



Minds Stayed On Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle In The Rural South-- An Oral History

Youth Of The Rural Organizing & Cultural Center

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Minds Stayed on Freedom is a vivid portrait of the civil rights struggle in one Mississippi county. While the national Movement has been painted in broad strokes by journalists and scholars, here the experiences of ordinary people bring definition to the lived texture of the Civil Rights Movement. Interviewed by local youths, Movement veterans recount how they overcame their fear in the face of terrorist resistance and collectively transformed the political and social fabric of their community. Their stories were repeated across the rural South, although seldom with the force and vigor experienced in Holmes County, located in the Mississippi plantation country. The teenagers who conducted this oral history project strike a rare balance between poignant prose and pathbreaking research. The detailed picture that emerges from their interviews brings into sharp relief issues that remain hazy in studies of national scope: the crucial resource of black land ownership, the limited extent of church involvement, the commitment to armed self-defense, the role of women, divisions of social class within the Movement, the range of white response and retaliation, and the interplay between direct action and legal tactics. *Minds Stayed on Freedom* provides plenty of fodder for academic analysis, but the interviews retain a raw, dramatic power. As project advisor Jay MacLeod writes in his introduction, "the drama in Holmes County began when a group of black farmers attempted to register to vote. Whites retaliated, pitting themselves directly against a small group of courageous black activists. The two sides battled each other. But they also battled for the hearts and minds of the black population. The tiny local Movement, armed with a vision of the future, tried to draw its people off the sidelines and into active involvement. Whites tried to keep Holmes County blacks in their "place" with a campaign of terror and intimidation. *Minds Stayed on Freedom* tells the story of the Movement's slow, painful triumph."

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