The Children Bob Moses Led

Study Guide

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NewSouth Books
Montgomery

Also by William Heath

The Walking Man (1994)

Blacksnake's Path: The True Adventures of William Wells (2008)

Devil Dancer (2013)

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Dramatizing What Matters

Understanding what it means to dramatize material is basic. Drama implies conflict, different characters having differing values and points of view. A good story dramatizes something that matters. Something important enough to merit the author's best effort and the reader's complete attention. What this comes down to is the fact that in most good stories characters disagree about basic values; they not only talk to each other, but they also talk back to each other, and through their differing ways of looking at the world and acting in the world and talking about their actions and perceptions the story dramatizes its themes. For a writer to dramatize well, he or she must try, in part, to share the differing values of the characters, giving them minds and emotions that are distinctly their own. In a sense, during the process of constructing the story, the writer needs to become schizophrenic, inhabiting several personalities and trying to give each character good lines, a memorable voice, and a creditable existence. This is to say that the writer must play fair and not load the dice or stack the deck; the drama of the story ought to determine which values emerge as better; the author should not impose his or her opinions directly, but rather let the drama unfold and find its appropriate ending and, in turn, allow readers to draw their own conclusions. Writers who are capable of honestly dramatizing their material will discover essential truths that had not occurred to them before they began to write. This process, sometimes called "creation as discovery," if done with total integrity and craft, can result in stories that achieve aesthetic success: stories that delight and instruct and provide wisdom about the ways of the world.

— William Heath

Historical Background

The Civil Rights Movement, specifically understood, was a campaign to put an end to legal segregation in the South. As such, it was a complete success. Over a roughly ten-year period from the Montgomery Bus Boycott and *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the mid-1950s to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the primary goal was accomplished. At the same time, it is important to remember what was not accomplished: by 1965, most blacks lived in the North, where de facto segregation, economic injustice, and ghetto life were often the rule. Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty" was directed at the problems of the inner cities of the North, but the funding for most of its programs was drained away by the war in Vietnam, and so the problems remain to this day.

The Movement's prime orator and primary leader was, of course, Martin Luther King Jr., but the true key to its success was the participation of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who were willing to step forward for freedom. On February 1, 1960, when four black college students sat-in at the lunch counter of a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, the Sixties phase of the Movement began. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) became the foot soldiers of the new student activism. Of those SNCC leaders none was more important than Bob Moses, who led SNCC into Mississippi, the most dangerous state of all, and who directed the famous Freedom Summer of 1964. There are several documentaries available on the Movement in general and Freedom Summer in particular; of these *Eyes on the Prize* is probably the best. The most popular commercial film based on Freedom Summer is *Mississippi Burning*, which features a fine performance by Gene Hackman, but which is not to be recommended because of its historical inaccuracy, especially its focus on the FBI as "heroes," its relegating of blacks to minor roles, and its complete downplaying of the Civil Rights Movement itself. The best history of the Movement in Mississippi is John Dittmer's *Local People*. (See the bibliography at the end of *The Children Bob Moses Led* for a more complete list of books).

A Note About Discussion Questions

The discussion questions following each chapter summary are designed to engage students more closely in the text itself. The assumption is that a work of literature requires the full attention of serious readers, since what the book, and its author, is trying to say is embedded in the dramatic interactions of its characters. Reading well is a discipline that requires a sharp eye—only when the actual words, the precise details, the telling dialogue are seen and heard, can a book's artistry and insights be appreciated. Reading, unlike television watching, is an active not a passive activity; in a sense it is a collaboration between a writer and a reader; without the reader's rapt concentration and imaginative participation a book simply can't live. These questions ought to be suitable for both high school and college students. Many teachers nowadays believe that the purpose of reading assignments is to stimulate discussion, any discussion, from the students, no matter how far that discussion may stray from the material being read. These teachers may want to supplement the present suggestions with more general questions as well as pre-reading and post-reading exercises.

Chapter Summaries

Introductory Material

Novelists often try to suggest their intentions and proper ways of reading a book at the very start. Mark Twain, for instance, toys with readers at the beginning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ironically daring them to find a moral in his story and to admire his skill at local idiom and dialect. On the copyright page of *The Children Bob Moses Led* a disclaimer asserts that "this is a work of fiction" that also contains "real persons and events" (the Acknowledgments return this issue). How is the reader to take this information? Why would an author wish to blend fiction and historical fact? Does this mean that the novel is truer, or less true, than other works of fiction you have read? The word fiction itself is suspect—something fictitious is by definition something made up, a lie. Why, then, do serious people write fiction? Some novelists might argue that novels tell lies to get at deeper truths. What exactly does that mean? Does this imply that *The Children Bob Moses Led* is less true because it is less fictive than some other novels?

These are questions that cannot be easily answered, especially before the novel has been read. But as you do read the book, you need to remember, for example, that Bob Moses is a real historical person, and his sections do indeed recreate with considerable accuracy what happened to him in Mississippi. Tom Morton, on the other hand, is a fictitious character, and his narration recounts events that might have happened, but in fact did not, although similar things did happen to real people like Tom Morton, Esther, Lenny, Feelgood, et. al., during the summerof 1964 in Mississippi. As you read the book you should ask yourself whether the Moses and Morton sections blend into a seamless whole where fact and fiction merge into a

larger sense of how life was lived and what was at issue during that time. Or does the author's attempt to combine history and fiction cause more difficulties than it solves?

The reader should pause for a moment over the table of contents and note that the novel is told by alternating narrators, Tom Morton and Bob Moses, whose narrations have two different chronologies but share similar settings. The "Bob Moses" narrative, in historical time, comes first. It begins in the late summer of 1961 and ends in the late spring of 1964, right before Freedom Summer begins. The "Tom Morton" narrative starts with a brief prologue in the summer of 1963, but its main task is to tell the story of the Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964, from Orientation in Oxford, Ohio, in late June, to teaching Freedom School in Tallahatchie and working for Voter Registration in McComb, and ending with the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. In other words, the "Bob Moses" sections end right before the "Tom Morton" sections begin, and as the reader reads these sections, he or she will come to a more complete understanding of why Bob Moses—who is, remember, the leader—decides to organize Freedom Summer. Why does the author choose to tell the story in this way? Does it create unnecessary difficulties for the reader or does it add another dimension to the story? What is gained and lost by this arrangement? If initially confusing, does it result in ultimate clarity?

Finally, before turning to the first chapter, the reader should notice the epigraph from Robert Penn Warren's poem "Courtmartial":

> The world is real. It is there.

