

**Small World Networks to Diffusion of  
Innovation:  
A Social Network Analysis of  
Mississippi's Freedom Summer Project**

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***Premise:***

Small world networks have played a critical role in shaping societies, cultures, and the institutions encompassing our world. Activists who have participated in numerous social movements have utilized social circles to help trail blaze initiatives and enable our world to transition and overcome many injustices. The Freedom Summer Project is just such a movement. Because innovation is diffused via small world networks, the Freedom Summer Project of Mississippi was successful and a catalyst for other social movements. Understanding how small world networks generate collective action and led to the diffusion of innovation will help illustrate to the reader the importance of small world networks in achieving success in a social movement similar to that of Freedom Summer Project.

### ***The problem:***

Many countries today are experiencing a stage of transition, as Arrighi and Silver outlined in Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System. "Liberation struggles [have] a profound impact on perceptions of human freedom and democracy" (pg. 173). Many countries are in a state of upheaval as they attempt to emulate an existing structure or achieve rights and equalities. Some societal ills initially can be treated by acknowledging the importance and power behind small world networks. Focusing on the Freedom Summer Project, the goal is to uncover the organizations and relationships that allowed this social movement to take place.

**Data:**

The data collected will come from the book, “Freedom Summer”, by Doug McAdams. The objective is to acknowledge specific, explicitly mentioned, relationships that contributed to the Freedom Summer Project. As mentioned above, by conducting a Social Network Analysis of the book, *Freedom Summer*, the significant organizations will be identified.

**BACKGROUND**

“Freedom Summer”, by Doug McAdam, is a historical biography comprising excerpts from; interviews with original volunteers, letters from project leaders and many who oppose the movement. Clippings from media coverage during and following the Freedom Summer Project (FSP) of 1964 were gathered to depict the victories and tragedies during this moment in history. McAdam provides great details of the event, highlighting personal, political, and societal consequences that followed the massive event.

Deriving from the economic euphoria (5) that is the “baby boom” and post-World War II, came an outcry for political activism permeated the United States. During the summer of 1964, the events of the FSP in Mississippi would set in motion the important social movements of the late Sixties and early Seventies. During the Sixties, black Mississippians were at the bottom of the “totem pole”, to put it lightly. The average non-white family income was approximately \$1,444, the lowest in the US, meaning 86% of all non-white families were living under the official federal poverty level. (5) “The median number of years of school completed by

[a black Mississippian] over the age of twenty-five” was six years, compared to eleven in the white community (McAdam, 1988, pg. 25). Low levels of education increased the unlikelihood of escaping economic traps imposed by the white minority of Mississippi.

Along with the seemingly non-existent education and low income, came infant mortality rates “nearly 250% higher than the national average [of] whites” in America (McAdam, 1988, pg. 26). Living conditions were beyond poor, with “100,138 [houses] lacking piped water; [and] two-thirds without flush toilets” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 26). The ability to imagine a world of equality and progression was impossible for the black citizens of Mississippi. Their right to vote was restricted, resulting in an inability to request the means to better their lives and the lives of generations to come. This phenomena is most surprising considering five counties in Mississippi were majority black with zero black voter registrants. While the state of Mississippi relied financially on the black sharecroppers, they were nonetheless reluctant to permit simple equalities that would inevitably increase the economic stability of Mississippi as a whole.

Due to insufficient civil rights activism, beginning to appear in other areas of the Deep South, the grim reality of impoverishment and inequality<sup>(5)</sup> plagued the black people of Mississippi for years. However, in the fall of 1961, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), entered. SNCC was determined to increase the number of black voter registrants in Mississippi. Although SNCC was a nonviolent organization, violence against it continued during its attempts to register black voters. Violence and death against the black

community was not uncommon. “Between 1882 and 1964, 539 blacks had been lynched in Mississippi” (Ploski and Marr 1976:275, & McAdam, 1988, pg. 26). The death of hundreds and the beating of thousands led SNCC to act quickly in developing a project that would unconsciously resonate and bring forth awareness of the injustices happening in America.

