

Viewing Guide

Mississippi ReMixed

A fresh look at race relations in the Deep South



Myra Williams Ottewell
Producer/Director
Ottewell Media, Ltd.
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With grateful appreciation to Vickie Malone of McComb, MS and to School District #36 (Surrey, BC) colleagues: Pat Anderson, June Demcheson, Dorothea Geddert, Grace McGuinness,, Peter Bonell, Carl Beach and Julia Poole for their valuable contributions.

In association with Mississippi Public Broadcasting

www.mississippiremixed.com

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The documentary format:

“Mississippi ReMixed” tells the personal story of Myra Williams Ottewell who returns to her birthplace of Jackson, Mississippi, tired of stereotypical media portrayals about her state, and determined to celebrate the great racial transformations taking place since the 1960s – but in doing so finds she must confront her own family’s past. This is a point of view (P.O.V.) documentary. It is not a definitive look at all aspects of race relations, but rather the recollections and experiences of Myra Williams Ottewell as she talked with old friends, researched Mississippi’s history, participated in commemorative events, and interviewed various Mississippians over a period of six years.



The outline:

The documentary is broken into five acts. **Act One** identifies the motivation for the film and the beginning of Ottewell’s personal journey. **Act Two** illustrates the importance of understanding Mississippi history. **Act Three** examines the challenges Mississippians face in dealing with barriers to positive race relations that involve issues of class, as well as prejudice and discrimination.

Act Four shows the celebrations

and commemorations of the past, and features current examples of things that are being done to promote better race relations in the state. **Act Five** shows how Ottewell personally changed because of her new education, and the hopes she has for Mississippi.

Teachers and students, you are invited to send in your comments to the “Community” section of the web site, or send emails to

info@mississippiremixed.com

Suggestions for Teachers or Group Leaders

Before viewing **Mississippi ReMixed**, the teacher should conduct the following activities on perspectives with the students.

Activity: Exercise on historical perspective that begins from a common/neutral example of the American Revolution.

Purpose: to help students gain an understanding that the view of historical events change depending on one's perspective.

1. Ask the students to consider what they know about the American Revolution. Give them some time to consider the question, and allow them to give responses, popcorn style, about their knowledge of this historical event. These responses should be written on the board.
2. After this is exhausted, ask the students to consider the same historical event, but to view it from the perspective of students like themselves in Great Britain. After they have had a few moments to consider this, again have them respond with how the British student might view the same event.
3. Would it be called the American Revolution? If not, how might it be described in their textbooks?
4. Would their textbooks describe the Americans as “winners?”
5. Draw this activity to a close with having them take time to think about another event that is similar to the American Revolution. Have them offer these events, and record them on the board. Good examples might be:
 - a. The plight of the Native American
 - b. The Civil War
 - c. The Civil Rights Movement
6. At this juncture, the teacher can either go through the same process as with the American Revolution, or take the activity to a more rigorous level by assigning the students a written assignment, allowing them to do the same thing in a compare/contrast essay with the topic of their choice.
7. This activity on perspectives can be closed with a Socratic seminar-style discussion about how we learn history; i.e., that students usually learn about historical events from one perspective, which is usually the perspective of the person with the most power.
8. Ask them to consider how they might be different if they considered several different perspectives around major historical events. Once students begin to understand this, they read and listen to history a different way.
(by Vickie Malone of McComb, Mississippi)

Handout for Viewing

Mississippi ReMixed

Act 1: Motivation and Background:

1. Identify, in writing, each time you see a place in the film where Ms. Ottewell was viewing the world from a skewed, or protected perspective. Who or what helps to shape your views? In what ways are your views shaped by others?
2. What words would you use to describe Ms. Ottewell's relationship with African Americans she encountered? What words would you use to describe your relationship with people of other races, ethnicities or cultures?
3. How common do you think it was for young whites to perceive people of color from the perspective that they were inferior to whites? How common do you think it was for young blacks to think that they were not as smart as whites were? What are some stereotypical labels that are put on your racial/cultural/religious/ethnic group?
4. While many young whites learned to feel superior to their black cohorts in many ways, how do you think the black young people may have felt about the whites of their same age? In what ways do feelings of superiority or inferiority hinder relationships?
5. Why do you think that people of that time thought that blacks and whites could not have authentic relationships across racial lines? How do you separate authentic relationships with superficial ones?
6. After seeing the film, "Mississippi Burning", why did the students not believe Ms. Ottewell had warm, respectful, even loving, relationships with black Mississippians? The film, "Mississippi Burning" had two reviews written on the board in the classroom scene - one by Pauline Kale, of the New Yorker magazine and one by Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun Times. Kale said, "The only emotion I felt was hatred for the movie." Ebert said, "Mississippi Burning" is the best American film of 1988..." How do you account for such divergent opinions?



