

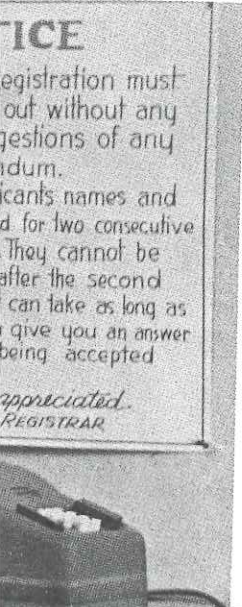
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Ruleville. Local groups and individuals took part; so did SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP. In addition to Moses, workers looked to Aaron Henry and Medgar Evers of the NAACP for coordination and leadership.

### *Murder in Jackson*

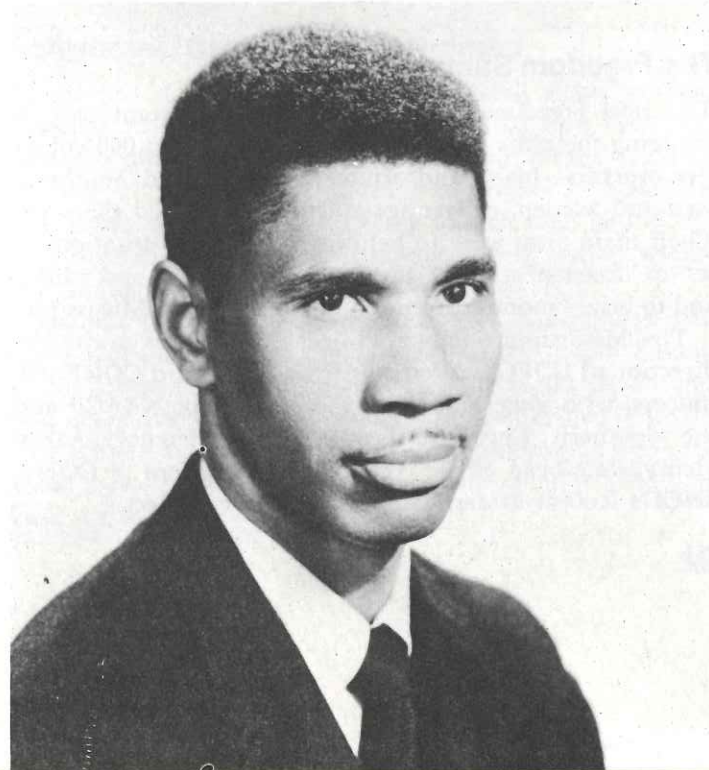
For several months tension had been rising in Mississippi's capital city. Blacks were boycotting downtown stores, demanding an end to job discrimination and a biracial committee where problems could be discussed. There had been demonstrations and hundreds of arrests.

Violence was in the air. The home of Tougaloo professor John Salter had been shot into. Evers's home had been hit with a firebomb, which his wife had put out with the garden hose. Then on June 12, 1963, it happened.

School was out and the children were told they could wait up for their father. Shortly after midnight, they heard the car as it turned in the driveway. "There's Daddy!" called out Darrell, eleven, and Rena, ten, in unison. Next moment came the shot, terrifyingly loud and final.

The black man lying wounded in his own driveway was Medgar Evers, a 37-year-old civil rights leader and World War II veteran. Evers had supported his family by selling insurance in the Delta. But the overwhelming poverty that he saw all around convinced him that blacks needed to organize and demand a share of the material goods and civil rights that most whites already took for granted. He joined the state chapter of the NAACP and quickly became a leader.

Soon Evers was NAACP field secretary and the best-known black leader in Mississippi. Despite the danger connected with his work, Evers felt optimistic. He often told friends that "Mississippi will end up being one of the best places to live."



Medgar Evers died from the wounds he received in ambush that night. Shortly afterwards, a white instructor at Ole Miss wrote of him:

Mississippi, after all, did produce Medgar Evers, a man who would not learn to be "practical" or "shrewd," would not learn to serve whimsical Time and brutal Circumstance, would not accept a definition of his "place" laid down by someone else (the kind of someone who would skulk in a thicket and shoot him in the back for disagreeing). Here was a man who knew precisely how much he was risking and why, and who had the courage and ultimate intelligence to do so; and I, witnessing his conduct . . . have felt myself grow.

Although there were two trials, the murderer went unpunished, and the slaying of Evers helped disorganize the civil rights movement in Jackson for the next ten years. Civil rights workers did not stop, however. They continued to cooperate under the name of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) for two more years.

After several years of voter-registration drives, more than 70,000 blacks had tried to register to vote. Less than 7,000 had been allowed to register. To show that blacks wanted to vote but were being kept from the polls, COFO organized a "freedom vote"; 80,000 blacks "registered" and cast unofficial votes for Aaron Henry for governor and Ed King for lieutenant governor in November 1963.

Now COFO workers set up a political organization, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). And they planned a new major effort—the "Freedom Summer."

King, a white man from Vicksburg, was chaplain at Tougaloo College.

### The Freedom Summer of 1964

The 1964 Freedom Summer played an important part in changing the old system of segregation. About 1,000 volunteer workers—black and white, Northern and Southern, men and women, college-age and older—entered the state. Their main aims were to help in political organization, to set up "freedom schools" for both young people and adults, and to bring national attention to conditions in Mississippi.

The Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 was under the direction of COFO, staffed mostly by SNCC and CORE volunteers, with some help from the Mississippi NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Aaron Henry, state head of the NAACP, was president of COFO. SNCC's Robert Moses was director of the project.