After many SNCC initiatives, the mission of the organization was to “no longer... [educate] the prejudice white folk, but [to dismantle the] elaborate system of economic, political, and social oppression [in Mississippi]” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 31). With this mission in mind, development of the FSP commenced. The Freedom Summer Project utilized 750 volunteers from elite American universities throughout the North. Majority of volunteers were the sons and daughters of white American privileged <sup>(5)</sup>, ignorant to the conditions of racism and caste systems imposed on those living in the backyards of their society. Although many were unaware of the injustices experienced by blacks prior to the Freedom Summer Project, all were forever changed as a result of living in Mississippi and undergoing the same cruelties as their black counterparts.

The success of the FSP has not much to do with the continued efforts of SNCC, but more to do with the social change that erupted as a result of the white volunteers in Mississippi. Many of the volunteers “served as influential carriers of the new culture” (McAdams, 1988, pg. 10) and continued to challenge the institutions of America through small world network of the Freedom Summer Project. To illustrate the impact the Freedom Summer Project, one must first understand the elements of small world networks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Small world networks empower individuals to communicate or reach distant parties within a network with very few intermediaries. <sup>(3)</sup> According to Charles Kadushin, there are seven fundamental ideas that explain small world networks. To best exemplify these ideas, a correlation between Kadushin's fundamental ideas and the Freedom Summer Project will be made.

1. "The first idea concerns the number of others that people know in the interpersonal environment." (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 108)

In order to facilitate the small world phenomenon a comprehension of the social structure must be attained. <sup>(3)</sup> In Freedom Summer, the chair of SNCC, Bob Moses, suggested incorporating white students in the FSP, similar to past Freedom Vote campaigns, as a method for gaining attention from mainstream media and society. <sup>(3)</sup> Receiving national attention for the injustices faced by blacks in Mississippi was hindered or blocked by the social structure in America. It was argued that, "if the murders, beatings, and jailing SNCC workers had endured in Mississippi had not been enough to stir public attention, perhaps--and, in turn, the federal government--would take notice if those beaten and shot were the sons and daughters of white America" (McAdam, 1988, pg. 33). By acknowledging the unfortunate biases of the American government, SNCC workers were able to develop a course of action that would be the foundation of their movement.

Initially, when dealing with a social issue, activists should pay close attention to the social status of participants and victims of oppression. Understanding their hierarchical placement in society will dictate the appropriate course of action for eradicating social injustices. The inclusion of white volunteers leads to the second fundamental idea of forming a small world network.

2. “A few people know a great many people while most of us know far fewer” (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 108).

Kadushin explains the number of people one person knows is skewed, suggesting the methods used to determine power distribution poorly reflects the actual number of people in a person’s social circle.<sup>(3)</sup> Despite lacking knowledge of this fundamental idea, SNCC leaders seemed to have followed the model of Assortative Distribution Networks. The Assortative Distribution Networks suggests the “elite tend to hang out with other elites” (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 117). This model is most evident in the FSP as it pertains to the communication between lawmakers and SNCC leaders. The SNCC’s communication specialist exploits volunteers’ parental connections in effort to gain mass media exposure.

In the FSP application a section required applicants to provide contact information for parents. This information enabled SNCC’s Communication Office to disseminate any information to parents regarding any injustices (e.g., beatings, arrests, or cases of harassment) faced by volunteers. The following memo (an excerpt from *Freedom Summer*,

pg. 158), was sent prompting parents to reach out to their elite contacts in hopes of gaining protection for their children and attention for the movement at large.

*“Immediate action is needed by all those concerned with the safety of the Mississippi Summer Volunteers. Unless the President and the Attorney General can be convinced of the need for Federal protection of civil rights workers in Mississippi, the events of Philadelphia are almost certain to be repeated over and over again in the next town months.*

*We are asking all parents to use their influence in coming week to pressure President Johnson and Attorney General Kennedy into a commitment to protect workers before violence occurs, instead of waiting until the worst has happened before they offer their help.” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 158)*

The elite status most parents of volunteers maintained was used strategically, and increased the power of the small world network, there fueling the Freedom Summer Project.

