



Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy

By Bruce Watson

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A riveting account of one of the most remarkable episodes in American history.

In his critically acclaimed history *Freedom Summer*, award-winning author Bruce Watson presents powerful testimony about a crucial episode in the American civil rights movement. During the sweltering summer of 1964, more than seven hundred American college students descended upon segregated, reactionary Mississippi to register black voters and educate black children. On the night of their arrival, the worst fears of a race-torn nation were realized when three young men disappeared, thought to have been murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Taking readers into the heart of these remarkable months, *Freedom Summer* shines new light on a critical moment of nascent change in America.

"Recreates the texture of that terrible yet rewarding summer with impressive verisimilitude." -*Washington Post*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this mesmerizing history, Watson (*Sacco and Vanzetti*) revisits the blistering summer of 1964 when about 700 volunteers arrived in Mississippi to agitate for civil rights and endured horrific harassment, intimidation, and persecution from racist state and private forces. The largely white, college student volunteers and the largely black trainers and organizers, SNCC veterans of previous campaigns, were fed and sheltered by the impoverished black community members they had come to serve and secure suffrage for. Their path was two-pronged: the Freedom School's challenge to a power structure... that confined Negro education to 'learning to stay in your place' and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge to Mississippi's all-white delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Familiar figures (e.g., Lyndon B. Johnson, Stokely Carmichael, Fannie Lou Hamer) take the stage, but Watson's dramatic center belongs to four ordinary volunteers, whose experiences he portrays with resonant detail. The murdered Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner cast shadows over all, haunting Watson's account of how the volunteers, organizers, and the black Mississippians who dared seek political expression lifted and revived the trampled dream of democracy. (*June*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Even those familiar with the history will want to read this gripping narrative, which combines a political overview of the Mississippi civil rights struggle in the summer of 1964 with more than 50 personal accounts from those who were there, both the famous (including Sidney Poitier, Pete Seeger, John Lewis, Stokely Carmichael) and the lesser known, including the more than 200 volunteer students from the North who lived and worked with local residents and taught in the Freedom Schools in converted shacks and church basements. The lengthy bibliography testifies as to how much has been written on the topic, but the personal interviews, some from people telling their stories for the first time, make gripping drama, as they recount the standoffs, the struggle for voter registration, the reign of terror that encompassed church burnings and murders. Ordinary people are the focus here, and the close-up details about the shocking violence and economic oppression show that even at the time of the famous "I Have a Dream" speech, sharecroppers earning \$500 a year could not afford to eat at lunch counters. --Hazel Rochman

Review

"Recreates the texture of that terrible yet rewarding summer with impressive verisimilitude."

-*Washington Post*

"Remarkable...a well-researched, vivid retelling of the 1964 civil rights crusade to put Mississippi's 200,000 disenfranchised blacks on the voting rolls...[an] important book."

-*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Elegantly written...A fascinating look at ordinary people at their best and worst...Riveting."

-*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

"An amazing account of one pivotal summer in the history of civil rights...with a thriller's pacing, the book forcefully describes the depravity and treachery behind the bombings, beatings and intimidation...and shows the physical and emotional costs of such a fight."

-*The Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

"Engrossing"
-*The Economist*

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