

The coming of age in
mississippi memoir
by anne moody essay



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The Coming of Age in Mississippi is one of the most influential pieces in African-American literature born in the period of active fighting for civil rights, against systematic racism and segregation. It was written and printed in 1968 by Anne Moody, a Black civil rights activist, as a form of autobiography. 1 The story takes place in rural Mississippi in the middle of the 20th century and talks about her life's hardships from early childhood through school and later in her enrollment at the historically black Tougaloo College. 2 The story touches on numerous issues the woman had to face as a civil rights activist, facing systemic racism from white people as well as sexist remarks from her male comrades. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the contents of the story, its main characters, and reflect on the changes that have occurred in the past 50 years.

Anne's story begins when she is four years old, enough to be able to think and remember things that happened to her. She, her mother, father, and younger sister live in a small plantation shack. Although slavery had been abolished many years ago, the living conditions for the workers did not improve much. None of the sheds they live in has any amenities. The only house in the entire village that has electricity and plumbing is the house of the plantation owners, the Carters. This image demonstrates the inequality still existing between the black workers and their white exploiters. 3

Anne describes the troubles her family went through. Due to a fire burning down their shack, difficulties with money, and other tragedies, father had left the family, forcing her mother to support the children on her own. 4 She switched over six jobs in the past six years, working as a waitress and a maid. Children are often left hungry, as the money is not enough to pay for <https://assignbuster.com/the-coming-of-age-in-mississippi-memoir-by-anne-moody-essay/>

the rent. This part of the story shows the difficulties that black single mothers had to face during that period. Being uneducated left only the simplest of jobs available, and the lack of child support forced the family to starve. 5 Nevertheless, Anne excels in school, which serves to show that despite the hardships, black people are just as gifted and talented as everyone else. The people Anne works for are friendly, for the most part, except for her late employer, Mrs. Burke, who is a racist and tries to make things difficult for Anne, eventually forcing her out of a job.

In her teenage years, Anne's life revolves around school, where she is very popular among boys, and home since mother manages to remarry to a man named Raymond. Although this marriage alleviates some of the family's financial struggles, it also brings conflict into the new family, especially between her and Raymond's mother. Raymond is a farmer, which exposes Anne to a plethora of problems with the black farming communities. The number of grievances towards the society, the privileged, and the white population in general boils inside of Anne, and finds an outlet in 1955, when a 14-year old boy is killed over whistling at a white woman. " I was fifteen years old when I began to hate people" 6 - she recalls her feelings about the event. Anne's desire to join the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is what distances her from her family. It pushes her towards her father and his new wife. Her greatest fear during that time was described as follows: " But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black". 7

Anne's growing self-awareness goes through several stages, making her change her name as well as college, eventually enrolling in Tougaloo college, <https://assignbuster.com/the-coming-of-age-in-mississippi-memoir-by-anne-moody-essay/>

where she becomes a member of the NAACP. Her political thought transforms as well, as she bounces between violent and non-violent solutions to the issue of racism in America. She desperately fights for granting people voting rights, but in so doing, forgets about the needs and necessities of the regular people like Raymond, who is more down-to-earth and is having trouble privatizing his land. The lack of results from her actions frustrates Anne, and she reminisces if NAACP lost their way and should focus on daily problems of the black community, rather than on distant concepts of equality and voting rights. The memoir ends with her, wondering if blacks could ever achieve equality in America.

The memoir covers a myriad of characters throughout Anne's life. This section will cover the five most prominent personalities throughout the entire story. For example, Anne Moody is the main hero of the story; the events are told from her perspective. We learn about the hardships, injustices, fears, and hopes of the black people through her eyes. She believes in black rights and wants to promote equality for the people of color, which alienates her from her family. Another character is Ann's mother, who went through much hardship, which formed her view on life as inherently unfair. Having worked hard to achieve what she had in life, she is worried about her family's wellbeing and does not want Anne to participate in any political activities.

Although Anne has an estranged relationship with her father, they later grow closer as she is tired of her family's perceived cowardice. He is a flawed man but does not look down on Anne or anyone else for the shade of color of their skin. Anne's relationship with Raymond is marred by many complications, including his romantic attraction to her. However, he serves as an essential

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screen to show the problems of black American farmers, whose issues were often neglected by the NAACP in favor of the “ bigger picture.” Moreover, Adlyne is Anne’s sister and is very serious and down-to-earth. Initially, she is not approving of Anne’s revolutionary spirit and dismisses her desire to attend college. As time passes, however, Adlyne learns to respect her sister and understand her motives.

Anne’s autobiographical story presents the emotions, hardships, fears, and worries of black rights activists of her time. Her frustrations and doubts are understandable, as the enormous racial and class struggle of that time was riddled with remains of fruitless attempts to change things, both violent and non-violent. The desperation, helplessness, and frustration go through the story like a red line. She doubts if actions of the NAACP were correct, and whether or not they have lost touch with the wants and needs of the black community. These thoughts resonate well with the plight of Martin Luther King Jr. His intent was on winning rights for all black people rather than waste strength on a multitude of small battles that would eventually lose its momentum. He understood that equality of political for blacks and whites was paramount, as only then would the black community be capable of becoming a major political force and effectively defend itself and its rights.

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