

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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*ELLEN—Female, 20s, white*

*About the scene:*

ELLEN explains what prompted her to join the movement.

ELLEN

You know going away to school, going away to college is a pretty scary thing. All your life you've been encouraged and spoiled and told that you're special and then all of a sudden just right out of nowhere you have to decide what you're going to do for the rest of your life. It's terrible. It's terrifying. I think that that's why kids in college drink so much all the time because they're scared. I mean that's what college really teaches us more than just books and studies is that nothing is ever going to be the same like it used to be anymore. It wasn't until now that I in some way realize how much my mom had made so many sacrifices so that me, and my little brother would feel that way . . . special I mean. But I didn't know then and I don't know now what I'm going to do with the rest of my life. I mean I'm a poly-sci major, but that's just because I read the newspapers all the time to keep from listening to my little brother whining and my mom complaining about what she has to go through . . . And now I have to do something with my life. So, I'm going down to Mississippi. I'm going to teach. I'm going to be a teacher in a Freedom School. I'm going to teach civil rights and politics and civics and Negro history and a lot of things that I don't really know anything about. But I'm learning and then I'm going to be teaching. I know my mom has still got to support me, but for now, for this summer anyway, I'm going to Mississippi. You see when I started discovering what was going on in Mississippi it really disturbed me. It hurt me in my heart. It just upset me and I couldn't stop thinking about it. It's wrong, it's just wrong what those white people do to Negroes in Mississippi.