Keep these words in mind as you read the novel. Why did the author select them? Don't they merely state the obvious? Or do they suggest that perhaps, in our heart of hearts, we don't really believe the world is real? How can one determine what is real and what isn't? If we don't fully realize how real the world really is, what is gained or lost? Is it possible that the author, whose work purports to be about "real" events, is encouraging his readers to take what he says seriously? Might he also be chiding other authors, suggesting their fictions aren't real enough? Most popular fiction such as thrillers,

romances, and sci-fi are formulaic escapist fantasies designed to pull readers away from the real world. Clearly, the author of *The Children Bob Moses Led* wants us to understand that his novel is, in a sense, a protest against that sort of fiction and a suggestion that realism in fiction still has value.

Discussion Questions

1. What do we mean by "fiction" and "nonfiction"?
2. Why would an author, who wants to write about history, write a novel?
3. Why would an author use two narrators and two chronologies to tell his story?
4. What does the novel's epigraph "The world is real. It is there" mean?
5. What does it mean for a novel to be "realistic"? How does a realistic novel differ from most thrillers, romances, sci-fi? What are the pros and cons of novels that encourage readers to engage reality as opposed to those that offer escape from it?

Tom Morton

Summer 1963

The first chapter is short and is clearly intended as a kind of prologue, a brief introduction to Tom Morton before his Freedom Summer experience. Pay particular attention to the first paragraph, since most authors try to set a particular tone and introduce some of their major themes with their opening sentences. One thing you might notice is that this paragraph contains a series of ironic allusions: "made safe for democracy" (Woodrow Wilson), "a little help from me and my friends" (The Beatles), "summer soldier" (Thomas Paine). Do these allusions from various moments in American history add anything? Tom Morton, remember, is a history major. Does he have a right to expect his readers to know American history and to catch these allusions? If these allusions are missed, is anything of significance lost? Not everything in this first paragraph, of course, is an allusion. One phrase that ought to jump out at the reader is "a hitchhiker of history."

How do these words prepare us for what is about to happen to Tom? In the Sixties, hitchhiking was very popular. Like Jack Kerouac, or, before him, Walt Whitman, a person could be a risk taker, an adventurer, and hit the open road in search of America simply by sticking out one's thumb. Tom, too, wants to find America, and himself, but instead finds "Mississippi." Over the course of the novel, pay attention to what Mississippi comes to mean to Tom and to others in the civil rights movement. The book opens and closes with this Mississippi metaphor—what exactly does it mean? By the end of the book, has Tom discovered the truth about Mississippi, America, or himself? If not, what has he learned? How has he been changed by his experiences?

The first chapter devotes several paragraphs to Tom's memories of working at a tennis camp in the Adirondacks and in particular his encounter with a camper who was "a manic perfectionist." Why open a novel about the civil rights movement in Mississippi with this brief account of upper-class Jewish kids from New York? What does this tell us about Tom? What does his account of breaking up with his girlfriend, Michelle ("I'd been jilted before, but never by a continent") and his parent's divorce add? Also note the last paragraph of this chapter, which gives us Tom's assessment of himself before he has met Bob Moses. Clearly, Tom wants us to believe that Bob Moses has had a big impact on his life. As you read the novel, pay attention to Tom's thoughts about Moses and his reactions to him. Why does Tom admire him so much and what does he hope to gain from emulating him?

Discussion Questions

1. How does the first paragraph set a tone and create expectations?
2. What is the purpose of Tom's depiction of working at a tennis camp?
3. Tom tells us that he was "auditioning identities." What does that mean?
4. What does Tom's discussion of his breakup with his girlfriend, Melanie, and his parents' divorce add?
5. How has this brief section created interest in Mississippi and Bob Moses

Bob Moses

McComb and Liberty, Mississippi: August–September 1961

"I am Bob Moses," this chapter begins. Bob Moses, unlike Tom Morton, is a real person of historical importance who is still making a significant contribution to American education and race relations. Why would an author wish to present Moses's story in the first person and to assert, in effect, that he can speak in his voice? Is this a power play, designed to co-opt Bob Moses's true voice? Since the author is white, does he have the right, or the ability, to make this assertion? On the other hand, isn't one of the main pleasures of reading a novel the fact that the author has created various characters with varying voices? If male authors can write about female characters and female authors can write about male characters (in fact, the very idea of the novel would collapse if they couldn't), why then can't a white author write in the voice and from the point of view of a black person (and vice versa)? Perhaps the real issue, then, is how well does this particular author write about this particular black person.

In the acknowledgements and bibliography the author goes out of his way to list his research, including interviews with Bob Moses. Why don't novelists usually do this? Does the fact that this author admits his indebtedness to others undercut his mystique as a creative writer? Should novels be based on research, or should the writer merely look into his or her inner soul and write? On the other hand, can there be a danger of too much research in a novel? What is it, exactly, that makes a novel seem to come alive on the page and assume a life of its own? Note, by the way, that both Tom Morton and Bob Moses are college graduates who talk in similar well-educated

and cultivated voices. Does this make the writer's task easier, since they are both articulate and even poetic? Or does it mean that it is even harder to keep their two narratives distinct? How do black people talk, anyway, and does Bob Moses speak with a credible voice? Even if Tom Morton and Bob Moses do sound similar to each other, how do their voices differ? How do their personalities and assumptions differ as well? How should we read their juxtaposed chapters?

One key to all the "Bob Moses" chapters appears in the first paragraph when he announces that his intention is "to break the Solid South by applying pressure at its strongest point." Moses is a leader and he is preoccupied with strategy. The particular strategy he has chosen seems contradictory and doomed to defeat. Why, if you are outnumbered and on the defensive, attack "the strongest point" of the opposition? How can this possibly be done successfully? Moses is determined to find a way, and his chapters detail the trail and error process by which he finally arrives at the decision to launch Freedom Summer and bring in student volunteers like Tom Morton.

In the second paragraph, Moses refers to himself as part of "the talented tenth." This is a phrase from W. E. B. DuBois, and it brings up a major debate over strategy between DuBois and Booker T. Washington, who advocated "cast down your buckets where you are" by improving the conditions of the rural folk, the black sharecroppers, while DuBois advocated cultivating the abilities and careers of the most talented so that they could move into the mainstream of American society and then have the influence to improve the lot of the masses. Moses, in a very real sense, combines these two notions. He has cultivated his talent at Harvard and other elite schools, but once he becomes involved in the civil rights movement he decides to work directly with the local people in small town and rural Mississippi.

Part one of this chapter tells how he becomes involved, first going to Atlanta to work for Martin Luther King Jr. and then finding himself a part of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Since Moses represents an alternative strategy to that proposed by King, the brief meeting between the two men (part 1) is both poignant and ironic. In part two Moses takes his first trip to Mississippi, meets Arnzie Moore, sees the horrible poverty, and the two discuss setting up a voter-registration school

in the Delta the following summer. But instead Moses goes to McComb and works with Curtis Bryant. Why? What has caused his change of plans? Furthermore, E. W. Steptoe soon intervenes, and Moses finds himself trying to organize the small farmers of Amite County as well. Note how he continually has to change his plans to meet unexpected contingencies. Why does he feel compelled to work with Steptoe even though it wasn't part of his plan and brought unusual dangers?