The remaining fundamental ideas circle back to social structures, which increase the number of steps to travel throughout the network, due to social circles (i.e. clusters) that form. <sup>(3)</sup> During the FSP communication between lawyers and physicians and the volunteers were completed utilizing small numbers of steps compared to communication with the FBI. The social structures in Mississippi prohibited any alliance between two of the clusters (Freedom Summer Project and Federal Government), whereas the lawyers and physicians of the movement were a part of another cluster (i.e., the movement) minimizing the required steps to communicate or be known. <sup>(5)</sup>

How do these clusters form? According Kadushin, clusters form from the overlapping of social circles, meaning “people [belong] to groups and organizations of one kind or another” (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 122). For instance, after the close of the summer many

volunteers continued to pursue activism positions to quench their thirst for political participation. As women's liberation began, 40% of female volunteers from Freedom Summer participated in initiatives, generating another cluster from the cluster established by the Freedom Summer Project. <sup>(5)</sup>

As small world networks create clustering of social circles, how does this encourage the diffusion of innovation? According to Everett M. Rogers, diffusion is the procedure by which an idea is shared through certain communication practices over a duration of time by actors of a society. <sup>(6)</sup> Kadushin explains that general diffusion occurs

1. "through contact that involves some form of influence, persuasion, or coercion" (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 135) --for example , when volunteers of the Freedom Summer Project visited many fearful black Mississippians, they used multiple forms of rhetoric to register blacks to vote;<sup>(5)</sup>
2. "contact that involves some kind of emulation" (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 135)--e.g., the Free Speech Movements at University of California at Berkeley, Freedom Summer Project volunteers returned to school and led protests that followed the style of sit-ins previously done by many civil right activists; or
3. "adoption or emulation without direct social contact" (Kadushin, 2012, pg. 135) --for example, students who began activism while in school as a result of following the stories in the news. <sup>(5)</sup>

Although the above examples are evidence of innovation diffused, the means by which Freedom Summer Project succeeded, has higher level complexity. A key element that

enabled FSP to be innovative was the existence of a problem. By having a severe problem at the base of Freedom Summer Project, SNCC's small world network was able to utilize the social influence, mass media, and marketing skills needed to encourage further activism in America. SNCC even sent correspondence to media outlets surrounding the hometowns and universities of volunteers detailing the events experienced by volunteers. This exposure created hero like images among those at home who were enthralled by the activism and happenings of Mississippi during the summer of 1964. The rights that were being demanded and the elite fighting for those rights were eye catching elements that influenced the nation to adopt new ideas of equality and civic duty. According to a study by Kornhauser and Lazarsfeld, researchers found that a combination of relative impact of perceived attributes regarding a particular idea, the influence of media messages regarding those attributes, as well as the environment of the one influenced, are all equally significant in determining why innovation was diffused or the ideas adopted. Their findings suggest the inability to pinpoint all evidence leading to why the Freedom Summer Project was innovative nationally but can highlight certain techniques that aided the process.

***Research questions:***

After analyzing the book *Freedom Summer*, to what extent did the Freedom Summer Project leaders take advantage of their small world network and which organizations, of that network, were most significant in the success of the social movement.

