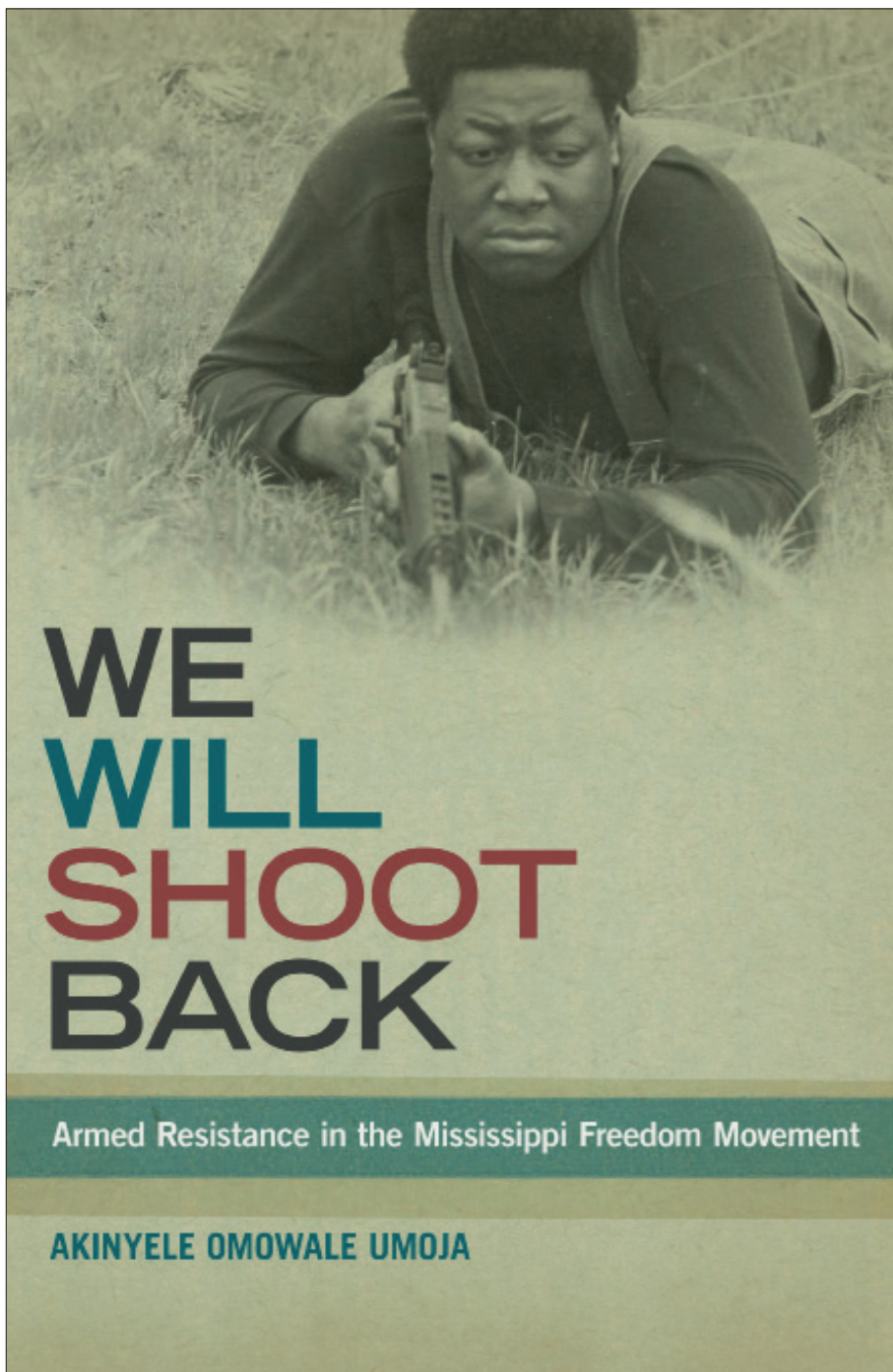


WE WILL SHOOT BACK

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



In *We Will Shoot Back*, Akinyele Omowale Umoja argues that armed resistance was critical to the Southern freedom struggle and the dismantling of segregation and Black disenfranchisement. Intimidation and fear were central to the system of oppression in most of the Deep South. To overcome the system of segregation, Black people had to overcome fear to present a significant challenge to White domination. As the civil rights movement developed, armed self-defense and resistance became a significant means by which the descendants of enslaved Africans overturned fear and intimidation and developed different political and social relationships between Black and White Mississippians.

This riveting historical narrative reconstructs the armed resistance of Black activists, their challenge of racist terrorism, and their fight for human rights.