Parts three and four describe how Moses begins to take people down to the Liberty courthouse to try to register. On the first occasion, Moses is arrested afterwards. What is the significance of the phone call to Washington he makes? On the second occasion, Moses is beaten on the streets of Liberty by Billy Jack Caston, the sheriff's cousin. What is the significance of Moses's determination to press charges? What happens at the trial? Have Moses's efforts in Mississippi, thus far, been successful? What do you think he will try to do next?

Discussion Questions

1. How does Bob Moses talk? How can we keep his voice distinct from Tom's?
2. In the first paragraph, Bob Moses says his plan is to break the Solid South by applying pressure at its "strongest point." How can this be done?
3. What happens when Moses first goes to Mississippi? How does it change him?
4. How does Moses end up, the next summer, in McComb?
5. What is unusual about the way Bob Moses responds to his first arrest and his first beating on the streets of Liberty?

Tom Morton: Orientation

Oxford, Ohio: June 21–27, 1964

In the second paragraph of this chapter, Tom Morton explains how he decided to get involved in Freedom Summer. How does his choice differ from that of Bob Moses? How does the March on Washington influence Tom's decision? Note that Tom says he listened to "a long interview" Hal Zizner taped with Bob Moses. Although this is the only mention of that interview in the novel, the suggestion is that the "Bob Moses" sections of the book are based on that interview, which dates from late spring 1964. The "Tom Morton" sections, on the other hand, were apparently written in approximately 1972, after he has completed a Ph.D. on Melville and found a teaching job (see Afterword). The Bob Moses sections, in other words, are more on-the-spot and in the heat of battle; while Tom's sections have the luxury of being a little more reflective and ironic, since he gets to recall his experiences under more tranquil circumstances (although in many ways the late Sixties and early seventies were far from tranquil!). How are the voices of the two narrators differentiated? Moses, of course, is a leader and a man of action, but he is also unusually deep and reflective. Still, he is essentially concentrated on the pragmatics of the present: what happened and what should be done next? On strategy, in short. Tom's voice is more self-consciously "literary," more discursive and descriptive.

What was the purpose of Orientation? The volunteers were divided into two groups, one to work on voter registration and the other to teach in Freedom Schools. The one-week training sessions for each group were held at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio (now a part of Miami University). Bob Moses and the other people who planned Orientation

wanted to mold the volunteers into a coherent unit that understood the discipline of non-violence and the goals of the Movement. At the same time, because Moses and the others knew how provocative it was to bring these volunteers to Mississippi, it was imperative that the volunteers realize that they were literally putting their lives at risk.

The chapter is divided between scenes that describe the public process of Orientation: the group meetings, the singing, the role playing, the warnings, and the pep talks. Juxtaposed with these are scenes where Tom, Esther, Lenny, and others discuss their feelings and try to cope with their fear. Perhaps the most significant thing binding the volunteers together was the music of the civil rights movement (part 1). Tom meets Fannie Lou Hamer, a historical figure who plays an important secondary role in the novel, whose powerful voice and indomitable spirit were legendary. She is the one who first urges the volunteers to surrender their inhibitions and "sing with yo whole self." Why was music so crucial to the Movement? Note that singing is stressed during Orientation and that excerpts of songs are laced throughout the novel. For students to appreciate the pervasive force of this music, it is imperative that they hear it, either on the soundtrack of documentaries like *Eyes on the Prize* or on tape (one good choice would be Sing For Freedom, Smithsonian/Folkways Records).

The dangers of going to Mississippi are made all too apparent on the second day of Orientation. Bob Moses is making his first presentation (note Tom's description of him in part 2) when he is interrupted with the news that three civil rights workers are missing in Mississippi. The murders of Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, on the latter's first full day as a Freedom Summer volunteer, was the most sensational story of the summer of 1964, and it remains at the center of many books about the civil rights movement in Mississippi. When Moses first hears that the three are missing, he urges the volunteers to contact their parents and congressmen. Moses is almost certain that they are already dead, but he wants to hold out some hope and he wants the federal government to get directly involved and initiate a search.

Tom and Lenny's conversation with Hal Zizner (part 2) is an example of how the SNCC veterans were able to "solve" the case so quickly, although

the bodies weren't found until August 4th (the same day as the Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to the escalation of the war in Vietnam). The bitter irony is that the death of these three young men probably did save the lives of other volunteers, because both the federal government and the national media came to Mississippi in large numbers. There were no more murders of volunteers that summer, although many were beaten and jailed, and, as the reader will see in the McComb section, there were some very serious bombings that were intended to kill people. *The Children Bob Moses Led* does not devote a lot of attention to the investigation of the murders, why? Even though this Klan killing is underplayed, how do we know that Tom and the other volunteers are haunted by it? How does Tom come to terms with his fear?

The reader of the third chapter may well have difficulty knowing which names to remember, because at this point in the novel it is not clear who the main characters are and who plays a minor role. One of the problems facing the novelist who also wants to write valid history is how much of the historical record to cut or keep. A key to Bob Moses's philosophy is his belief that for too long too many nameless black people have been sacrificed, and that until people are known by name and are connected to the larger society, this victimization will continue. Therefore, the novel does try to name a lot of people who played a part in the struggle, although this can detract from the reader's ability to focus full attention on a small cast of characters. At Orientation, for example, important SNCC figures like Vincent Harding, James Forman, and James Lawson make presentations, but only Forman will reappear in the novel, briefly, in the Atlantic City chapter. Fannie Lou Hamer, on the other hand, appears in several subsequent chapters. The key fictional characters introduced in this chapter are Esther Rappaport and Raymond Fleetwood, a.k.a. "Feelgood."

They play important roles in the novel, especially in the "Voter Registration in McComb, Mississippi" section. Both Tom and Feelgood are attracted to the vivacious Esther at Orientation. The volunteers have been cautioned about the dangers of interracial dating in Mississippi. In spite of these stern warnings, the volunteers were risk takers by nature and they weren't about to renounce their sexuality for the summer. The mutual at-

traction of Tom and Jasmine in the "Freedom School" section, and Esther's complex relationship with Feelgood in the "Voter Registration" section, are representative of the kind of situations that did develop. We will look more closely at them later. Readers of the Orientation section should simply be told which characters to concentrate on and be alerted to the significance of the private relationships that are beginning to emerge.

Perhaps the key question to ask about this chapter is how effective was Orientation? What did the volunteers learn about Mississippi during their intense week of training? What was their attitude, in general, about nonviolence? How effective were the role-playing exercises? How well have Tom and the others learned to conquer their fear? Above all, what does this chapter teach us about Bob Moses's style of leadership? How does it demonstrate both his ability to make on-the-spot decisions as well as his tendency to brood deeply about the consequences of actions he has initiated? Not only does this chapter show us how Moses is devastated by the deaths of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, it also mentions by name and foreshadows the deaths of Herbert Lee, Medgar Evers, and Louis Allen, that are described in detail in the second, third, and fourth Bob Moses sections respectively. As Bob Moses says at the end of the Orientation chapter, "People will always be expended. The question is ... Are they ever expendable?" (part 4). That is a good question with which to conclude a discussion of this chapter.