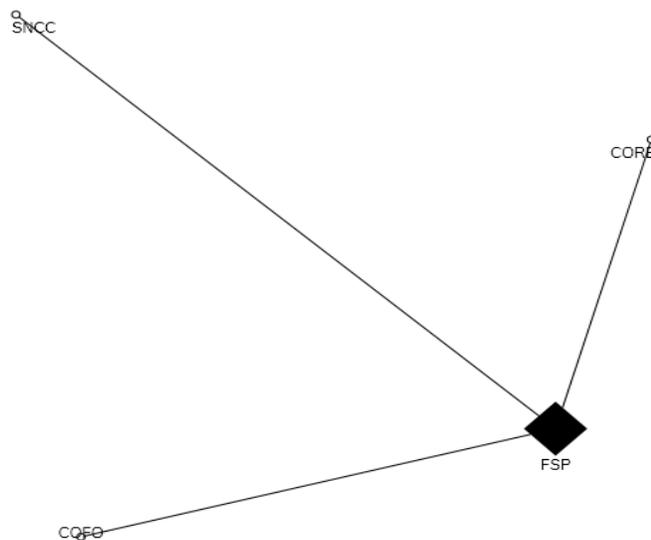
## METHODOLOGY

Moving forward, a Social Network Analysis will be conducted focusing on the presence and impact of various organizations during the Freedom Summer Project. Going chapter by chapter capturing the relationships described in *Freedom Summer*, the goal is to educate readers about the Freedom Summer and to show, in effect, how graphs facilitate learning. The impact of small world networks will be conceptualized by examining the relationship and civic involvement of organizations, government parties and corporations. The goal is to determine the importance of particular organizations by illustrating how their absence could have potentially changed the course of history.

Each graph will represent a chapter in the book, *Freedom Summer*. The nodes within the graph will represent organizations, government affiliations, corporations and significant individuals. The edges connecting certain nodes will illustrate the connection to the cause. Each edge will increase in thickness if they are mentioned once in each chapter. Each node and edge will have a particular color or shape to represent a different element of the FSP.

## ANALYSIS

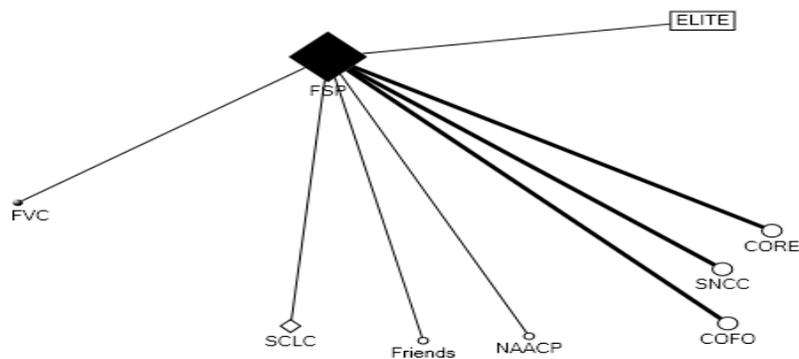
### Chapter 1



The graph of chapter one illustrates the initiation of the Freedom Summer Project (FSP). CORE represents Congress of Racial Equality, which was responsible for one of Mississippi's five Congressional districts. The other four districts were monitored by Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), which also funded approximately 95% of the FSP. Although SNCC assumed responsibility of the movement, "planning and directing the project fell to the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of civil rights groups... [who spearheaded] voter registration efforts in the South" (McAdams, 1988, pg. 28) . The summer project began as an intimate network of organizations, comprised of other corporations with a mutual cause as their foundation. This cause enabled the groups to create a project that met the goal of each organization, and the collaboration of like minds generated the opportunity for

