



The Freedom Summer Murders

Don Mitchell

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To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Summer murders, this will be the first book for young adults to explore the harrowing true story of three civil rights workers slain by the KKK.

In June of 1964, three idealistic young men (one black and two white) were lynched by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi. They were trying to register African Americans to vote as part of the Freedom Summer effort to bring democracy to the South. Their disappearance and murder caused a national uproar and was one of the most significant incidents of the Civil Rights Movement, and contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

THE FREEDOM SUMMER MURDERS will be the first book for young people to take a comprehensive look at the brutal murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, through to the conviction in 2005 of mastermind Edgar Ray Killen.

The Freedom Summer Murders Details

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Author : Don Mitchell

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Maya says

This book is wonderful and perfect for middle school children. The details helped to refresh my memory of individuals on both sides. Often time I find it challenging to keep up with the Civil Rights Movement because there are so many prominent people involved as well as the lesser known individuals whose stories are not often told. The book also puts in perspective what the civil rights story was in Mississippi because it is often clumped together with other southern states.

Lori Hoegler says

The Freedom Summer Murders briefly outlines the turbulent 1960's U.S. civil rights movement in the Deep South. This book highlights the horrific murder of 3 civil rights workers by the local Ku Klux Klan. The story of the three young men murdered in this story inspired the movie "Mississippi Burning" as well as other documentary films and book. Sadly, it was somewhat disjointed and the author failed to capture my complete attention and empathy for the victims. The first couple of chapters read like a poor sixth-grade history report(sorry sixth graders), and slowly built interest in a tragic story too important not to be told well.

BriannaEA says

Freedom Summer Murders by Don Mitchell, published in 2014, is a non-fiction, historical book. I, personally didn't like the book very much. There were three main characters, the three who were murdered, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Micheal Schwerner. It doesn't go into much detail on their personality. The entire book goes on about them being murdered. How it happened, the case, the theories, etc. It was all from the Civil Rights Movement time period. It was all very dry to me, though I would recommend it to anyone who is doing research on, or is extremely curious about, freedom summer. The text is structured to talk about the victims lives, freedom summer, how the men were found, theories, the court case/trial, and finally witness and investigator tellings.

Erica says

This book was difficult to read; not because of the author's style of writing but because of the content. It is hard to read about such hatred and corruption. This is a good summary of what happened with the murders of Civil Rights workers in Mississippi and is an excellent choice if you're looking to read something this month in honor of Black History Month.

Damien Goodwin says

Really Really good book, especially for people who like history or other Crime/Murder books.

Heidi says

I found this to be a powerfully told story about the Civil Rights era. During the Freedom Summer of 1964 when several groups were working to obtain voting rights for blacks throughout the south, three young men disappeared. Mitchell explains the circumstances surrounding their disappearance before giving a brief biography of each of the three young men, two white and one black. Even in death there was great bigotry. The two white young men were shot, the black young man was severely beaten and probably dead before he was shot. The author then shares the events leading to the discovery of their bodies and the trials and memorials connected to their deaths.

This story illustrates in a sickening way the circumstances existing in the South during the 1960s and long before. The sad thing is, that it's apparent from the get go that if two of the three hadn't been white, the case would not have drawn the attention that it did. The KKK did so much harm to so many and yet was so rarely brought to justice. Once again that is illustrated here. The main instigator was let go until 2005 when he was finally convicted yet even then he was only convicted of manslaughter rather than murder which it so clearly was.. And many of the others got off with just a few years in prison.

One of the things that stuck with me the most is a statement made by the author, "Many people feel that this country is not yet at the place where the killing of a black mother's son is as important as the killing of a white mother's son. But the United States is closer to that goal than it was in 1964." (pg. 183)

I hope that we keep moving forward toward the day when as the author says the killing of a black mother's son is a tragedy equal to the killing of a white mother's son.

Edward Sullivan says

An excellent account of the brutal murders of Civil Rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi. I particularly like how Mitchell emphasizes the selfless devotion of these young men to the cause they passionately believed in and their incredible courage to work for it under extremely dangerous conditions.