Discussion Questions

1. How can we distinguish Tom Morton's voice from Bob Moses's?
2. What is the purpose of Orientation? How effective was it?
3. Why was music so important in the Movement? Who is Fannie Lou Hamer?
4. How does the disappearance of the three workers in Mississippi change things? How much is Tom changed during Orientation?
5. What do we learn about Esther and Feelgood in this chapter?

Bob Moses

Liberty and McComb, Mississippi: September–November 1961

In the first part of this chapter, Bob Moses takes John Doar from the Justice Department to meet E. W. Steptoe who tells him what life is like for black people in Mississippi. At the end of their discussion, filled with authentic details from Steptoe's life, Doar says, "It's hard to believe that this is America" (part 1). This marks a further development of the Mississippi metaphor; the reader should ask throughout the novel just how much is Mississippi like America. In terms of race relations, is Mississippi exceptionally bad and therefore not typical? Or do the excesses of Mississippi merely show the flaws of the nation in a clearer light? Certainly the horrors of Mississippi are made explicit when Moses learns of the killing of Herbert Lee by E. H. Hurst, a member of the Mississippi legislature at the time. The Liberty police have declared the killing an act of self-defense, but Moses finds a black witness, Louis Allen, who is willing to tell the true story if he can be given federal protection. Moses is now confronted with a major dilemma: should he encourage Allen to talk even though doing so could put his life in danger? Moses must also face the fact that his presence in Liberty has been a factor in Lee's death, a point brought painfully home by his widow, who accuses Moses at the funeral of killing her husband. Again, the reader sees that even the most conscientious leadership entails certain moral ambiguities and burdens.

The killing of Herbert Lee forces Moses to stop his activities in Liberty, although he promises Steptoe that he'll be back. The situation in McComb is also tense, and it is only made more so when black students take the initiative

and walk out of Burgland High School and march downtown. Moses and the other SNCC workers have to hurry to catch up with their "followers" (Martin Luther King found himself in a similar situation in Birmingham in 1963). At the courthouse, the SNCC workers are beaten—especially Bob Zellner, a white Southerner—and jailed. Even though the high school students continue their boycott, Moses has to face the fact that he has to abandon McComb as well. Nevertheless, he has learned from his experiences, and at the end of the chapter he has "formulated a strategy" (part 3). See, in particular, the last two pages of this chapter, where Moses sums up his thinking. The passage in italics at the end is from a letter Moses wrote from the McComb jail. Note how it foreshadows the next Moses chapters, which describe how he takes the Movement to Greenwood and other towns in the Mississippi Delta. At this point in the novel, it looks as if Moses's plan to break the "Solid South" at its strongest point is doomed to failure. Why? Is there any evidence yet that the iceberg might be about to crack?

Discussion Questions

1. When John Doar from the Justice Department first visits Mississippi he says, "It's hard to believe that this is America" (part 1). How bad was Mississippi at the time? Was it exceptionally bad, and therefore not typical? Or did it reveal disturbing truths about America in general?
2. How is Herbert Lee killed? Whose version do you believe, why?
3. How does Bob Moses react to the death of Herbert Lee? What does his reaction tell us about his style of leadership?
4. How do high school students take the initiative in this chapter?
5. How do Bob Moses and the others react to being jailed?

Tom Morton: Freedom School

Tallahatchie, Mississippi: June 29–July 24, 1964

The first part of this chapter shows Tom already living in Mississippi, while parts two and three picture his arrival a week earlier and his arrest by Deputy Pratt. Subsequent parts then pick up where the first one left off, elaborating on what life was like for blacks and whites in Tallahatchie and describing how Torn taught in the Freedom School. Why does the author reverse chronology in the opening three parts? What is gained? What is lost? How effectively, in a short space, does part one introduce us to the Mays family? Tallahatchie is a fictitious place, meant to represent a rather typical town in the heart of the Delta. It is neither as moderate as Greenville nor as reactionary and dangerous as Greenwood, two real towns in the area. Although the town resembles in some ways Indianola, Mississippi, the characters and events are certainly not based on that or any other specific town. Rather they are the result of the general research suggested in the acknowledgements and bibliography.

Faulkner's fictitious Jefferson, based in part on Oxford and Ripley, Mississippi, is of course the great precedent, and it is no accident that Faulkner's name comes up when Tom tours Tallahatchie and visits the Den of Antiquity (part 6). The Tallahatchie River does flow through the Delta; it is the notorious place where the body of Emmit Till was found. Since Mississippi is the setting of Faulkner's greatest novels, what difficulties does that present for an author who wishes to intrude on his "territory"? Is *The Children Bob Moses Led* Faulknerian in style or subject or sensibility? Does the author succumb to or avoid the dangers of sounding merely like another of Faulkner's disciples? Does the fact that the author is from Ohio

detract from his ability to dramatize what life is like for black and white people in Mississippi?

Tom's fear of the "cottonmouth in the outhouse" (part 1) and his arrest in the next section for carrying "deflammatory literature" (part 2) have their comic aspects, but they also suggest real fears and dangers. How well does the author mix these elements? Are Tom's responses to his fears and his encounters with Southern whites creditable? How well are the various whites who resist the civil rights movement characterized? Look, for example, at Judge Brumfield, Pervis Pratt, Tallahatchie sheriff Dan Wade, and the owner of the Den of Antiquity. Are these people presented as being basically the same or different? Do they appear to be typical whites who lived in Mississippi at this time? Do they appear to have any redeeming qualities? Do his descriptions of the Delta (part 2) and "niggertown" (part 3) in Tallahatchie effectively set the scene? In parts 4-6, Tom presents more information about Tallahatchie. From Eddie Mays he learns about the problems of black sharecroppers and from Ella he learns how small indignities characterize the day-to-day effects of segregation. Eddie also tells Tom the ironic story of Midnight Grimes and his Stutz Bearcat dealership, while Ella tells the tragic tale of her daughter, Miscelia. Furthermore, Torn learns through rumor and anecdote about the deaths of several nameless blacks in the area.

All in all these introductory chapters are designed to give an overview, spiced with inside information, of life in the Delta. What does the reader learn, to co-opt the title of John Dollard's classic study, about class and caste in a southern town? Is the information presented dramatically, in keeping with a novel, or does it sometimes sound too sociological? What is the difference? Does the story of Miscelia strike you as authentic or as one more version of the conventional "tragic mulatta" story? How does the Miscelia story relate to the relationships between Tom and Jasmine and Feelgood and Esther? Have you learned anything important about Mississippi you didn't know before?