7. How did Ms. Ottewell and her friend describe their relationships with their housekeepers/caregivers? What was the problem in these relationships? Or, was there a problem in these relationships? Do you have any reason to think that employers and employees are able to have a personal relationship where both parties are considered equal? Is a "nanny's" relationship different from an "employee's" relationship with a family?

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8. In the scene where Ms. Ottewell recalls almost drinking from the “Colored” water fountain, can you recall what emotions she expressed? Are the emotions felt by Ms. Ottewell as a child the same emotions a black child of the same age may have expressed if they had gone to the “wrong” water fountain? Why or why not? Describe a racial or culturally unfamiliar situation where you were unsure of yourself?

9. Ms. Ottewell’s friend recalls interacting with black children when she went with her father to take their maid home.
- How did the black neighbors view this white child?
 - What did singing that song “Jesus loves the little children” (“red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight”) mean to her?
 - How does she view that time today?
 - What does it mean to be naive? Can you be naive “to a fault”?
 - Can you see any parallel between the following question and the culture of those days or of today: “Does a fish know it is wet?”



10. How realistic is it to think that young whites during the 1960s, would have been aware of the struggle of their black peers when there was such separation in their worlds? From what cultural/racial/ethnic/religious groups are you isolated? Some say that you should “stick with your own kind”. What do you think?

11. Why would Ms. Ottewell’s father not want her to continue in the Girl Scouts troop after the cross was burned in her leader’s yard? Were his reasons justified or legitimate? What would you have said if you were her father then? What would you say if the same thing happened today? What issues cause tension between parents and young people today? Do your friends comply with their parent’s wishes, rebel or pay “lip service” to their parents and do something behind their back?

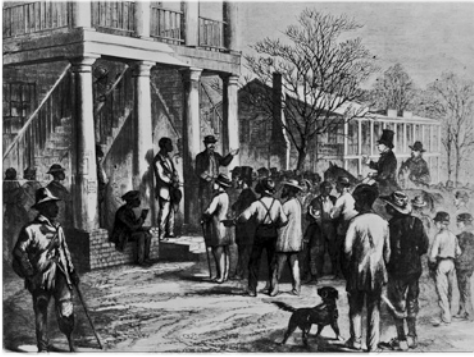


12. The black people that Ms. Ottewell and her parents interacted with were mostly maids, janitors or cooks. How would her view of black people have changed if she had been taught by a black teacher or knew a lawyer or businessperson who was black? What is the effect today of limited exposure to a different classes or racial or cultural groups?



13. What stereotypes are there about Mississippi and about the Civil Rights Movement today? Give examples of stereotypes that are held in your community?

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Act 2: Historical Background

1. What were the Black Codes? Start with the example that blacks couldn't own land. What is the legacy of slavery and the black codes even today? Were there similar laws about Native Americans in those days?

2. Describe how these phrases were used in the film. What do they mean in this film or in a segregated society? Are these phrases significant today? If so, in what way?

- a. ...a pebble in a pond...
 - b. ...there goes the neighborhood...
 - c. ...everyone knows his or her place...
- 3.** Ms. Ottewell mentions in her search for facts that she discovered some important film footage about the history of blacks in Jackson and in Mississippi “that never aired”.
- a. Why would these film clips or newsreels be kept from the public?
 - b. What would have happened at the time that the film was shot, had it been broadcast?
 - c. What historical events have been hidden in your community's past?
 - d. Why are some countries considering banning PDAs, like Blackberries?
- 4.** If the white students had been exposed to the sometime-shocking news of their city, would it have made a difference? What issues or concerns happening in our community today need to come to the “light of day”?
- 5.** In the film, black people were prevented from voting. What was the fear by white people, if black people were given the vote? Are there other controversies involved with voting today? If so, how many can you name?
- 6.** In the film, there were protests for blacks to have the right to eat at a lunch counter and the right to attend integrated schools. Have you ever encountered a situation where a person from any group was not served at a business or was reluctantly served because of his or her race/ethnicity/religion or culture? Is selecting a school to attend a “no brainer” today or are there considerations of race/culture/ethnicity/religion being used in that decision? Are these considerations positive, negative or neutral?
- 7.** Who was involved in the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission (an undercover agency designed to report on blacks and whites who transgressed the norms of the day) and what kinds of things did they do to keep black Mississippians “in



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their place”? Since overt discrimination is against the law, are there covert ways in which people today are discriminated against today?