Mackenzie H says

The Freedom Summer Murders was a very deep and eye-opening book. It starts right off by informing you what happened to those three men during that summer. But trust me when I say that you will not expect what they tell you about those murders. I'm not going to go into details of what happened because it would ruin it for you. I will say that 97% of the time I was either mad or frustrated at the events and reasonings in the book. I couldn't, still can't, and won't ever be able to wrap my head around why those murderers did what they did. But on the other hand, I felt like this book was a very important one because of the lessons that need to be taught. Equality should not be a crime.

There was a paragraph in the book that was so true I needed to include it in here. It states, "If James Chaney,

a black man, was the only person who turned up missing in Neshoba County in June 1964 under suspicious circumstances, it probably would have received little, if any, media attention outside of Mississippi. But because two of the men were white and from New York City, it became not only a major New York City story but a national story as well." This is just a tiny sliver of how society was back then. I am not going to say anymore about the book. I just recommend it to anyone who likes the type of books that have an important message behind it and to anyone who wants to learn about what happened in the summer of 1964.

Krista says

"Many people feel that this country is not yet at the place where the killing of a black mother's son is as important as the killing of a white mother's son. But the United States is closer to that goal than it was in 1964." In the wake of tragic events across the country, from the Trayvon Martin case to that of the riots in Ferguson, MO, Mitchell's biography could not come at a more important time. Thoroughly researched and organized in a fast-paced read, interwoven with photos and other primary documents, the book documents the lives of three young men in their early twenties (2 white, 1 black), from diverse backgrounds, who were victims of the KKK while volunteering as teachers and community organizers in Mississippi during the 1964 Freedom Summer movement. Many students will be familiar with the civil rights movement and the icons and organizations involved. However, this story delves deeper into lesser known but just as significant individuals whose legacy continues to impact our laws and society today. In fact, this story's connection between the past and present, concluding with a trial in 2005, is what makes this story uniquely appealing to contemporary audiences. Perfect for teens interested in everything from activism and community service to readers with a taste for mystery and true crime. Note of local interest: Oxford, OH is an important setting in the books, as a training site for what was then known as Western College for Women; WCW later merged with Miami University, where the author also studied. Highly Recommended Purchase – Middle/High School

Adriana Osorio says

This book is quite an eye opener to America's segregated history. The Freedom Summer Murders by Don Mitchell focuses around James Chaney, Andy Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner. The three good men all bonded and knew each other by working towards a progressing society and attaining civil rights for Blacks in Mississippi. Three good men who wanted what was best for people in the USA. Three good men who were compassionate and considerate people and well known for being caring. Three good men who died early deaths that were in vain thanks to the KKK and racist America. Freedom Summer Murders brings insight to some real terrors Blacks faced in the South and the degree of corruption there was in the country at the time. This book and its characters seemed so surreal due to the shock factor and how cruel the people in Neshoba County could be. Officers committed horrifying crimes and national politicians supported racism. So many racists just let Black mothers cry night and day because of their lost loved ones, but everything just slid by for the most part. One of the best people in this book truly was James's mother, Fannie Lee Chaney. She refused to let her son's death not mean anything and demanded justice be brought to her son. My favorite part of the book is the beginning where the story starts off at a good pace and keeps the reader engaged. The author tried his best to describe all the good qualities of James, Andy, and Mickey and the reader acknowledges these men as heroines who were innocent. The way this book was written helps the reader understand how characters felt during this time; from the slow, peaceful, and happy childhood of the three men to waiting such a long and frustrating time to even receive some justice after the terrible crime

committed upon the three men.

