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50 years ago, 'Freedom Summer' changed U.S.

By Allen G. Breed and Sharon Cohen

HOLLY SPRINGS, Miss. (AP) - Roy DeBerry learned at an early age what could happen to a black boy who violated Mississippi's Jim Crow-era social code.

His teacher at the one-room church school outside town had arranged for porters to toss copies of the Chicago Defender, Jet and other black publications from passing trains, because mailing them was too risky. One day, the young pupils learned the gruesome tale of Emmett Till, the Chicago boy beaten beyond recognition, shot and dumped in a river in 1955 - for whistling at a white woman.

"There was real terror in Mississippi," says DeBerry, just 8 at the time. "We knew that this state was capable of killing and lynching a 14-year-old boy - and was also capable of not convicting the people that did it."

As a teen himself, DeBerry knew he was gambling with his own life when he joined civil rights activists who came to Mississippi in the summer of 1964 to challenge its way of life.

During what became known as "Freedom Summer," hundreds of volunteers - mostly Northern white college students and others, including Aviva Futorian, a young history teacher - descended on the state to focus national attention on the indignities and horrors of segregation. They came to register blacks to vote, and establish "Freedom Schools" and community centers to help prepare those long disenfranchised for participation in what they hoped would be a new political order.

Opposition was widespread and brutal. Churches were bombed, volunteers were harassed, arrested, beaten - even murdered.

Fifty years later, Freedom Summer stands out as a watershed moment in the long, often bloody drive for civil rights. Mass resistance to integration started to crumble. Congress took a monumental step toward equal rights. And scores of young, idealistic volunteers embarked on long careers of activism that continue to shape American politics and policy today.

And in this vortex of history, lifelong friendships formed between people from vastly different worlds.

So it was that a 16-year-old black factory worker's son from Mississippi and the 26-year-old daughter of a Jewish furniture mogul from Chicago's affluent suburbs bonded over bologna and tomato sandwiches and chatter at Modena's Cafe during a summer that would define their lives.

Sitting side by side recently on a sofa in Futorian's condominium overlooking Chicago's fashionable Lincoln Park, the two friends flipped through albums of photos from 1964. They reminisced about Freedom School lessons under a tree in oppressive heat, practice sessions for a sit-in at a segregated theater, taboos that prevented a white woman and black man from sitting next to each other in a car. As they talked, they sometimes finished each other's stories as old friends often do.

"Everybody told us our lives would be in danger," said Futorian, now a 76-year-old attorney. "I probably didn't have as much trepidation as I should have. Because it's hard to imagine your own death."

Freedom Summer followed many winters of discontent in the fight for civil rights. Years of



Durham based award winning poet Dasan Ahanu led the The Bull City Slam Team to a first place finish at the The 22nd Annual Southern Fried Southeastern Regional Poetry Slam June 14-15. From left to right are: Eric "Lyrically Blessed" Thompson, Brandon "Ishine" Evans, Wendy Jones, Dasan Ahanu, Lejuane "El'Ja" Bowens, Micah Romans (squatting). See story on page 2

Black Workers Stuck in Poverty Wages

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - As fast food and retail workers continue to march for higher wages, a new study by the Economic Policy Institute revealed that blacks are more likely to earn poverty wages than whites.

EPI released the "Raising America's Pay" study in conjunction with the launch of a new research initiative focused on "broad-based wage growth as the central economic challenge of our time - essential to alleviating inequality, expanding the middle class, reducing poverty, generating shared prosperity, and sustaining economic growth."

During a panel discussion about the new project, Valerie Wilson, director of EPI's program on race, ethnicity, and the economy, said that over the last 30 years, wage growth has been far below productivity growth, for a lot of workers, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender.

Although the number of blacks and whites working poverty-level wages has increased since 2000, nearly 36 percent of black workers made those wages compared to less than 23 percent of whites.

"As we see a shrinking piece of the pie for workers to divide, black and Hispanic workers have been left behind," said Wilson.

Wilson said that the new project will examine occupational segregation in gender and race, observe the rise of mass incarceration and how it affects black male workers, and the surge in undocumented workers.

In a 2011, EPI researchers reported that black males earned less than \$15 working full-time, compared to their white male peers who made more than \$20, even with the same levels of education.

"One possible explanation for this wage disparity is that black men tend to be crowded into lower-paying occupations - even when they have similar educational attainment as white men," stated the report. "The result is an oversupply of workers in the crowded occupations, which has the effect of lowering wages further in those jobs."