Religion is a major theme in the Tallahatchie sequence in the novel; part 7 dramatizes the topic. Tom Morton tells the sheriff that he was "brought up a Methodist" (part 2) and he relates his experiences at Methodist church camp (part 7); but he also presents some very skeptical ideas about religion,

stating that its essence was "believing in something that wasn't so" (part 7). He then goes on to describe a day devoted to worship, including a complete sermon, a church picnic, and a baptismal ceremony. The minister, Midnight Grimes, is presented as a man of many facets; when he isn't preaching he's involved in various business ventures, some of which are suspect. Yet when he is preaching, he seems to be truly inspired; and the "Say it with your life" refrain for his sermon (part 7) is intended to echo in the novel; Tom even repeats it at the end of the novel. After the service Tom and Ledell Simmons (the Tallahatchie project director) get up to talk about the Freedom Democratic Party. Compare this speech with Grimes's sermon. How are they different? Is one more "religious" than the other? What does the description of the church picnic and Jasmine's baptism add? This section has presented us with several different ways to look at religion. Intellectually, Tom suggests that no religion wins the logic prize, that all depend on a "leap of faith" over skeptical objections. On the other hand, experientially, the section shows that religion is indeed a powerful force in these people's lives, and that blacks could not have survived in the South, or participated in the civil rights movement, without it. A novel can dramatize these various ways to think and feel about religion without necessarily insisting that the reader choose one "correct" answer. Rather the suggestion is that the larger "truth" needs to at least encompass aspects of multiple points of view.

One more philosophical question: Is it possible to have a successful moral revolution without a religious basis? What would Tom, or Ella, or Ledell, say? What do you say about this question?

Tom tells us that his main job at Tallahatchie is to teach in the Freedom School. What was the purpose of the Freedom Schools and what were they really like? Evaluate the effectiveness of the Freedom School that Tom teaches. Look especially at three sessions. In the first session, Tom and the students talk about their regular school (part 8); in the second session Tom invites Ledell Simmons to speak. Ledell talks about how the white man has deliberately misused words and distorted history to keep the black students "from knowing how wonderful you are" (part 9). Later, Tom and Jasmine argue about the difference between facts and feelings in history (part 9). Where do you stand on this debate? Again, is it necessary to see one posi-

tion as right and the other as wrong? Jasmine does indeed feel empowered by the speech, but Tom also sees some distortions in Ledell's argument. Furthermore, Jasmine is aware that Tom is attracted to her and jealous of Ledell. Does knowing this change your perception of their debate? In the third session, Tom tries to teach the students about Reconstruction by having them act out the roles of carpetbagger, scalawag, etc. (part 11). How effective is this lesson? How would you compare this third session with the one taught by Ledell? Which one is more important and why?

Reconstruction is one of the toughest issues to tackle in all American history. For almost one hundred years the dominant interpretation was shaped by the South—"A small clique of radical fanatics added insult to injury," is the way the owner of the Den of Antiquity puts it. But with the coming of the civil rights movement, historians revised their interpretation and revision and counter-revision continue to this day. Since Reconstruction is such a tangle of thorns, why tackle so complex a topic in so short a space? What is the author's purpose in including it? Does he succeed? Overall, do you get the impression that Tom Morton, a white Northerner, has accomplished a lot by teaching these Southern black students?

From Tom's first appearance at the Mays's home, he found himself drawn to Jasmine and she to him. Is their growing attraction convincingly presented? Do you believe that they are truly relating to each other as individuals? Or are they self-consciously acting out roles to prove that they aren't prejudiced? Does the fact that that Jasmine is sixteen and Tom is twenty-one significantly influence your view of their relationship? Does the fact that Tom was warned at Orientation to avoid such relationships influence your view of him? In truth, there were relationships during Freedom Summer that involved college-age white male volunteers and high-school-age black girls. Do you think Tom and Jasmine's relationship is meant to be typical or exceptional? Near the end of his stay in Tallahatchie, Tom tells Jasmine, "I really do love you. If anything should happen, I'll do the right thing" (part 12). What is implied by this statement? Are Tom's words sincere? Do they represent his triumphing over his own prejudices by falling in love with a young black woman, or do they simply represent another version of the exploitation of black women by white males that dates back to the days

of slavery? If Tom had stayed with the Mays family and had an affair with Jasmine, would the perception of him have changed? Would his actions be justified, given the goals of "Freedom Summer"? Again, this is a sequence that dramatizes public roles and private lives.

Discussion Questions

1. What do we learn about the Mays family in this section? What do we learn about what segregation was like for black families in the South?
2. How well does Tom adjust to living in the Delta? What does he learn about the town of Tallahatchie during his encounters with the sheriff, his deputy, and the owner of the antique store?
3. How does part 7 dramatize various ways to look at religion? What is Tom's attitude toward belief? What do we learn from Midnight Grimes's sermon? How does it contrast to Ledell Simmons's talk? What does the description of the picnic and Jasmine's baptism add?
4. What does Ledell Simmons' talk at Freedom School about Africa add? Why do Tom and Jasmine argue about his talk afterwards? Who is right? What are we to make of the growing relationship between Tom and Jasmine? Are they truly in love? What are the pros and cons of their relation ship?
5. Tom tries to devote his Freedom School classes to a discussion of Reconstruction. What teaching methods does he use? How successful is he? What relevance does Reconstruction have to Freedom Summer?

Bob Moses

Ruleville and Greenwood, Mississippi: January 1962–June 1963

In this chapter, Bob Moses moves his operation to the Delta, where he is joined by several other SNCC "field secretaries." Greenwood, a very tough town, is at the center of the action. Again, the reader may have trouble keeping all the names straight; there is Sam Block and Jimmy Travis in Greenwood, Charles McLaurin in Ruleville, and local blacks who step forward in a heroic way, especially Fannie Lou Hamer and Hartman Turnbow. There is also an escalating series of violent acts by the resising whites—people are fired at, buildings are burned—culminating in the attempted assassination of Bob Moses himself (part 2) and the murder of Medgar Evers (part 3).

One reason why the violence escalates at this time is because Bob Moses keeps changing his strategy to achieve his goals. He begins to think in terms of organizing a separate political party for blacks in Mississippi, holding separate primaries and elections, and he keeps trying to find ways to get the federal government more directly involved. At an important meeting with representatives of the federal government, SNCC agrees to concentrate on voter registration under a blanket civil rights organization named The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), which in truth has been set up so that funds can be funneled to SNCC without getting the other groups jealous (part 1). In return, SNCC thinks that it has been promised federal protection. This, unfortunately, proves to be largely an illusion. Even after the government arranges for the release of the SNCC workers from jail (part 2), the deal that is struck with local law enforcement does not provide the protection Moses has been seeking. This forces him to reassess his position

and what his strategy should be (part 3). How does this chapter dramatize the role of the federal government? Why is the federal government reluctant to take law enforcement out of the hands of local officials, even though they know those officials are often racists, even members of the Klan? What roles do Robert and Jack Kennedy play in this?