8. What role did fear play in the lives of black and white Mississippians in the 1950s or 60s? What role does fear play in the lives of the people in your community today?
9. Why did people in the 1960s not want blacks or “outsiders” to enter their churches? What was the perceived fear? Are your religious communities open to all today? If you have a strong religious belief, can that belief be sustained apart from your parents? Do your religious beliefs cause you to separate from your school culture?

Act 3: Barriers to Positive Race Relations

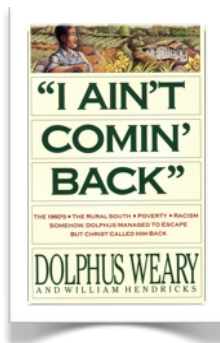
1. How did Carlton Turner say that inferiority in black young people is displayed today? Is it “cool” to be known for being “smart or a geek” today? Are our attitudes toward those who succeed in school any different than the black students who are being put down as “trying to be white” if they succeeded in school?

2. Donna Ladd talked about the importance of understanding history because it shapes the way we are. What is your reaction when you hear this:

“...just because someone loved their nanny doesn’t mean that they respected who they are as human beings or considered them equal to them.”

3. Can a person apologize for something that he or she did not do? How was Dick Molpus’ apology to the parents of the three young men killed in Philadelphia - Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner - received by Mississippians? How do you respond to Donna Ladd’s comments:

“...I think that the more people are willing to step up and say, ‘Look I’m sorry about what happened. Does that mean we live in a constant state of apology for the past? No. I don’t. But it doesn’t hurt me to say I’m sorry for what people who look like me did to people who look like you, and I’m sorry for the lasting legacies of that.’”



4. What is your response when you consider Dolphus Weary’s statement about Mission Mississippi’s goal:

“Mission Mississippi for example, does not necessarily push for integrated churches. What we push for is open churches. Every church needs to be open to anybody that God brings into that community and into that church. As they get to know each other, they can build strong, lasting relationships. That sort of encourages the black church to remain a church culturally, that they want, it causes the white church to remain culturally. But you’re not judging each other at a distance.”

5. Why did the media owners of the day - newspapers, TV stations - not report the demonstrations and the protests in the 1960s in

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Mississippi? Considering the use of the Internet and cell phones, is it possible for the media to cover up such a serious problem within a culture today? Is there a different threat to skewed media reporting today?

Act 4: Purposeful Acts for Positive Race Relations

1. James Meredith said, "That advice from an old man was the main reason he decided to do something about destroying white supremacy". What would happen to you if you truly believed Meredith's statement: "You can never keep thinking about anything without doing something about it."
2. What does the statue that was erected on the Campus of Ole Miss say about the University of Mississippi today? Do you know of any acts of reconciliation that involve physical markers or public monuments that have to do with past wrongs?
3. What role do commemorative events and ceremonies play in the lives of Mississippians?



Act 5: Conclusion

1. How did Ms. Ottewell's students change her life? Can you foresee that your questioning or challenging someone could lead to a life-changing experience for another person? How does that possibility make you consider your role as a student?
2. Who in your community is making a difference in human relations today?
3. Have you or have you ever known anyone who gave something of value to a person who made a difference in his or her life? If you were to give something of value, to whom would you give it and what would you give?
4. Has Mississippi come a long way? Has your community come a long way? List the changes in your parents and grandparent's lifetime with regard to race/cultural/ethnic/religious relations.
5. What, if any, advantages do Mississippians have in overcoming racial segregation that other communities may not have in working toward racial/cultural/ethnic/religious harmony?
6. What still needs to be done to make Mississippi a better place for all of its citizens? What still needs to be done to make your community or school a better place for all? What will you do?