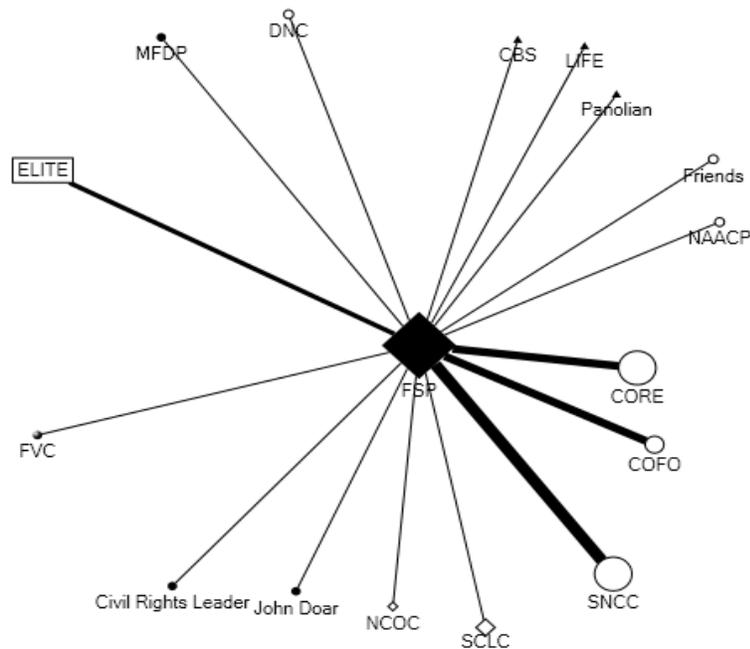
dialogue and collective thinking. These groups constructed the FSP and expanded their initiative to other surrounding organizations.

## Chapter 2



FSP derived from the success of a previous campaign, Freedom Vote, which incorporated college students from the north to inspire media coverage on issues in the south. Chapter 2 introduces Freedom Vote Campaign (FVC) as the parent to the Freedom Summer Project idea. This campaign was used as the template for organizing FSP and a tool for persuading other groups to participate or fund the project. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.), NAACP and Friends of SNCC were among the many organizations persuaded. They are added to the network illustrating their significance and service to the cause. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and NAACP provided a percentage of funds to the project, while Friends of SNCC coordinated the recruitment of ELITE volunteers on various campuses. As the network of organizations expanded the motive of the project was consistently strengthened.

## Chapter 3



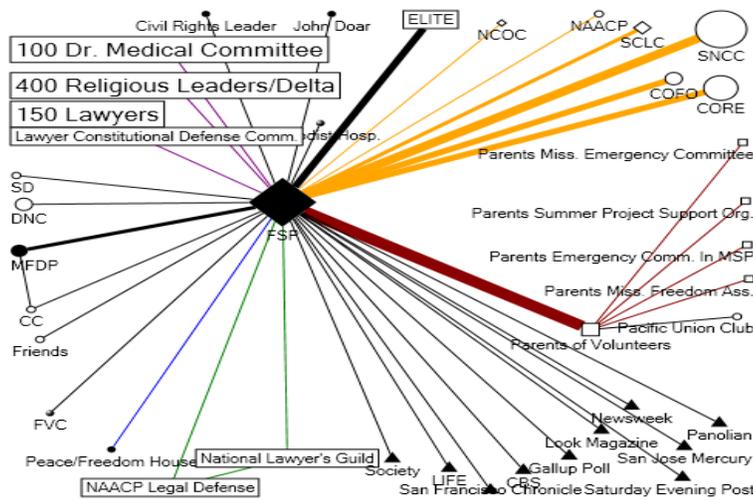
After volunteers were recruited to participate in the FSP, they underwent a training in Oxford, Ohio at the Western College for Women. National Council of Churches (NOCO) sponsored the training and included many parties to help prepare the ELITE volunteers for the summer to follow. Among the parties involved in the training of the volunteers were civil rights leaders such as, Bayard Rustin, Vincent Harding, and James Lawson.<sup>(5)</sup> Along with many civil rights leaders and activist came John Doar, a representative from the Justice Department. Doar advised volunteers not to anticipate federal protection while protesting or registering voters in Mississippi, explaining that, “Maintaining law and order is a state responsibility” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 67).

Instead of being dissuaded by the training and speeches made to educate volunteers on the struggles they will face, they became encouraged and united as a social circle. They all had the same mission in mind and looked to change the lives of those in

Mississippi. During their time in Ohio, the volunteers were followed by media “communicating a sense of “history-making”” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 68). Volunteers wrote home spreading the news about possibilities of being featured in Life magazine and CBS news segments which also aided in the spreading of the cause and the oppression of citizens in Mississippi. This distribution of information is pertinent to the diffusion of innovation nationally.