Although he is not discussed in detail in the novel, what role did J. Edgar Hoover play? The federal official with whom Moses is most in contact is John Doar (part 2). What is your opinion of him? What is your opinion of the way the federal government handled the situation? What were the pros and cons of acting differently? On the very night President John Kennedy gives his most impassioned civil rights speech, Medgar Evers is killed in Jackson, Mississippi. Moses has now been in Mississippi for nearly three years, and he is still a long way from achieving his goals. What should his next move be?

Discussion Questions

1. What problems do the first SNCC workers in the Delta encounter? How does Bob Moses try to organize Greenwood? What happens when the Klan tries to assassinate Bob Moses himself?
2. How do local leaders like Fannie Lou Hamer and Hartman Turnbow get involved in the Movement? How do they compare with E. W. Steptoe in Liberty?
3. How does the federal government get more involved with aiding SNCC? Why does it want its aid to be indirect?
4. How does Bob Moses reassess his strategy after SNCC faces escalating violence and the federal government fails to provide protection?
5. What events lead up to the assassination of Medgar Evers?

Tom Morton: Voter Registration

McComb, Mississippi: July 24–August 20, 1964

As with the Tallahatchie chapter, this chapter changes sequence to open with the bombing of the Freedom House in section 1, and then part 2 goes back to tell how Tom and Lenny arrived the previous day and to describe a subsequent staff meeting. This chapter is punctuated by a series of bombings, several of them designed to kill or maim, although fortunately no one was seriously hurt. These bombings are all based on real events in the McComb area, but the author has changed the dates of some of them, moving the September bombing of Mama Quin's house and Society Hill Baptist Church, for example, to late August. Why would the author change the dates of some bombings and not others (The date of the Freedom House bombing is correct)? Does this undercut the novel as valid history? Does it overload the novel by packing too much action into too short a time span? These bombings are also left unsolved in the novel.

Does the novel suggest who was responsible? In truth, several men were put on trial and found guilty of the bombings in the McComb area, but they were given ridiculously light sentences and no attempt was made by the court to find out who had given them orders. Does the novel suggest who might have done the bombings and who might have been ultimately responsible? What fictive purpose do these bombings serve within this chapter?

Even though the Freedom House has been bombed, it still stands and serves as the Movement's headquarters; it provides Tom with an experience of the communal living that was characteristic of Freedom Summer and which foreshadowed later developments in the Sixties. Here we see how well, or badly, blacks and whites from the urban and suburban North learn

to live with blacks from the rural South. At a series of staff meetings, in particular, we see that stress and tension are high, that building "the beloved community" is difficult (see especially parts 2, 4, 8, and 10). What are the causes of these tensions and what effect do they have on the people involved?

In particular, how has Monty Poe added a challenging new perspective on Freedom Summer? What is Monty Poe's influence on Feelgood? Why did blacks become increasingly militant after the civil rights movement had won its biggest victories? How has the fact that Esther is having an affair with Feelgood add to staff tension? What are we to think of their affair? Is it a sadomasochistic affair that does no one any good, or is there a more positive way to view it? Why is Esther attracted to Feelgood? Why is he attracted to her? Is the author implying that interracial relationships are doomed? Or is he rather stressing the problems of this particular relationship? How does Feelgood's relationship with Esther compare with Tom's relationship with Jasmine? Was Jasmine's letter to Tom convincing? What purpose does it serve in the novel?

What about the people from the local community who have more or less wandered into the Movement? At one point, Tom divides the staff into the WiFos, LoFos, MoFos, and MauMaus (part 4). What do these categories stand for and do they accurately capture the conflicting viewpoints within the Movement? Gayle Norris is one of the more mature black leaders, yet even she gets caught up in staff tensions. Why? When Bob Moses comes to visit, he observes these staff tensions yet does very little to confront or defuse them? Why? How does this demonstrate an aspect of his concept of leadership? What are the pros and cons of remaining low-key and non-authoritarian? Why does Moses support Feelgood as project director in spite of his obvious flaws?

In calling attention to all the conflicts within the civil rights movement, is the author in any way satirizing or degrading what was accomplished? Does our knowledge, for example, that Martin Luther King Jr. was a womanizer and had affairs during key moments of the civil rights movement make him less of a hero? The same question could be asked of John F. Kennedy? When history is seen up close, with a novelist's eye, isn't it inevitable that the all-too-human aspects of people show? Has the author been fair in his

presentation of the staff tensions? Do you see the pro and con of each position or does the author play favorites? How can we tell when an author is too biased for one character instead of another or too wishy-washy to distinguish why one idea or person may be, all things considered, better than another?

The main business of the volunteers in this chapter is canvassing, which Tom describes as "hard, boring, heartbreaking work." Two sections describe the process of canvassing in detail (parts 2 and 5). How do these two scenes suggest the similarities and differences of canvassing in various black neighborhoods? In both parts, Tom encounters a variety of black people who present a variety of ways of responding to voter registration. Many are suspicious of him and come up with sometimes fantastic excuses to avoid getting involved. Why? What attitude are we to take toward the people who refuse to participate in the civil rights movement? On the other hand, Tom and the others also encounter a lot of people who are willing to get involved, knowing that they face certain humiliation and possible retaliation. The characters Tom meets are young and old, men and women, employed and unemployed, sick and well. How successfully does the author capture the voices and personalities of these people? Does the cumulative effect of all these encounters say something about black life in Mississippi? In many ways, the key to the civil rights movement was how many common people showed uncommon courage. Does these sequences on canvassing demonstrate that proposition?

The latter part of this chapter describes the bombings at Mama Quin's house and Society Hill Baptist Church, as well as Freedom Day in Liberty where Tom and the others are arrested and jailed. Although no one is permanently injured, these sections describe a lot of violence in a short time span. Again the author has changed some dates to move real events within the time frame of the novel, in this case Freedom Day in Liberty, which wasn't held until the following year. Are these changes in the historical record justified? What is the author trying to accomplish? Why has the author created a fictitious town, Tallahatchie, to set his novel in the Delta, but kept the names of real towns, McComb and Liberty, when Tom is sent to do voter registration? Clearly, the author doesn't want to give up the ironic connotations of a town named Liberty where civil rights workers have already

been killed. Also, if Tom is striving to be more like Bob Moses, what more fitting place to test his newfound selfhood than the towns where Moses's work in Mississippi began. During this sequence Tom realizes that he has only seen the ugly side of white Mississippians (part 11). How much has this biased his view of the situation?

