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## From the "Bland Leading the Bland" Mississippi Freedom Vote: William Sloane Coffin Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement at Yale University, 1958 - 1963

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### Abstract

When Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr. arrived at Yale University in 1958, he found a campus he characterized as "the bland leading the bland." In the sixties, sixty-seven Yale students went to Mississippi in 1963 to participate in the Mississippi Freedom Vote. Coffin had played a crucial role in creating the freedom vote, directly involved student population. Coffin had infused the movement with "energy." He did this gradually by preaching, introducing

leading by example. Through his weekly Sunday sermons the civil rights leaders he brought to campus and his part Crossroads-Africa and the freedom rides, Coffin was able to change the climate of the Yale campus from apolitical and uninterested to socially active and involved. By 1963, Yale was a politically active campus such that sixty-seven students traveled to Mississippi to join the freedom march. In the 1963 freedom vote, a protest election to elect representatives to the Republican National Party and the Democratic National Party, the freedom vote also served to draw national attention to the issues involved in the freedom vote. The issues involved in the freedom vote were the rest of the country had been largely ignoring, including the issue of the rights of African Americans. In October and November of 1963, sixty-seven Yalies went to the South, including Clarksdale and Natchez and for three weeks encouraged the protest election, by canvassing and handing out pamphlets.

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