The main issue combated during the FSP was voter registration. Black Mississippians weren’t allowed to participate in the electoral process, “To address the problem, SNCC spearheaded the establishment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 78). MFDP would challenge the legitimacy of the white-only US Democratic Party, by winning seats in the Democratic Conference, held in Atlantic City. MFDP staged a mock election to demonstrate numbers of support for a diverse democratic party. Although, MFDP did not win the seats, knowledge of the oppression continued to be spread and supporters of the movement increased.

#### Chapter 4



As MFDP continued efforts to establish a new party for equal voting rights they were faced by many oppositions. Some of the potential threats to the summer came from black orchestrated organizations. Prior to the Sixties, fear and rumors of communistic affiliations spread throughout the US. SNCC refused to abate to threats made by Jack Greenberg, Director of NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Greenberg warned FSP of fund revocation if the National Lawyers' Guild were permitted to engage in the FSP, due to "communist association".<sup>(5)</sup> By refusing the threat sourced by perceived communistic affiliation, FSP influenced a new stance on issues unrelated to the cause.

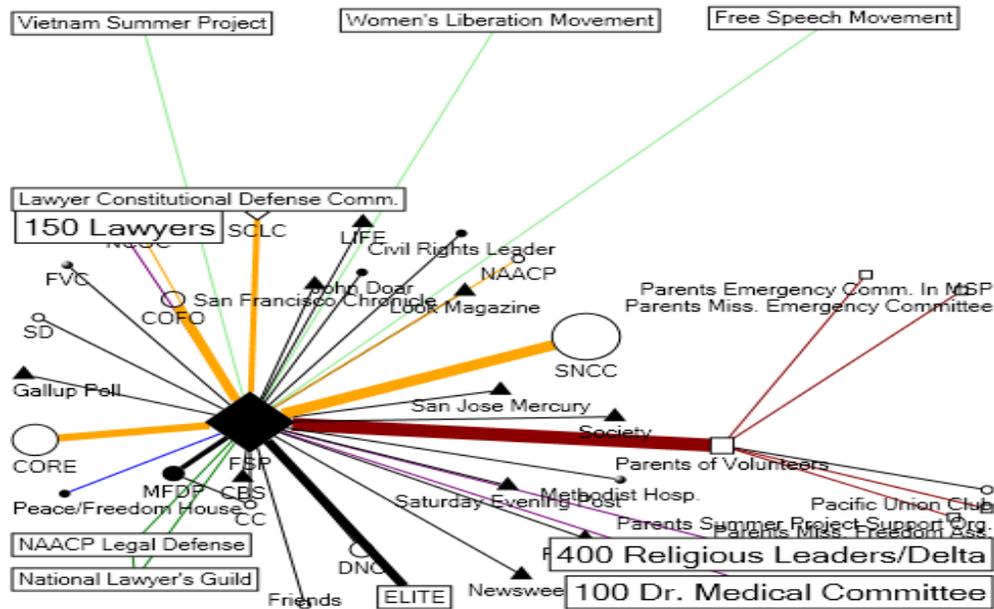
Beyond the MFDP initiatives and Lawyer's Guild controversies, FSP was attracting much attention as the summer events began. The ELITE volunteers were actively engaging with black Mississippians, experiencing the same treatments of those they were determined to help. In an effort to continue generating wide spread mass media attention, SNCC required the volunteers to provide contact information to news outlets in their hometown and surrounding universities. These new outlets were contacted and given stories detailing the experiences of the volunteers, generating more publicity for FSP. A few of the many news outlets sharing the FSP events are showcased in the small world network graph (mentioned above) as triangles.

FSP continued to utilize and expand its small world network once 650 volunteers, aside from northern college students, continually visited Mississippi. 400 volunteers were ministers, priests, and rabbis assemble by the NCOC, 150 lawyers, and 100 personnel from the

Medical Committee for Human Rights. These groups aided volunteers when tribulations arose effecting their spiritual, mental, physical, and legal wellbeing. The small world network enacted participation across many social circles during the FSP.