Freedom Summer was okay to read. I did not have amazingly high hopes for it when I started out and my view on it being average didn't change once I finished reading it. The book did not have as many layers I would have liked or as much emotion embedded into it as it should have. The death of James, Andy, and Mickey should have been devastating, but it seemed more like a private matter within a country that did not care about its people. The US did not care enough about bringing justice to the 3 men and thousands of other blacks being abused in the country or enough to face the fact that awful things were happening to minorities in the country and this book could have greatly emphasized on it instead of seeming to be straight facts. The main reason this book has a 2 star rating is because of the lack of emotion that should have been present through the entire book. Facts are important, but so is bringing out why these 3 mattered so much. I would not recommend this book to others because there is most certainly a book that better describes the story of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Such an important part of the civil rights movement deserves a better tribute.

Sondra LaPointe says

This was a wonderfully writing book providing both primary images and first-hand accounts, made it a very hard book to put down.

Anaya Abtidon says

The Freedom Summer Murders, by Don Mitchell, is about the murders of three young men in Neshoba County Mississippi. This novel is told during the civil rights and segregation times. Mitchell talks about three young men; James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Andrew Schwerner, during the summer of 1964. These men were civil rights workers, two of were white and one was black. These three men went to Neshoba County as civil rights workers to work at Freedom Summer. One night these men got pulled over by the police and were shot. The novel then talks about the investigation of the three missing men who were later found dead in the summer of 1964. Throughout the novel the investigation of the three deceased men were discussed over the course of forty years.

In the novel it felt as if you were experiencing what these people had felt emotionally and mentally. The characters felt real, you could feel the emotions they were feeling, you could experience the tragic and mournful events the characters were dealing with. This novel was a very emotional story, it was so sad to hear the speeches of their loved ones, to hear the lies, and to feel the discrimination against the black community. This was a gripping novel, it makes you want to keep turning the page, and hear more of the story. When you read it, you physically want to be apart of it, witnessing it, and having your voice heard as well.

Even though this was a good book there was aspects of the story that I did not like. I felt that the book did not focus on the racial profiling. If someone were to read this novel and they did not know anything about the civil rights times they would be confused on what is going on. Also some of the main characters like the sheriff and deputy should have had chapters or sections talking about their life. Also I did not like the fact that Edgar Ray Killen was convicted of manslaughter rather than murder, but that is not up to the author to depict.

Overall this was a very good book, it is something you want to keep reading. I give this book a five star rating. It gave good background information, and character background. The book was an easy book to read and was very comprehensible. I enjoyed this book and I highly recommend it. I would recommend this to

anyone who enjoys reading about the civil rights movements and also to anyone who just wants to read a good novel.

Lucas says

The book I am doing this book review on is “The Freedom Summer Murders”. The author of this book is Don Mitchell. I think that you should read it because it talks a lot about slavery and what happened with slavery back in the 1960’s and up to the 1980’s. It talks about what most whites said to the blacks if they passed them on the street or the sidewalk and stuff. Whites yelled bad words, they were racist towards the blacks and more. At most times whites called the blacks the N word. And if a white saw a white guy or white girl next to a black, people would yell the N word and lover. There were cars back then as well, not many, but some. There would be fights between whites and blacks that would sometimes lead to death or arrests. Even white cops would take things into their own hands and arrest the blacks for no reason and sometimes even kill them for no reason.

Nevan Malwana says

As famous civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The time is always right, to do what is right.” These words of wisdom reflect the journey for a better world in the nonfiction thriller, *The Freedom Summer Murders* by Don Mitchell. In a time where people were judged on the color of their skin, it took courage to stand up to this age old system. James Earl Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were three men who saw the injustices in society and stood up to make a change. These three men channel the virtues that all of us should carry with us today: courage, passion, and perseverance. The three men head to Mississippi to assist in a program known as the “Freedom Summer,” a program to bring suffrage to people of color. Then the plot thickens as the men are reported missing, and soon after dead. Follow the investigation of a century to bring justice to three men who wanted to see a better world. This is a great page-turner that I recommend to all, especially those who want a break from monotone non-fiction.

