

The 1964 mississippi burning



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The civil rights movement held many of the nation's pivotal turning points in opening the eyes of the American people. There are many arguments of which events have had the greatest impact, but the Mississippi murder of 1964 set the nation in a scramble for change. On June twenty first, 1964, three civil rights field activists headed to Philadelphia, Mississippi. James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were taken hostage and murdered during their investigation of a black church that had been burned by the Klan. ¹ The devastation left the American people in a panic for revival. The people were awakened with the severity of the problems facing their nation and were dumbfounded on how to handle them. At this time in the US, people were closeminded about their views of society. One either had the northern or the southern view of things. People in the north were less closeminded and did not want the murder to be taken lightly. People in the south were annoyed that the murder blew up and caused commotion in their town. The people were able to relate and converse over their views on the situation. The 1964 Mississippi murder of three civil rights field workers impacted the civil rights movement nationwide.

In viewing the crime, itself there is no " general demographic" of the workers killed. James Chaney was a twenty-one-year old African American male who worked for CORE alongside Schweerner. Andrew Goodman was a twenty-year-old Caucasian male from Queens college in New York. Michael Schwerner was a twenty-four-year-old Caucasian male from Brooklyn New York who worked alongside Chaney at CORE. ² The men were heading to Philadelphia Mississippi to investigate on behalf of the Congress of Racial Equality. The state-level Klan had previously tried to murder Schwerner by

attacking and beating church members thinking he was amongst the crowd. They were unsuccessful in their attempt to get Schwerner but were able to shake up their hometown church.³ When passing through Mississippi they were pulled over and arrested for speeding. They arrived at the station around four in the afternoon and didn't leave until ten that night. The men noticed the lynch mob following them and began to speed up. Finally, the mob caught up and forced the men into their vehicles. The men were driven to a secluded road where they were individually beaten or shot. Chaney got the worst beating due to his race. He was beaten with chains, shot, and castrated in front of the other men. Along with being forced to watch, Goodman tried to run but was shot in the act. Schwerner was beaten for holding up Chaney's dying body. The three men were taken to a nearby farm pond where they were to be buried by Herman Tucker. Herman worked for a construction company which allowed him easy access to such tools.⁴ The abduction, beatings, humiliation, and murder of these men caused the people of America to open their eyes to problems in their own backyard.

The FBI investigation commenced June twenty-first, 1964 after the three men were reported missing. The first found piece of evidence was Goodman's vehicle which was found three days after their disappearance. Two local Native Americans found Goodman's vehicle abandoned and burned. This caused them to name the investigation the Mississippi burning. They ordered one-hundred-fifty men to join the missing persons search.⁵ Worried the men were already dead, the FBI recruited naval men to search the swamps for their bodies. Though they did not find Goodman, Schwerner, or Cheney's bodies, they were able to find other missing victims. They found college

students Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore who were kidnapped and killed by whites. Herbert Oarsby was a fourteen-year-old boy found wearing a CORE t-shirt along with five other unidentified blacks.⁶ Hoping for a response, the FBI put out a twenty-five-thousand-dollar reward. This led to someone tipping off the FBI and they were able to find the bodies in an earthen dam forty-four days after they were reported missing.⁷ After completing an autopsy, the FBI released that both Cheney and Schwerner were dead when buried, but Goodman was most likely buried alive. This is thought to be true due to his lungs being full of dirt and his fists were clasped at the time of his death.⁸ The FBI was able to arrest eighteen suspects, including their very own Sheriff Ramsey and Deputy Sheriff Price. Three years later, only seven of the eighteen men were found guilty, but none of the Klansman served more than six years in prison.⁹

Amongst the men convicted was Edgar Ray Killen. In 1964, Killen was one of the head men in the Ku Klux Klan. He was a part-time preacher and lumber mill operator.¹⁰ His initial case ended with a hung jury after one juror refused to convict a preacher. Killen went free due to the deadlock, but his case was reopened in 2005. New witnesses, Jerry Mitchell and some of his students, came forward with more evidence. They had convinced Killen to do a sit-down interview for their history documentary. In the film Killen speaks and admits to conspiring against the activists and coordinating their murders.¹¹ At the age of eighty, Killen was convicted by a jury of nine white and three black people in Neshoba County. His conviction consisted of three accounts manslaughter and was the only one from the Klan to face state

murder charges. Killen was serving twenty consecutive terms for manslaughter, which is equivalent to a sixty-year sentence.¹² Killen only served twelve of the sixty before passing at the age of ninety-two.¹³ The reopening of this case showed the American people just how significant the flaws in our legal system could be. Due to that woman's decision to not convict Killen, he walked free when he was in fact guilty.

The media played a major role in spreading the severity of the crime nationwide. Unfortunately, this crime blew up because it was not fully targeted to the African American race. The people were used to racial offenses and saw the severity in them, but the crime was taken more seriously due to the demographic of the workers. The Mississippi locals and people of the south's long history of racism affected their view of the murders and events that followed. Most southerners were genuinely annoyed by the amount of publicity they were getting for something they believed to be "just another murder." They were less sincere about their concern and did not take the transgression seriously. Nationally, the northern liberals took the offense very seriously.¹⁴ Their view wasn't strengthened by the racial aspect, but more their unsteady feeling about the murder itself. Locally and nationally, volunteers were coming out to help the movement. There was an incredible amount of national exposure to the problem. The racism in the south surprised and embarrassed many Mississippians when they were able to see the problem from another's perspective.¹⁵ With everyone banning together, there was a stronger force fighting against the Klan which weakened their abilities. When Americans come together to fight against a cause, the force is one to be reckoned with. The movement was gaining

<https://assignbuster.com/the-1964-mississippi-burning/>

volunteers at incredible numbers due to the exposure and education provided by the publicity of the murders. Though a sad subject, the murders educated hundreds of thousands of people across the nation.

