

# “Lessons in Law and Liberty: Freedom Summer 1964” Law Day 2014 Lecture Event

Tuesday, May 6, 2014, 1:00-3:00 pm

A 12:15 pm reception with light refreshments will precede the program

Approved for 2.4 Missouri CLE Hours

Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse, 28<sup>th</sup> Floor, En Banc Courtroom



Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society

Fifty years ago in 1964, civil rights activists organized the **Mississippi Freedom Summer Project**. At the time, Mississippi had the lowest percentage of African American registered voters. For nearly a century, segregation had prevented most African Americans in Mississippi from voting or holding public office. People who dared to challenge these conditions were often beaten, arrested, fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes, or even killed.

Several hundred northern college students, mostly white, were recruited to work in Mississippi during the summer. The leaders believed that bringing volunteers from northern colleges to Mississippi would attract media attention. The overarching goal of the Freedom Summer Project was to empower local residents to register and vote in local, state, and national elections. The local and visiting volunteers also set up Freedom Schools.

Though the volunteers were met with violence, they persisted. Americans all around the country were shocked by the brutality they witnessed on their televisions. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed Congress in part because Americans had been educated about these issues during Freedom Summer.

(Adapted from the Wisconsin Historical Society)

The U.S. Courts and The Judicial Learning Center invite you to an afternoon of learning, exploration and discussion in honor of **Law Day 2014** and the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer**.

FREE and open to the public

To make a reservation, visit

[www.JudicialLearningCenter.org/event-registration/](http://www.JudicialLearningCenter.org/event-registration/)

Questions? Call or email Rachel Marshall at (314) 244-2410

[Rachel\\_Marshall@ca8.uscourts.gov](mailto:Rachel_Marshall@ca8.uscourts.gov)

**12:15 pm - Reception and Light Refreshments**

**1:00 pm - Welcome & Opening Remarks - Jim Woodward, Clerk of Court, U.S. District Court of Eastern Missouri**

**1:30 pm - Keynote - Christopher T. Hexter, Freedom Summer Participant and St. Louis Attorney; Charles McLaurin, Mississippi Resident, Civil Rights Activist, and Freedom Summer Participant**  
What were conditions in Mississippi during 1964? What was the local legal culture in the Mississippi Delta counties? What was the motivation for the Freedom Summer Project? How did activists become involved? What did volunteers do? What risks were involved? How did the law in Mississippi inhibit African Americans from registering to vote? How did the courts intervene to protect the Freedom Summer workers? What role did lawyers play in the defense of volunteers? What were the lasting impacts? What are the lessons for today's citizens and legal practitioners?

**2:25 pm - Slideshow, Q & A, and further discussion - Christopher T. Hexter and Charles McLaurin**

The presenters will show images and documents to give the audience additional context. Both presenters will engage in discussion with the audience through questions.

**3:00 pm - Optional tours of the Freedom Summer exhibit and The Judicial Learning Center will be available**

The program is held in conjunction with the exhibit “Risking Everything: A Freedom Summer Exhibit,” at the courthouse April 22-May 6. The exhibit, from the Wisconsin Historical Society, is travelling through schools, libraries, and museums during 2014 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Freedom Summer. The Wisconsin Historical Society holds over 30,000 documents and images relating to the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, most of them collected during the 1960s. For more information, see [fsxbt.tumblr.com](http://fsxbt.tumblr.com) and [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org)

Law Day 2014 – “American Democracy and the Rule of Law: Why Every Vote Matters.” Law Day is officially May 1, and the entire month of May is a time to celebrate the rule of law and its contributions to the freedoms that all American share. For more information, see [www.LawDay.org](http://www.LawDay.org).

## SPEAKER BIOS

**Christopher T. Hexter** is a St. Louis attorney at Schuchat, Cook & Werner, focusing on labor, education and employment discrimination law. He has previously worked at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, and has been active in the ABA Section of Labor & Employment Law, serving as Union Co-Chair and Union Program Chair of the Section's Developing Labor Law Committee. He co-edited *Developing Labor Law* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition), and continues as a chapter editor of the Annual Supplements to that publication. He served as a member of the Governing Council of the ABA's Section of Labor and Employment Law for eight years through 2012 and continues to work on administrative committees of the Council.



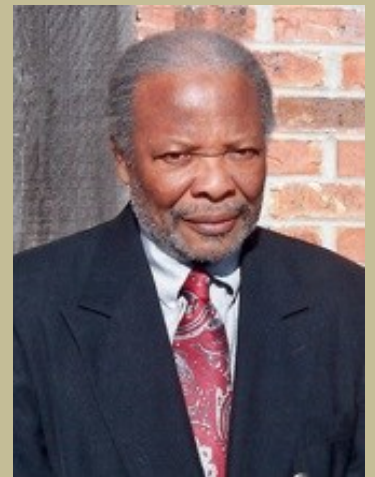
In 1963, just after graduating from University City High School, Mr. Hexter participated in the Jefferson Bank demonstration in St. Louis. In 1964, Mr. Hexter applied for and was accepted as a volunteer in the Mississippi Summer Project and worked in Ruleville and Indianola, Sunflower County, Mississippi as a Freedom School teacher. While attending the University of Wisconsin as an undergraduate and then law student, he worked part-time for the Wisconsin Historical Society collecting manuscripts for the archival collection including materials related to the Mississippi Summer Project. Since returning to St. Louis in 1972, he has continued to work on civil rights, and educational and social issues. He has served on the boards of the University City Residential Service and National Neighbors, both of which were created in response to the practice of block busting by the real estate industry. Mr. Hexter has organized a career day for University City High School, and is a

current Ready Readers volunteer in the St. Louis Public Schools. He was instrumental in promoting and sustaining a joint venture between his synagogue, Central Reform Congregation, and Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church for over two decades. At present, he is working to develop a coalition of parents, students, and others to help improve the educational opportunities for students attending public schools in Sunflower County, Mississippi.

Chris and his wife Shellie live in University City where they raised five children, three of whom graduated from University City High School, and where one of their four grandchildren now attends public school. Their other three grandchildren live in Jerusalem, Israel with their son and daughter-in-law.

**Charles McLaurin** was born in Jackson, Mississippi and received his early education in the Jackson Public School system. He attended Mississippi Valley State University and Jackson State University. He is a veteran of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In 1962, Mr. McLaurin joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was assigned to work Sunflower County as the SNCC Field Secretary with the responsibility to assist Ruleville black citizens in organizing and implementing a voter registration project. It was during his work with SNCC that he met and later became close friends with a sharecropper named Fannie Lou Hamer.

In 1964, Mr. McLaurin directed the Sunflower County Freedom Summer Project which brought young volunteers into Sunflower County under COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, a coalition of several major civil rights organizations including SNCC. Mr. McLaurin played a key role in organizing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in Sunflower County and served as a delegate from the Delta during the MFDP seating challenge at the 1964 National Democratic Party Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Mr. McLaurin served as campaign manager for Fannie Lou Hamer's unsuccessful bid for the U.S. House of Representatives. He later played a key role in the election of the first black Congressman from the Second District of Mississippi.



*Photo courtesy of Wabash College*

Arrested over thirty times, Mr. McLaurin is still active in the movement. Today he guides tours throughout the Mississippi Delta on the civil rights trail. He is actively involved with Sunflower County Civil Rights Movement Veterans, ROAR, and other organizations. In 2010, Charles McLaurin was the recipient of a Fannie Lou Hamer Humanitarian Award. The Hamer Award is presented annually by Hamer Institute on Citizenship and Democracy, at Jackson State University.