Convocation Freedom Summer Essay

Convocation and The College Reads! are important focal points for each year's incoming class. Convocation, held on the day prior to the start of classes, is your first opportunity to engage in academic dialogue with your new classmates and a professor. To prepare for Convocation, write a 500-750 word essay that responds to one of the prompts below. Bring a hardcopy of your essay (typed and with your name on it) to Convocation and give it to the faculty member leading the discussion.

Your essays will play an important role in the College-wide discussion of Freedom Summer. Faculty and staff will read the essays to learn more about this year’s incoming class. Information from your essays will also be used to design activities related to Bruce Watson’s visit to campus in November. Authors of outstanding essays will be invited to lunch with Bruce Watson during his visit.

1. In telling the history of Freedom Summer, Watson introduces a number of different people who committed their lives to the Civil Rights Movement. Select a person you identify with and explain what it is about that person that you find so personally meaningful. In the same time and place, would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?

2. Watson examines the critical role of education during Freedom Summer. What were the objectives of Freedom Schools in Mississippi? How are the educational goals and ideals that informed the Freedom Schools similar to and different from your own educational experience so far? Are there any insights you can draw from the Freedom Schools in planning your next four years of formal education?

3. After recounting Mississippi’s slow steps forward and inevitable steps back in the years after 1964, Watson’s epilogue—punctuated by excerpts from Obama’s 2008 Inaugural address—takes a more optimistic perspective as it follows the lives of former Freedom Summer volunteers into the era of our nation's first black president. If you could re-write the epilogue to Freedom Summer today, would you be as optimistic? What recent events would you use in framing your own conclusion?