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PAPER

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is the main argument of the book?
2. What distinguishes this book from previous studies that focus on armed resistance in the Black Freedom Movement?
3. How does the author distinguish the Civil Rights Movement from the Black Power Movement?
4. What are the different ideological expressions of Black power?
5. What are the various forms of armed resistance?
6. What did you take away from the book?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What were the demographics of Mississippi after Civil War—and what did it have to do with the character of white supremacist violence in the state?
2. What role did the Black militia (led by Charles Caldwell) have in securing Reconstruction in Hinds County? How were their efforts ultimately defeated?
3. Describe and contrast the NAACP (from the 1920s to 1940s) and UNIA (1920s) organizing in Mississippi during the Nadir period. Why did the UNIA activity decline?
4. Why does the author say that most of the armed resistance in the state from the end of Reconstruction to the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s was not collective resistance, but primarily “individual emergency self-defense”? Please provide two examples of this.
5. What were proposed UNIA responses to white terrorism in the Deep South?
6. Describe the New Afrikan social constructs of the “Bad Negro” and the Trickster. How were they different?
7. What role did secret societies and lodges play in pre-Civil Rights movement resistance?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Identify some global connections between anti-colonial movements and the upsurge of Black insurgency against segregation in Mississippi.
2. What was the political environment in Mississippi during the 1940s?
3. Describe the founding of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) and the role of Dr. T.R.M. Howard in the development of that organization.
4. What was the social background of the leadership of the RCNL?
5. What indicators do we have that Dr. T.R.M. Howard practiced armed self-defense?
6. Why were NAACP memberships compromised in Southern states after 1954? What does the author argue was the significant difference in the increase in NAACP membership numbers in Mississippi?
7. What was the "Mau Mau"? Why did Medgar Evers stop publicly advocating the organizing of a Mississippi Mau Mau?
8. What were Simeon Booker's reflections on armed self-defense and guns in the Mississippi Black freedom movement after visiting the state in 1955?
9. Contrast and compare Robert F. Williams and Medgar Evers on the practice of advocacy of armed resistance. How did the NAACP leadership for his advocacy on this question treat each?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Explain the roles of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the development of nonviolence.
2. How can Robert F. Williams be distinguished from most local movement activists in the early 1960s?
3. Bob Moses was SNCC's first organizer in Mississippi. What was his perspective on nonviolence?
4. How did Amzie Moore's advice to Moses help shape SNCC activity in Mississippi?
5. Why did MacArthur Cotton and other SNCC members consider the Black neighborhoods of Tylertown a "haven" community?
6. Describe the debates between Moses and E.W. Steptoe about possessing firearms. What did Moses ultimately conclude from their interactions?
7. List two examples of how Laura McGhee demonstrated that the tradition of armed resistance is not exclusively male.
8. Why was Hartman Turnbow targeted by nightriders as a leader of the Black freedom movement in Holmes County?
9. How is C.O. Chinn different from most of our representations of who participated in the Civil Rights movement? How did he negotiate space for himself that was not available to other Blacks in Jim Crow Mississippi?
10. What are two reasons it was difficult for nonviolent activists to challenge armed self-defense by local activists in Mississippi?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What was the motivation for Freedom Summer?
2. Why were the majority of Mississippi SNCC field staff opposed to bringing massive numbers of white college students to the state to volunteer in Freedom Summer?
3. On June 10, 1964, SNCC staff had its first major debate on the question of field staff having guns in Freedom Houses. What sparked the debate? Present both sides of the debate on SNCC staff participating in armed self-defense.
4. What was the ideology of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM)? How did SNCC leadership, membership, and local activists respond to RAM's advocacy of armed self-defense?
5. How did the abductions and murders of James Chaney, Mickey Schwerner, and Andy Goodman impact CORE organizer Dave Dennis' beliefs about nonviolence?
6. Mileston and Harmony are both haven communities. What were common features of both of these communities?
7. What was Janie Brewer's strategy to challenge the terrorism of nightriders in Tallahatchie County?
8. In 1964, McComb, Mississippi was known as "the bombing capital of the world." What motivated the federal and state governments to intervene and ultimately arrest the Klansmen responsible for the bombings?
9. The author quotes Lorne Cress, who said at a November 1964 meeting, armed SNCC members constituted "the beginning of the end of the nonviolent movement." How does the author support Cress' statement and argue that 1964 and Freedom Summer constituted the beginning of the decline of nonviolence for CORE and SNCC?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are some of the significant differences in the Mississippi freedom movement in the years following 1964 Freedom Summer?