SNCC organized the FSP most effectively by communicating well pass three degrees of the volunteers’ relationships. Similar to SNCC’s use of media, in relation to volunteer’s application and spreading awareness of FSP, parents were enlisted in the network of this civil rights movement. Parents’ involvement, as previously mentioned, is evident in the network graph (with red edges).

### Chapter 5



In the fifth chapter of Freedom Summer, the theory of small world networks becomes most evident as political activism begins to “catch fire”. With FSP as the foundation of

the volunteers' civic involvement, it comes as no surprise that it will serve as the template for prospective social movements. Following the close of FSP many of the volunteers' desire to fight injustices and aid the oppressed increased. As shown in the graph above (with green edges), three social movements, mentioned in Freedom Summer, were led or heavily supported by the volunteers of FSP. The three social movements highlighted include, Free Speech Movement, Vietnam Summer Project, and Women's Liberation Movement.

The Free Speech Movement was supported by many volunteers of the FSP as they returned to University of California at Berkeley in the fall. Fighting for their right to protest injustices on their campus, many students employed the strategies commonly used during the civil rights era (e.g. sit-ins). Vietnam Freedom Summer was another movement that emulated the structure of FSP. Combining student activism and the fight against the oppression of a particular ethnic group is a reminiscent ideology that fueled the Vietnam Summer Project. One volunteer wrote to her parents, "The people we're killing in Viet Nam are the same people whom we've been killing for years in Mississippi. True, we didn't tie the knot in Mississippi and we didn't pull the trigger in Viet Nam—that is, we personally—but we've been standing behind the knot-tiers and the trigger-pullers too long." (McAdam, 1988, pg. 172)

Following the FSP, women also looked to be involve in issue they saw prominent during the FSP. 40% of female volunteers went on to participate in women's liberation, in hope of receiving equality between sexes. The events experienced in Mississippi clearly resonated with volunteers and were heavily showcased in future movements.



local, who in turn [had] connections with the legislature and governor, who in turn [had] connections with Congress and the President” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 128). Not only were social circles formed in opposition of the movement but negative media also existed reporting the FSP’s agenda was baseless. An editorial in Jackson’s *Clarion-Ledger* reported, “These young people who have gone to Mississippi have been attending training schools which can be described as nothing short of inflammatory in their instructions to these young people. The naïve inexperience of these youngsters has been preyed on and they have been stirred by tales of horror and violence that simply don’t exist in Mississippi.” (McAdam, 1988, pg. 148) While many were opposed to the agenda of FSP, too many viewed (via media) the true and injustices of the oppressed in Mississippi, resulting in the widespread adoption of the morals and ethical beliefs encompassing the movement.

## **CONCLUSION**

As illustrated through social network graphs, small world networks are significant in producing a large scale change in society. The leaders of Freedom Summer Project made effective use of their small world network and managed to inspire millions. The primary components of the Freedom Summer Project include; the media, parents of volunteers, additional volunteers, and the church. As previously mention, Rogers explains that diffusion is the procedure by which an idea is shared through certain communication practices over a duration of time by actors of a society. This project formally lasted approximately three months but informally was timeless.

The use of media coverage surpasses most tracking capabilities. Beyond news outlet the stories of volunteers' were communicated in books years following the social movement; *Freedom Summer* being a prime example. The social circles of the parents were also utilized beyond measure and the social circles of SNCC, COFO, CORE and NAACP were considerably valued components of the FSP. The church underrepresented as a sole organizations was repeatedly involved in the movement. Many church members housed and fed volunteers, and the church itself was used as a facility for educating black children in Mississippi.

Several of these organizations can be regarded as contributors of FSP. However, the success, as mentioned before, cannot be solely seen through the longevity of one particular organization. Rather, the success of FSP can be seen through changes in the society and the increased realization for the need to act civilly, and engage politically and socially in issues of today's transitioning world.

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