releases:

2. After reading the two articles, have students respond in writing to the question, “What effect was violence intended to have in the 1955 and 1964 murder cases?” Discuss student responses.


5. After reading Austin’s article students should complete the On Violence and Nonviolence worksheet. Assess student work.

VARIATION: Have students watch the documentary series Eyes on the Prize, specifically the episodes “Awakenings” and “Mississippi: Is This America?” Students can complete the worksheet after, or as they view, the documentary.

5. Have students choose one of the murder cases and, in groups, research and develop a presentation that explores the role of violence or nonviolence in the case. The presentations should utilize student research along with images from SAH Archipedia Classic Buildings and other online sources. The presentations could take the format the teacher feels most appropriate for his or her classroom, including poster projects, computer presentations, slideshows, or dramatic presentations/mini-plays. Assess student work.
Infusing Technology in the Lesson

• The teacher might utilize free online discussion software such as TodaysMeet.com to solicit student responses for class questions. (For http://TodaysMeet.com/: (1) create a room at the site and have students join it; (2) post the question, “What types of buildings make up a town?”; and (3) allow students time to respond to your query in the program—responses are shared instantly with all members of your “room” and can be projected or shared in front of the class in real time.)

• The teacher might utilize a classroom blog with software from Edublogs.com to address the question, “What types of buildings make up a town?” and solicit the student responses. (For http://edublogs.org/: (1) follow the “get your free blog now” link to register and create your free classroom blog and (2) follow directions for sharing the blog with your students.)

• The teacher might utilize the Historic Preservation Curriculum of the Mississippi Heritage Trust lesson “How Buildings Are Used” as part of an expanded introduction to this lesson. The curriculum is available online at: http://www.mississippiheritage.com/curriculum.html

• The teacher might utilize Google Docs as a digital means for students to complete worksheets by: (1) saving the On Violence and Nonviolence worksheet as a Google Doc, allowing students to complete and edit it in pairs or small groups, or (2) saving the worksheet as a Google Form, then asking students to complete the form individually. (For more information on using Google Apps in the classroom, see: http://www.google.com/drive/apps.html.)

• Technology-based presentation possibilities might include student-created and edited video presentations, PowerPoint presentations, online Prezi presentations (more information available at: www.prezi.com), or digital poster projects such as Glogster presentations (more information available at: www.edu.glogster.com/).

Extending the Lesson

The possible extensions are limited only by the desire, time, creativity, and imagination of students and teachers. Some possibilities include:

• Students could take a field trip to an area courthouse, research important events that may have taken place at the site, and compare events in the area to those at the Tallahatchie County and Neshoba County courthouses in Mississippi.

• Students could take a field trip to a museum featuring exhibits related to the civil rights era and explore how the events in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, and Neshoba County, Mississippi, fit into the larger historic context of the 1960s.

• Students could research and create photographic collages of events related to the civil rights era in the United States.

• Students could research and collect oral histories from area participants in civil rights activities, or relatives of these people.

• Students could prepare a program for other students relaying historical events from the civil rights era.

• Teachers and students could invite members of the community who experienced the civil rights era in the local community to speak with the class. If technology is available, teachers and students could video record interviews for future use.

• Students could research Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in their local area or in their state, then explore the significance of the style, and identify which buildings reflect Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic details.

• Students could research Classical Revival architecture in their local area or in their state, then explore the significance of the style, and identify which buildings reflect Classical Revival stylistic details.

• Teachers and students could invite a local architect or architectural historian to speak with the class about significant architectural styles found in their community and what symbolism might be attached to those buildings.

• Students could research civil rights era court cases in their community.
Internet Resources


Civil Rights Documentation Project, The University of Southern Mississippi, last updated August 1, 2005, http://www.usm.edu/crdp/


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On Violence and Nonviolence

READING


Answer the following using complete sentences:

1. How was violence used during the civil rights era in Mississippi? Who used violence? What did they hope to achieve?

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_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. How was nonviolence used during the civil rights era in Mississippi? Who used nonviolence? What did they hope to achieve?

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3. What were some of the effects of the violence and nonviolence employed in Mississippi during the civil rights era?

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WRITING

1. Explain a problem you see in society today that you feel should be addressed or corrected.

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2. Explain how you could peacefully work to make positive changes happen toward the problem you have identified.

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