In 2013, the Center for Economic Policy Research, reported "that increases in education and work experience will increase workers' productivity and translate into higher compensation. But, the share of black workers in a 'good job' - one that pays at least \$19 per hour (in inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars), has employer-provided health insurance, and an employer-sponsored retirement plan - has actually declined."

Wilson said that higher levels of education have not translated into wage growth.

"If we look at those workers who are the highest earners, these are also the workers that tend to be the most highly educated," said Wilson. "More education has helped minorities and women to get higher wages, but it hasn't necessarily gotten them to equal wages, so that's an additional step that needs to be taken to close the gap."

Lawrence Mishel, president of EPI, agreed, adding that college education is important, but when it comes to inclusive income growth over the next 10 years, addressing education is not very high on that list.

Ruby Dee's legacy of activism, acting mourned

By Mark Kennedy

NEW YORK (AP) - For Ruby Dee, acting and activism were not contradictory things. They were inseparable and they were intertwined.

The African-American actress who earned lead roles in movies and on Broadway also spent her entire life fighting against injustice, even emceeding the 1963 March on Washington and protesting apartheid in South Africa.

"We are image makers. Why can't we image makers become peacemakers, too?" she asked after she and her husband Ossie Davis accepted the Screen Actors Guild Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2000.

That legacy of entertaining and pushing for change - in addition to her epic love affair with Davis - made Dee, who died at age 91 in her New Rochelle, New York, home on June 11, a beloved figure in America and beyond. Broadway theaters dimmed their lights in her honor June 13.

As a sign of how influential Dee has been to generations of performers, she was thanked twice from the podium at this year's Tony Awards - by six-time winner Audra McDonald and new Tony winner director Kenny Leon.

"She will be missed but never forgotten as she lives on in many of us," Leon said in a statement June 12, noting that Dee's passing came just weeks after the death of Maya Angelou. "Maya and Ruby leave us only days apart - those two women with four letter names instructed us on how to live."

Dee's long career earned her an Emmy, a Grammy, two Screen Actors Guild awards, the NAACP Image Award, Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Art, and the National Civil Rights Museum's Lifetime Achievement Award. She got an Oscar nomination at age 83 for best supporting actress for her role in the 2007 film "American Gangster."

Spike Lee, who directed Dee and her husband in "Do the Right Thing," took to Instagram to say he was "crushed." He said it was one of his "great blessings in life to work with two of the finest artists and activists - Ruby and Ossie."

Dee made her Broadway debut in the original production of "South Pacific" and in 1959 starred in the Broadway premiere of "A Raisin in the Sun," Lorraine Hansberry's landmark play about black frustration amid racial discrimination, opposite Sidney Poitier. Both reprised that role in the film two years later.

Davis and Dee, who met in 1945 when she auditioned for the Broadway play "Jeb," and married on a day off from another play in 1948, shared billing in 11 stage productions and five movies during long parallel careers.

But they were more than a performing couple. They were also activists who fought for civil rights, particularly for blacks. "We used the arts as part of our struggle," she said in 2006.

Along with film, stage and television, their richly honored careers extended to a radio show, "The Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee Story Hour," that featured a mix of black themes. Davis directed one of their joint film appearances, "Countdown at Kusini" (1976).



ACTRESS RUBY DEE - (Photo Courtesy Ruby Dee/Ossie dAvis.com)

As young performers, they participated in the growing movement for social and racial justice in the United States. They were friends with barrier-breaking baseball star Jackie Robinson and his wife, Rachel - Dee played her, opposite Robinson himself, in the 1950 movie, "The Jackie Robinson Story" - and with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Both spoke at both the funerals for King and Malcolm X.

Their activism never waned. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary by helping to launch the 30th-anniversary celebration of the University of Iowa Black Action Theatre and in 1999, were arrested protesting the shooting death of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed African immigrant, by New York City police.

In 1998, the pair also released a dual autobiography, "With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together."

Dee and Davis, who died in 2005, were celebrated as national treasures when they received the National Medal of Arts in 1995 and got a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Screen Actors Guild in 2000. In 2004, she and Davis received Kennedy Center Honors. Another honor came in 2007 when the recording of their memoir won a Grammy for best spoken word album.

Born Ruby Ann Wallace in Cleveland, Dee moved to Harlem with her family as an infant. She attended her first protests as a child, joining picket lines to rail against discriminatory hiring practices.

She graduated from a highly competitive high school and enrolled in college but longed to act.

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