

# Anne moody's coming of age in mississippi essays example

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



Growing up in the Jim Crow South is an incredible ordeal for a person of color, particularly as illustrated by Anne Moody in her memoir *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Covering four eras of her childhood and adolescence in distinct chapters, Moody discusses the many ways in which racism affected her life, and the ways in which she fought back. In the process, the book illuminates a realistic and deeply felt struggle for rights and personhood during a very difficult time in American life. By looking at the way Anne Moody's struggle throughout her life, a great deal can be gleaned about race, social movement, and citizenship.

First and foremost, Anne Moody's life is essentially defined by the racism that she experiences; her time growing up in Mississippi is fraught with the distinctions that arise between white and black, as well as the discrimination many others levy against her because of her skin color. It is telling that, in the very beginning of the book, Anne lives on "Mr. Carter's plantation" with her family, despite it being in the late 40s – the racial tyranny blacks receive is still largely on par with slave-era America, and the specter of slavery is still well in place in the lives of African-Americans (Moody, Chapter 1). From the start, Anne Moody experiences the kind of hardship that being darker-skinned brings, you as her father divorces her mother for a "yellow woman" (meaning a mixed-race woman who is lighter skinned), which allows her to "[hold] herself high and mighty" (Moody, Chapter 2). In her childhood, Moody is constantly bemused and confused by the distinction that racial differences make in her life, as she does not get the cultural baggage that comes with skin color in America. As a result, Moody uses this naivete to illustrate the inherent wrongness of racism, using Anne's innocence as something we

must all aspire to.

Race is a significant factor in the book, not just among whites, but among blacks as well. In addition to the aforementioned intrusion of lighter-skinned black women in more advantageous social positions (thus making them more desirable to men like Anne's father), there are frequent examples of black-on-black prejudice within the book. Within the African-American community, degrees of tolerance and injustice are levied against people depending on how dark-skinned they are; lighter-skinned blacks become more prejudiced against dark-skinned African-Americans because of their comparative social acceptability within the culture. As Anne says quizzically in relation to Raymond's family hating hers, " They were Negroes and we were also Negroes. I just didn't see Negroes hating each other so much" (Moody, Chapter 4).

There is also an intersection of race and class in the book, as richer blacks look down on poorer blacks for perpetuating stereotypes and making black people look bad. Being a darker-skinned black woman, Anne tends to form her own prejudices not only against whites, but against lighter-skinned blacks, their presence almost being a factor in refusing to go to Tougaloo College. In this way, prejudice on the part of blacks is shown to be just as destructive as the systemic racial prejudice that they themselves experience.

The power of social movements, particularly the Civil Rights Movement, is particularly poignant in *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, and in the life of Anne Moody as a whole. As she grows up knowing prejudice in many different, pervasive forms, Anne herself becomes more of an agent of change. Entering

the civil rights movement when she attends college, the book shows her becoming more and more politically active, particularly in the “ College” and “ Movement” sections of the book. This proves revelatory for Anne, as she moved from a defensive state of having to compensate for her blackness to actively rooting for citizenship: “ It no longer seemed important to prove anything. I had found something outside myself that gave meaning to my life” (Moody, Chapter 22). While in college, Anne joins the NAACP and begins fighting for change, finding incremental ways to assert herself and her own desire for equality.

In the “ Movement” section of the book, Anne becomes fully involved in the fight for civil rights, participating in sit-ins and marches that threaten her life but fill her with hope. These events prove particularly harrowing, particularly one time when she sits in at a lunch counter at Woolworth’s, an encounter that quickly turns violent. Even as she is escorted out of the restaurant, she sees that “ about ninety white police officers had been standing outside the store; they had been watching the whole thing through the windows, but had not come in to stop the mob or do anything” (Moody 267). It is there that she realizes the insidiousness of Southern white prejudice and anti-black racism, and that even the most ardent and compassionate attempts at fighting for equality will be met with resistance by those who oppose it.

It is in these moments, tragically, that Anne Moody starts to lose her revolutionary fervor, as she grows pessimistic about the possible outcomes of the Civil Rights Movement. She quickly also becomes disillusioned with the leaders of the movement, who had pie in the sky plans for civil rights that were not attainable without more practical solutions: “ We had ‘ dreamers’

instead of leaders leading us” (Moody, Chapter 24). As time went on, Moody began to recognize the problems with the movement itself, noting that those in charge were out of touch with the base that needed rights and fought for them. This provides an interesting challenge to the state of the Civil Rights Movement, characterizing it not as a unified front but as a collective goal that everyone had a different idea of how to address.

All of these aforementioned issues come together in a discussion over citizenship – in many ways, the social movements of civil rights were an attempt to overcome the issues of race in order to vie for equality and equal status as American citizens. Moody’s growing activism, a product of her life to that point, is a central component of the book, and her desire for citizenship is central to the book’s themes. The constant and ever-growing fight for true equality and citizenship is something that Moody doubts we will ever overcome: “ I WONDER. I really WONDER” (Moody, Chapter 25). This measured appraisal of the struggle for civil rights is novel and far less optimistic than the average person would imagine existed at that time, lending further complexities to the fight for rights in American history. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is a tremendous work of autobiographical memoir, combining coming-of-age narratives and the loss of innocence with the burgeoning civil rights movement of the time and the constant navigation of cultural and political interests in a very complicated nation. Just as Moody grows up with the specter of racism, the issues of intersectionalism and revolutionary practicalities make the fight for freedom much murkier than one would anticipate. To that end, the book is an essential read, and a fantastic example of the individual struggle for civil rights and freedoms.

## **Works Cited**

Moody, Anne. *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Dell, 1992.