Under the circumstances, was there any way Tom could have achieved a more complete view? Has the novelist been fair to the viewpoint of Southern whites? If not, what might he have done? Is an author under an obligation to be fair to all points of view? Where do you think the author's presentation of the racist South was most heavy-handed? Where was it most subtle? Do we meet any white Southerners we can admire? Tom's friend Lenny has a caustic wit and often makes smart remarks at inappropriate times. What purpose does he serve in the novel? Do you find him a credible and interesting character? What makes Lenny say and do the things he does? Who do you think speaks for the author, Lenny or Tom? Must it be an either/or choice?

Discussion Questions

1. What happens when the Freedom House is bombed? What other bombings take place during this chapter? What is their significance?
2. This chapter dramatizes a lot of inner-staff tensions. How successful are the members of the Freedom House at building "the beloved community"? What are the main grounds of their disagreements? In particular, how does Monty Poe add a volatile ingredient to the Freedom House? Who are the LoFos, MoFos, WiFos, and MauMaus? Why does Bob Moses support Feelgood's leadership of the Freedom House in spite of his obvious flaws?
3. What is the relationship between Esther and Feelgood? How does Feelgood's relationship with Esther compare with Tom's relationship with Jasmine?
4. Parts 2 and 5 describe canvassing in some detail. How do these scenes dramatize the various people encountered by the Movement and the various responses people had to its expectations? Why are some people cowardly while others show unusual courage?

5. What do the descriptions of Freedom Day in Liberty and being jailed in Magnolia add to our understanding of what Freedom Summer was like? During this sequence Tom realizes that he has only seen the ugly side of white Mississippians (part 11). Why? How much has this biased his view of the situation?

Bob Moses

Greenwood and Liberty, Mississippi: July 1963–May 1964

At the start of the final Moses chapter, Allard Lowenstein arrives at the SNCC office in Jackson and begins to offer advice. What is Bob Moses's opinion of Lowenstein? What influence does Lowenstein have on Moses's evolving strategy to crack Mississippi? What does Lowenstein contribute to the Freedom Vote? How does the Freedom Vote foreshadow Freedom Summer? How well is Lowenstein captured as a character? (Lowenstein, like all the people appearing in the Moses chapters, was a real historical figure, who was later head of the "Dump Johnson" movement, served as a U.S. Congressman, and was later killed by an insane Freedom Summer volunteer, named Dennis Sweeney, who had been in the McComb Freedom House when it was bombed). Following the Freedom Vote, the SNCC staff hold a series of meetings to decide what to do next. After debating the pros and cons of bringing in a lot of college students during the next summer (part 2), Moses finally opts for what became the Mississippi Summer Project.

Moses accepts the position of director of Freedom Summer, but he tells Lowenstein, "You've got to understand that my leadership in SNCC must be low-key." Lowenstein doesn't agree, and they debate the pros and cons of leadership (part 2). Throughout the novel we have seen examples of Bob Moses's concept of leadership. How would you describe his leadership style and how it differs from, say, Martin Luther King Jr.'s? How is Moses's leadership based on his philosophical ideas, especially about the wisdom of the common person? Moses sees himself as an organizer, an enabler, who helps identify local leadership and lets the local people decide what they

want and how they want to get it. On the other hand, he is a person with a prophetic aura and a prophetic name, and the more people see him in action and hear him speak, the less they want to rely on themselves without his direction. Moses's speaking style, of course, is the opposite of Martin Luther King Jr.'s soaring public eloquence; he is indeed low-key and soft-spoken, but he is also very thoughtful and farsighted. What are the pros and cons of these two styles of leadership. The SCLC was created to make Martin Luther King Jr. the star of the civil rights movement, the darling of the media, and the key ingredient to any successful mass march. To a large degree they succeeded, and King's exceptional abilities justified this strategy. At the same time, the notion that the Movement was essentially a one-man crusade is patently false, and when a given community came to rely too much on an outside orator like King to tell them what to do and where to march, that same community was often left flat and directionless after King left. Moses followed a different strategy, but his own exceptional presence and talents sometimes caught him in the contradiction of the leader who didn't want to lead too much.

A few characters in the novel appear to be critical of Moses's approach and his philosophy. Who are they and why are they critical of him? In your opinion, was Moses's style best suited to his program of helping the country achieve civil rights for African-Americans? Why or why not? In terms of the popular perception of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. is celebrated as the leader and Bob Moses is almost totally unknown. *The Children Bob Moses Led* was written, in part, to change this perspective. To what degree has the book succeeded? What is your final assessment of how well or badly Bob Moses "led" his "children"?

Parts 3 and 4 of the final Bob Moses chapter describe the harassment and murder of Louis Allen and the sheriff's visit to Steptoe's house to warn him not to let Freedom Summer volunteers stay there. In both of these scenes, Moses remains in the background, not calling attention to himself, as he lets the stories speak for themselves. The murder of Louis Allen is, in a sense, the last in a series of killings of nameless black men in Mississippi. In this case, the novel attempts to tell the story in enough novelistic detail to make us care. Some readers have found this sequence (part 3) the most powerful

in the novel. What is your opinion? This case remains unsolved. Does the novel suggest who was responsible? When Sheriff Jones visits Steptoe, how does their dialogue suggest some of the complexities of race relations in the South? How does it add to our sense of Steptoe's character? How does this chapter prepare us for the following chapter, set in Atlantic City?

Discussion Questions

1. Who is Allard Lowenstein? What does he add to Moses's strategy? What role does Lowenstein play in Freedom Summer and the convention challenge?
2. What are the pros and cons of the SNCC debate about Freedom Summer? How does Moses sum up the debate and cast the deciding vote?
3. How would you describe Bob Moses's style of leadership? What is the philosophy behind his leadership? How do his assumptions about the Movement and leadership differ from Martin Luther King Jr.'s?
4. Why is Louis Allen murdered? How does his death influence Bob Moses's thinking about Freedom Summer?
5. What does Steptoe tell Sheriff Jones when he comes out to his house? How does Steptoe epitomize all that is best in the "local people" of Mississippi?

Tom Morton: The Convention

Atlantic City: August 22 - 27, 1964

This chapter opens with a sustained description of Atlantic City itself (part 1). Is this rhetorical display necessary? Why is Atlantic City a genuine culture shock for Tom and the other Mississippi volunteers and veterans? What ironies does this opening sequence stress? If, on the one hand, the Freedom Summer people were tempted to see all America as Mississippi, is there equal reason to see the country as one big Atlantic City boardwalk? This chapter tries to steer the reader through the complexity of a challenge to the seating of the regular Mississippi delegation to the convention by the so-called Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Most people's eyes glaze over at the very mention of politics, let alone the arcane rules for seating delegates. Why does the author want his readers to know this information? Do you, when this chapter is over, understand how the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was outmaneuvered by President Lyndon Johnson? Do you understand why the SNCC veterans, the Freedom Summer volunteers, and the MFDP delegates left Atlantic City largely embittered?

