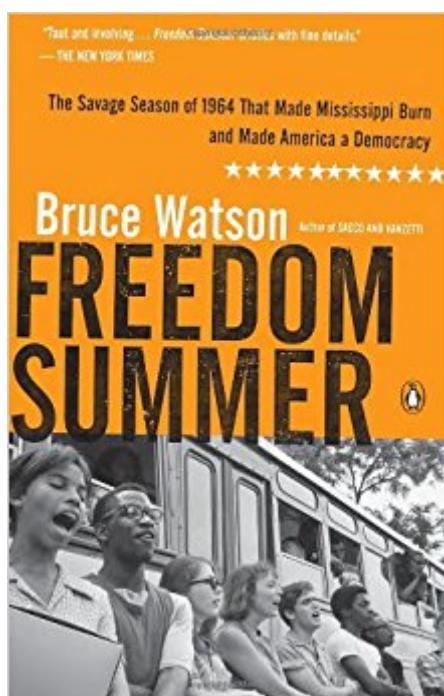


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# Freedom Summer: The Savage Season Of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn And Made America A Democracy



## Synopsis

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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Bruce Watson talks about my teen years, in his "Freedom Summer." He talks about my people, as he describes one of the most significant years of the country's civil rights struggle. In the summer of 1964 I was a 14 year old Mississippi boy; actually, a Mississippi good-ol'-boy-in-training. The three civil rights workers were killed in my regional neighborhood. They were communist agitators, invading my land, stirring things up. Watson wasn't there, that hot, hot Mississippi summer; he really wasn't. But the reader of his "Freedom Summer" wouldn't know that, as they are transported in his narrative to that time and place. As I read Watson, it was, for me, mostly a poignant and painful reminder of my past, as he narrates my 1964 summer. I was there, and he will put you there, with me, as social forces transform the cultural landscape -- not just in Mississippi, but the very

consciousness of the nation. "Freedom Summer" is that good. In a most compelling manner, Watson describes the hundreds of civil rights activists as they arrive in Mississippi, having no real idea as to the world they were entering, settling into towns and communities throughout the state. He puts the reader into the lives of the activists, as they help invigorate and support the black population to register to vote; as they are all spit upon, cursed, beaten, jailed, terrorized, and killed. In addition to the terror, Watson describes, in an equally compelling manner, the forever-kindled hope and commitment of both the outsider civil rights workers and the local black communities. One small victory after another, and another, he describes the joy of the movement from within. As an insider of that Freedom Summer, I know that Watson's description is more than fair. It is an accurate depiction of that time and place; as accurate a description as I have known. It will become an important contribution to the history of civil rights.

"Freedom Summer" is likely to be recognized as the definitive account of a seemingly all-but-forgotten but nevertheless enduringly transformative episode in American history. That I myself was a volunteer in the Mississippi Summer Project necessarily colors my perception, but I little doubt that a reader more objective of mind will draw the same conclusion. Bruce Watson, a meticulous journalist, takes you into every nook and cranny of Mississippi with an abundance of crackling anecdote recounting the actualities that transpired during this unprecedented surge into a higher level of American democracy, and he does so with an imagination suggestive of the gift one expects of a novelist; so much so that, on the one hand, I found myself reading his compelling narrative as if I were entering Mississippi for the very first time, while on the other I was able to locate myself in the there-and-then of my actual experience as I was never able to do heretofore. He tells his story so empathically that, did I not know otherwise, I'd be thinking he himself was a Mississippi volunteer. Watson gives his tale luminous specificity by threading it through the experiences of four particular volunteers. We find out why they came to Mississippi, what they were thinking and feeling as they were either teaching in a freedom school or canvassing door-to-door for voter registrants, and how their Freedom Summer experience impacted their lives thereafter. Lurking with a tumescent tension behind the accounts of their unique travails is the tragic story of the disappearance and murder of the three advance-guard civil rights workers whose names--Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman--will forever be paradigmatic for the savagery that permeated Mississippi not only that summer but for all-too-many prior years as well. As an engaging counterpoint to the goings-on within Mississippi, Watson keeps us abreast of how the nation is responding to all that it's seeing and hearing, and how the federal government--J. Edgar Hoover,

RFK, LBJ--struggles to cope with it, all of which adds to the tale a welcome historical perspective.

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