

DOWN IN MISSISSIPPI  
by Carlyle Brown

*About the play (from the playwright):*

*Down in Mississippi* takes place during the Freedom Summer campaign to register African Americans to vote in the dangerous, segregated world of Mississippi in 1964. It explores the transformational experiences of three young civil rights activists who leave their safe northern homes to go down to Mississippi to try to change the world and discover that before they can change the world they will have to change themselves. A celebration of a movement that gave birth to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voter's Right Act of 1965.

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*JIMMY—Male, 20s, African American*

*About the scene:*

At the top of the play, JIMMY explains what prompted him to join the movement.

JIMMY

. . . But then I seen something on the TV, on the news, that made me change, my thinking once again. It was a little girl going to school, a little black girl going to school. It was her first day. She was six years old going to the first grade at William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans of all places. But she wasn't just going to school, she was integrating that school, escorted by Federal Marshals no less, and every day all around her there was this mob of red faced angry crackers yelling at her and jeering at her and threatening her life. And I'm wondering to myself how can she do it? How could she contain all that fear in that little body? How could that little girl possibly put up a wall against all that hate? How could a child so little, so young have such mastery over her self?

[...]

And seeing that little girl going through all her struggles and still standing up, made me suddenly realize that she had just changed my life forever . . . I'm going to prove to myself that there's a light shining in me just like there was in that little girl.

The only problem is that our leaders, they say we got to be nonviolent which isn't natural. Why the first law of nature is that most natural and absolute of laws, the law of self-defense. But the SNCC people say if I'm going to be with the program, I got to get with the program. They say I got to learn it, got to practice it like a discipline. Learn it like it was an instinct. 'Cause you can't fake it. It's got to be real.