The murder, though tragic, put the civil rights movement into full swing. Northerners knew about the racism in the south, but they weren't fully aware of its severity. The south dealt with an immense amount of racial crimes, so this issue was nothing but another offense. The murder itself was a landmark for change in several different ways. The disappearance of three activists drew attention from every news station across the country.¹⁶ Americans were on the edge of their seats waiting for a new report to come out saying they had found the three men. The devastation left everyone pitching in trying to help. Whether it was donating money, time, or prayers, everyone was able to feel like they made a difference. The people felt violated and hurt because they realized innocent people were losing their lives. They were more aware to how common crimes like this happen. Americans saw how seriously the FBI handled this case in particular and it alarmed them in a way. They were internally questioning events leading up to this and began to ask if this could've been avoided. Americans began having internal battles contemplating right and wrong after their attention was captivated by the Mississippi burning murder victims.

Though this murder was a pivotal part of the nation's awakening, many people believe it to be yet another racial crime. The closeminded people of the south dealt with these problems almost daily and were not surprised to see another African American man dead. Citizens of Mississippi thought the civil rights workers from the north were just an "annoyance" and that they

<https://assignbuster.com/the-1964-mississippi-burning/>

were trying to break up their customs and flaunt their social practices. The ones born and raised in the south respected the ways and knew nothing different. They would argue that the investigation took over their town and caused a disturbance. Thought the investigation did take a great deal of time and caused the closing of many spaces, missing people is not to be taken lightly. The judge of the initial trial said, " They killed one n*****, one Jew, and a white man. I gave them what I thought they deserved." ¹⁷ This quote proves that these murders were common to the people of the south. The Mississippi trial had an all-white jury, so the bias was completely slanted. There was no racial mixture of opinions, but rather a southern Caucasian mindset ruling a racial crime as minor.

The 1964 Mississippi murder shocked the nation with its ongoing investigation and seemingly endless discoveries. Between the forty-four-day search and the reopening of Edgar Ray Killen's files, Americans were on the edge of their seats waiting for new evidence. Three men investigating the burning of a church were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan secluded the men before beating and shooting at Chaney and Schweerner. Their burial made the FBI's search close to impossible, forcing them to put out a reward. The forty-four-day long search was devastating and confused all parties involved. After finding the bodies, the conviction of eighteen men, including their own Sheriff and Deputy Sheriff. The baffling court case that lacked evidence and only gave seven of the eighteen men under six years. These awful chains of events showed the people how serious this problem was. Humans killing other humans due to their skin tone was and is not right. Thought it goes against the born and raised southern beliefs, racial profiling

has been deemed constitutional due to this and many other events. This murder was the tip of the iceberg for the civil rights movement, and the pivotal point to the United State's successes in years to come.

Bibliography

- Carter, Joe. " 9 Things You Should Know About the 'Mississippi Burning' Murders." The Gospel Coalition. January 13, 2018. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-know-mississippi-burning-murders/>.
- " Civil Rights Act of 1964 (U. S. National Park Service)." National Parks Service. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/civil-rights-act.htm>.
- " Download PDF for Free." Counter Hit Xanga. Accessed April 09, 2019. <http://www.swaonline.org/pdf/murder-in-mississippi/>.
- Hampton, Henry, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- " Man Convicted of Killing 3 Civil Rights Workers Dies in Jail." Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/man-convicted-of-killing-3-civil-rights-workers-dies-in-jail>.
- McKissack, Pat, and Fredrick McKissack. *The Civil Rights Movement in America: From 1865 to the Present*. Chicago: Childrens Press, 1994.
- " Mississippi Civil Rights Workers' Murders." Infogalactic. https://infogalactic.com/info/Mississippi_civil_rights_workers'_murders.
- " Murder in Mississippi." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-murder/.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-1964-mississippi-burning/>

- Taylor, Alan. " 1964: Civil Rights Battles." The Atlantic. May 28, 2014. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/05/1964-civil-rights-battles/100744/>.
- " The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act>.
- " The Lasting Impact of a Civil Rights Icon's Murder." Smithsonian. com. December 01, 2008. Accessed May 01, 2019. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-lasting-impact-of-a-civil-rights-icons-murder-92172099/>.
- Wexler, Sanford. The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1999.

Notes

¹ " Man Convicted of Killing 3 Civil Rights Workers Dies in Jail", Fox News, <https://www.foxnews.com>.

² Hampton, Henry, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom* , 188.

³ Carter, " 9 Things". The Gospel Coalition. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org>.

⁴ Carter, " 9 Things", The Gospel Coalition.

⁵ " Mississippi Civil". Infogalactic. <https://infogalactic.com>.

⁶ Carter, " 9 Things", The Gospel Coalition.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-1964-mississippi-burning/>

⁷ “ Mississippi Civil Rights”, Infogalactic.

⁸ Carter, “ 9 Things”, The Gospel Coalition.

⁹ Carter, “ 9 Things”, The Gospel Coalition.

¹⁰ “ Man Convicted”, Fox News.

¹¹ Carter, “ 9 Things”, The Gospel Coalition.

¹² “ Man Convicted”, Fox News.

¹³ Carter, “ 9 Things”, The Gospel Coalition.

¹⁴ Hampton, *Voices of Freedom* , 192.

¹⁵ Hampton, *Voices of Freedom* , 187.

¹⁶ “ Mississippi Civil Rights”, Infogalactic.

¹⁷ Carter, Joe, “ 9 Things”, The Gospel Coalition.