Many hold a brazen point of view when it comes to non-fiction as it being a boring, monotone summary of a happening, but Mitchell shatters that mold bringing an intense novel on an excellent subject. The story unfolds with introduction of the three main protagonists. These men for the most part are pretty average, from humble backgrounds. They all come together and connect one hot summer in Mississippi. In Mississippi, civil rights leaders were organizing a movement known as the “freedom summer”. The freedom summer project had one goal in mind... gain black suffrage. Unfortunately for these men, that was the last thing the people of Mississippi and the KKK were willing to give up. Soon the men are reported missing, with seemingly not a trace of their disappearance. After investigators pick up on the trail, the men’s bodies are found in horrific condition, and all the signs point to murder. From that point on the book turns into a fast paced investigation to bring justice, and find the killer before it’s too late.

The characters in the book, Andrew Goodman, James Earl Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, are three very unique characters. All of the men, although from similar backgrounds, display much of the same traits. All of the men are courageous, as well as passionate. In fact they put their passion of civil rights even in front of the judgement of the ones they love. While not all people hold their beliefs this high, I imagine that some would find this trait relatable. Antagonising characters such as Police Chief Cecil Price are given characteristics that infuriate the reader, and overall make those characters seem like unlikable people. The author’s descriptions and background information of the characters help the reader better understand not only why the protagonists

put themselves in danger for their cause, but also why antagonists acted in the bigoted way they did. Throughout the novel there is one outlying theme, which is defend what you think to be right. Basically from the start the author introduces this theme as he gives the reader background on the heroic journey the main characters have to take, to the point of losing their lives. The author reiterates this throughout the novel telling how even when their lives were in the most danger, they would not back away from the challenge. Finally the author at the end reinstates that the characters impact and legacy will live on forever, due to their persistence defending what they sought to be just.

Mitchell's tone throughout the novel is for the most part formal. However he focuses more on the informational aspect of a formal tone than the solemn aspect. While his tone is not upbeat, it also is not as serious as one would expect for this grave of a topic. With this tone I found the author to be very effective at getting his point across. He did not use humor, or colloquial language, and kept composed in his writing with the primary goal of informing his audience. This formal tone comes especially in handy when the author is describing legal scenes, as the author is able to stay serious about his topic, and not show any partiality. The conflict of this story is a very interesting concept. For many stories similar to this, the conflict is often the main character's murder, with a lot of rising action building to that point. However, this book starts right away with announcing that the main characters ended up dead. This led to the new conflict being completely focused on who the killer was, and bringing him to justice. There are both pros and cons to this writing. By writing like this the author does lose the potential to build up some drama leading up to the murder of the men. However, by starting his book like this, Mitchell is able to focus on the conflict he wants to zero in on, which is the investigation of the murders. This story's conflict also is rather intriguing as it stretches the resolution to the plot over a period of forty years, which is rather uncommon for many books.

In summary, the Freedom Summer Murders by Don Mitchell, is a very fast-paced, intriguing book. The novel has an excellent plot, which not only thoroughly develops the characterization of the protagonists but also the antagonists. There is also a solemn theme: defend what you think is right, in this case to the point of death. This theme is reiterated throughout the novel and is very clear to the reader. The tone the author chooses allows the author to be serious and impartial, and quickly get out the information needed. Perhaps, the best part of the book however, is its unique approach to the conflict. Instead of building up to the murders of the main characters, the author jumps straight into it focusing on the investigation aspect of the story. This is an excellent novel for those who want a historical thriller with a unique setup.

Anna Orsini says

First of all, I am so glad that there is an account of these murders for young readers. We need our kids reading far more literature pertaining to race and civil rights. That said, there were a few things I didn't love about this book. The sentence structures were simple, as was the language. It read more like a biography/nonfiction book I'd expect to see a fourth grader reading rather than a middle schooler.

Throughout the book, I felt like I was learning a lot of facts, but I was not moved emotionally very much. With a story like this, it seems more could have been done to make it personal. Overall, I'm glad I read it, and I will encourage my students to read it as well, but I will still search for more personal, critical writing from or about the Civil Rights era.