In Atlantic City, Tom shares a hotel room with Lenny and his father Mr. Swift, who goes into a long explanation of why President Johnson can't allow civil rights and the seating of the MFDP delegation to become a major issue in the election of 1964. President Johnson has ordered Mr. Swift's friend Hubert Humphrey to try to defuse the issue (part 3). Do you see Mr. Swift as a wise political realist who knows how difficult it is to achieve change on the national level or do you see him as someone who has lost sight of right and wrong because of his involvement in national politics? Mr. Swift, because he knows Johnson and Humphrey among others, stresses the role

of personality in politics. How convincing is this? How important is it for us to know the character of our candidates? Are politics essentially decided by public issues or private personalities? Mr. Swift is very impressed with Johnson's political savvy, but he says some troubling things about his personality. Does one factor negate the other?·

Overall, how do you see the handling of the MFDP at the Democratic convention? Did Johnson have legitimate reasons for refusing to seat the whole delegation? What influence did Goldwater and the "white backlash" factor have on his political calculations? In the final analysis, was it a victory or a defeat for those working for civil rights? In the course of the novel, we have spent the summer in Mississippi and so we see the issues at Atlantic City differently than those politicians who were elsewhere. How does that fact help to explain the reactions of the various characters in the book to the compromise solution? Should Bob Moses and his followers have been so bitter about what happened? What is the significance of the scene where Bob Moses brushes past Tom in the hotel hallway? Has Tom ever established a relationship with Bob Moses? Has following Bob Moses to Mississippi significantly changed Tom's life? Bob Moses said that the Movement wanted to bring morality to politics. Is it inevitable that the political process weaken moral positions?

On the last day of the convention, Tom listens to Adlai Stevenson give a tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt (part 7). This speech moves Tom to tears because it reminds him somehow of Bob Moses. What does this speech add to our understanding of Bob Moses? What does Stevenson suggest that the civil rights movement and we as Americans still have to accomplish? At the end of this chapter, Tom states, "I knew then that most of us, the children Bob Moses led, would leave Atlantic City with an idea, terrible in its simplicity, that would haunt us through the years: America was Mississippi, Mississippi was America; from sea to shining sea." What are we to make of this statement? If this Mississippi metaphor is "terrible in its simplicity" is it therefore wrong? Does the fact that many SNCC veterans and Freedom Summer volunteers believed that metaphor to be exactly right help to explain the increasing militancy of the late Sixties? In the Afterword, we even see that Monty and Lenny have joined revolutionary movements,

that Feelgood has died of an overdose, and that Bob Moses has changed his name and is teaching school in Africa. How do these events comment on the events of the novel? Henry James once said that "the whole of a thing is never told." Has this novel told enough to make Bob Moses and Freedom Summer make sense?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Atlantic City a genuine culture shock for Tom Morton and the other Freedom Summer volunteers?
2. What does Mr. Swift's knowledge of the personalities of Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey add to our understanding? How important is the role of personality in politics? How does Johnson's character shape his actions?
3. Why doesn't Lyndon Johnson want to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party? What are the pros and cons of his decision? What influence did Barry Goldwater and the "white blacklash" factor have on his political calculations?
4. Why were Bob Moses and the other SNCC veterans so bitter because of their treatment at the convention? Shouldn't they have been prepared for "hardball" politics?
5. What is the significance of the scene where Moses brushes past Tom in the motel hallway? Has Tom ever established a real relationship with Bob Moses? Has following Moses to Mississippi significantly changed Tom's life? What are we to make to Tom's last assertion that "Mississippi was America"?

Tom Morton: Afterword 1972

Is the fact that Tom has become a college professor, not a social activist, meant to be critical of him? Readers might like to know that Bob Moses, who first fled to Canada to avoid the draft and then to Tanzania, returned to the United States under President Carter's amnesty; he was awarded a five-year MacArthur "genius" grant and has devoted himself since to his celebrated "Algebra Project," which uses innovative methods to teach advanced math to "disadvantaged" black students both in the North and the South, including a major effort in Mississippi. See Robert Moses and Charles Cobb, *Radical Equations*, for some reminiscences about the civil rights movement and information on the Algebra Project.

Discussion Questions

1. What has happened to Jasmine and Ledell since 1964?
2. What has happened to Esther and Feelgood?
3. What has happened to Lenny Swift and Monty Poe?
4. What has happened to Midnight Grimes and Gayle Norris?
5. What has happened to Tom Morton and Bob Moses?

In each of these cases, how relevant is the term "character is fate"? Do these characters, in a sense, "get what they deserve," or has fate played strange tricks on them? The afterword answers some questions while it creates more: Why did Monty Poe and Lenny Swift become more radical? Has Tom Morton lost all of his political commitment to become a college teacher? Will Midnight Grimes be a good mayor of Tallahatchie? Why has Bob Moses changed his name and moved to Africa? The novel doesn't directly tell us, but readers, based on what they have learned about Bob Moses and the other characters, can speculate.

Acknowledgments and Bibliography

The Children Bob Moses Led includes extensive information about the author's research. All of the books mentioned in the bibliography are recommended, but the best scholarly overview of the civil rights movement in Mississippi during these years is John Dittmer's *Local People*. Reading that fine work along with this novel is a way of weighing the relative power of history and literature to make the past come alive and tell its secrets.

About the Author

William Heath was born in Youngstown, Ohio. He received his B.A. at Hiram College in 1964 and his Ph.D. in American Studies in 1971 at Case Western Reserve University. His extensive teaching experience began in 1967 at Kenyon College as an English instructor and includes such notable institutions as Vassar College and the University of Seville, where he was a Fulbright Professor of American literature.

He and his wife Roser have spent extended time in Spain and Europe, traveling and lecturing at places such as the Institute of Italian/American Studies in Rome, and as the Fulbright representative from Spain at the Berlin Fulbright Conference. From 1981 to 2007 he was a professor of English at Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, where he was the faculty advisor of *Lighted Corners*, a prize-winning undergraduate literary magazine, and the editor of *The Monacacy Valley Review*, a national literary magazine. He has published fifteen scholarly essays on Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain, among others, and his poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines. The best of these are collected in *The Walking Man* (Icarus Books, 1994). His second novel, *Blacksnake's Path: The True Adventures of William Wells* (Heritage Books, 2008, ebook Argo/Navis) was a History Book Club selection. *Devil Dancer* (Somondoco Press, 2013) is a neo-noir novel set in Lexington, Kentucky. A work of history, *William Wells and the Struggle for the Old Northwest*, will be published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 2015.

Heath has a lifetime of experience driving his intense and personal portrayal of the civil rights activities in the early sixties. He participated in the March on Washington and other events of the time and spent ten years researching the civil rights movement and interviewing participants. His personal experiences, combined with his acknowledged talents as a writer, combine to make *The Children Bob Moses Led* a remarkable account of the events of Freedom Summer 1964. His wife Roser Caminals is a Catalan novelist who writes about her native Barcelona. They live in Frederick, Maryland.

A 1999 interview with Heath is available at www.cortlandreview.com