2. Describe the emergence of Charles Evers as the primary spokesperson of the Mississippi freedom movement. How was his rhetoric different from previous Mississippi Black spokespersons in the 1960s?
3. What was the role of secrecy in the organization of the Mississippi Deacons for Defense? What measures did the Deacons employ to counter intelligence on the organization by the Klan, police, and the FBI?
4. What type of weapons did the Natchez Deacons possess? How did they acquire guns and ammunition? How did state officials respond to the presence of armed Deacons?
5. List some of the demands of the 1965 Natchez Boycott.
6. What was the role of the enforcer squads? What name was given to enforcer squads in the state after the Hattiesburg Boycott in 1966?
7. What role did women generally play in boycott enforcement in the Natchez model?
8. Who was Rudy Shields? What was Shields' role in boycott enforcement?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What was the purpose of James Meredith's March Against Fear?
2. Why did the leadership of the major national Civil Rights organizations immediately come to Memphis, Tennessee in response to Meredith's shooting? What were the major conflicts between them in planning to continue the March Against Fear?
3. Describe the response of the March Against Fear on local Blacks in Belzoni (Humphreys County) and Yazoo.
4. The March Against Fear became a venue for the debate in the Movement between advocates of nonviolence and those who supported armed resistance. What were Dr. King's perspectives on this debate? How did the role of the Deacons possibly encourage the advocates of armed self-defense?
5. How did the defense of the Philadelphia, Mississippi Freedom House assist in increasing Ralph Featherstone's reputation within SNCC?
6. Why didn't the Deacons defend marchers attacked by Mississippi State troopers in Canton, Mississippi?
7. One of the young people organized by Rudy Shields in Belzoni commented on the boycott organizer, "made people aware they didn't have to be afraid". What tactics did Shields employ to counter the white supremacist violence in Humphrey's County?
8. What age group did Shields employ in the Spirit? What type of activity did the Spirit utilize in Yazoo County to protect the integrity of the boycott?
9. What were some of the successes of the Yazoo boycott of 1969-1970?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. One NAACP lawyer stated that Rudy Shields was "one of the few Black radicals left who still believe in integration." The author argued that by 1969-1970, Shields began to embrace the Black Power ideology of revolutionary nationalism. What argument does the author present for that?
2. How did Shields' tactics in the Aberdeen boycott of 1970 reflect his use of deception and psychological warfare?
3. How effective was the collective defense by armed Blacks of Cole residence on August 15, 1970?
4. The author presents evidence that a clandestine group was responsible for the bombing of the Clay County Courthouse and the shooting of storeowner Billy Wilson on January 25, 1970. What were these actions in response to? Who were possible participants in this act of guerrilla warfare?
5. Rudy Shields began to utilize the name Black United Front (BUF) to organize boycotts in different towns in Mississippi. List a few example of the BUF in Mississippi boycotts. What function did the BUF play?
6. Outline some of the responses from the Black community to the shootings and killing of Jackson State College students.
7. What was Gaidi and Imari Obadele's (aka Milton and Richard Henry) original plan for Black majority counties in Mississippi? How did that strategy change after the founding of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Africa (PGRNA)?
8. How did the Hinds County Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) identify with the Black Power movement? What role did FDP members play in the founding of the PGRNA in Mississippi?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why did historians Sundiata Cha Jua and Clarence Lange characterize the middle and late 1970s as "a moment of retreat, reconceptualization and regrouping"?
2. What are the origins of the United League (UL) of Marshall County?
3. How did the shoot out between UL members and the KKK enhance the reputation of Alfred "Skip" Robinson?
4. What sparked the 1974 boycott in Byhalia? What measures from the Natchez model were employed in the Byhalia boycott? What impact did the victory in Byhalia have on UL organizing in northern Mississippi?
5. What was the catalyst for the UL organized boycott in Tupelo? What was the response to Klan counter-demonstrations in Tupelo?
6. At a July 22 1978 demonstration in Okolona, UL leader Dr. Howard Gunn stated "Because we came here peacefully, we don't want the KKK to impose on us. But if you [the KKK] are going to impose on us we are going to retaliate. We are not going to throw up our hands and go behind closed doors". How did Gunn put these words into action?
7. What deceptive tactics did Blacks employ in northern Mississippi when there were attempts to disarm them by police officers?
8. Describe the negotiated settlement that brought the arrests of Blacks and Whites involved in shooting "both sides of the tracks" in Chickasaw County during October of 1978.
9. What are the factors that led to the decline of the UL as a viable movement in Mississippi? What was their impact on creating change for Black people in local communities?