# Coming of Age in Mississippi Study Guide

## Coming of Age in Mississippi by Anne Moody

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# Introduction

By the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had seen enormous successes along with tragic losses. Significant anti-discrimination legislation had been passed, but in the view of many civil rights activists, society had not changed enough. The civil rights movement itself was transforming, turning away from the nonviolence of Martin Luther King to a more militant stance epitomized by Malcolm X. Into this confusion, in 1968, Moody published her autobiography, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. This startling depiction of what it was like to grow up a poor, southern African American captured the attention of Americans around the country, from all social classes and all backgrounds. Moody, intimately involved in the civil rights movement in the first half of 1960s, created an unforgettable image of the inequities and violence that characterized southern society.

Instead of focusing on her years in the civil rights movement, Moody chose to start at the beginning□when she was four years old, the child of poor sharecroppers working for a white farmer. In telling the story of her life, Moody shows why the civil rights movement was such a necessity and the depth of the injustices it had to correct; Moody's autobiography depicts the uphill battle that faced all southern African Americans. More than thirty years later, Moody's autobiography still retains the power it had for its first readers. Part of the book's long-lasting appeal is its basic humanity. Despite herself, Moody gets drawn into the fight for civil rights, knowing the challenge is incredibly difficult but knowing she has no other path to take.

# Author Biography

Born Essie Mae Moody on September 15, 1940, near Centreville, Mississippi, Moody was the daughter of poor African-American sharecroppers. She was the oldest of nine children. Moody's father left the family when she was only a young child, and her mother supported the family through domestic and restaurant work.

Moody grew up in and around Centreville, where she attended segregated schools. Despite her impoverished circumstances, which led her to work from the fourth grade on, Moody was a good student. She won a basketball scholarship to Natchez Junior College and was in attendance from 1959 through 1961. She then won an academic scholarship to Tugaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, and received a bachelor of science degree in 1964.

While at Tugaloo, Moody became an activist in the civil rights movement, maintaining involvement with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1963, she was one of three young people who staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson. She also took part in the 1963 march on Washington, D.C.

Moody worked in Canton, Mississippi, for more than a year with CORE to register African-American voters. She faced threats of violence and also was put on the Ku Klux Klan' s blacklist during this period. From 1964 through 1965, Moody served as the civil rights and project coordinator at Cornell University.

Becoming disenchanted with certain aspects of the civil rights movement, Moody moved to New York City, where she began to write her autobiography, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* , which was published in 1968. The book has received several national awards.

Aside from her autobiography, Moody has only published one other work, *Mr. Death: Four Stories* (1975). Moody has also worked as a counselor for the New York City Poverty Program.

# Plot Summary

## Childhood

The narrator of *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Anne Moody (born Essie Mae) spends her first four years in a sharecropper's shack on a plantation owned by a white farmer. Her parents work long hours in the fields. Daddy begins gambling and takes up with another woman, and eventually he deserts the family. Mama and the children move off the plantation, closer to the town of Centreville. Mama supports the family through domestic and restaurant work but often does not earn enough money even for food.

By the time Anne is in the fourth grade, she works regularly after school and on weekends to help support her family. They move into a house that Mama's boyfriend, Raymond, builds for them. Eventually, Raymond and Mama marry, but Raymond is unable to provide for the ever-growing family. Despite working many hours to help support the family, Anne continues to excel in school. She makes top grades, starts playing basketball, and is elected homecoming queen.

## High School

As Anne enters high school, a fourteen-year-old African-American boy is killed for whistling at a white woman. Anne realizes that she has overlooked the racial problems and violence that surround her. She now fears "being killed just because I was black." After the murder, Anne overhears Mrs. Burke and her "guild meeting" discuss the NAACP, and she finds out from her teacher that this organization is trying to improve the situation for southern African Americans. She feels hatred toward almost everyone: whites who kill African Americans and African Americans for not doing anything to stop these actions. The tensions between the white and black communities of Centreville escalate, resulting in the beating of one of Anne's classmates and the deliberate setting of a fire that kills almost an entire family.

These events, and the talk surrounding them, upset Anne greatly, so she goes to spend the summer with Uncle Ed, who lives in New Orleans. When she returns to Centreville, she learns of more racial problems that end with a cousin of hers being run out of town. When she asks her family about it, they just get angry and refuse to talk. Anne gets the feeling that Raymond hates her.

To take her mind off her problems, Anne becomes very busy with studies, extracurricular activities, and work. She also begins to tutor Mrs. Burke's son, Wayne, and his white friends in math. Wayne and Anne become friends, which makes Mrs. Burke angry and nervous. Wayne and Mrs. Burke fight over his relationship with Anne, and Anne quits working for Mrs. Burke after she implies that either Anne or her brother stole from her. Over the next few years, Anne finds work with other people and goes to New Orleans in the summers. She works hard to save money for college.

At the start of her last year in high school, Anne realizes that Raymond has started to desire her sexually. The tension escalates, and one day Anne gets into a fight with Raymond and leaves home. She goes to stay with her father and his wife, Emma, for the last six weeks of school. At first, she gets along well there. However, Emma, housebound because of an injury, starts treating Anne poorly. Two days after her high school graduation, Anne leaves town.

## College

Anne gets a basketball scholarship to a two-year junior college in Mississippi. Anne feels like college is a prison. During her second year, Anne meets her first boyfriend, a popular basketball player. She also leads a boycott of the school cafeteria, her first act of political activism.

Anne receives a scholarship to the best African-American senior college in the state, Tugaloo College, where she joins the local NAACP chapter. Tugaloo students are involved in demonstrations throughout Jackson. Anne becomes so involved in her NAACP activities that her grades drop. Anne is then recruited to help register African-American voters in the Mississippi Delta. As Anne and her coworkers convince African Americans to listen to their views, for the first time, she thinks that something can be done to change the way that whites treat African Americans.

## The Movement

In her senior year, Anne becomes increasingly involved with the civil rights movement, canvassing and giving speeches. Along with two other students, Anne stages a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter. Despite being physically and verbally abused by the gathering white mob, the students, joined by other demonstrators - some white - remain at the lunch counter for several hours, until the manager of Woolworth's decides to close the store early. When Anne and her friends leave the store, they discover about ninety police officers, none of whom has prevented the mob violence.

Many more demonstrations take place throughout Jackson. Anne gets arrested for her participation and, along with hundreds of other students, is jailed. Following the event, Anne receives letters from her family and learns for the first time that her actions are causing problems for her family back in Centreville.

Jackson becomes the hotbed of racial agitation. Civil rights leader Medgar Evers is shot to death. Anne and the other workers launch a protest march and are arrested. Thousands of African Americans attend Evers's funeral, and a demonstration ensues. Evers's murder contributes to the confusion and infighting between civil rights organizations.

Anne decides to work at the CORE offices in Canton, Mississippi, though she is warned by local civil rights leaders against doing so. Anne and the other workers face an uphill battle in registering voters. African Americans who support their activities or try to

register are often threatened with violence or fired from their jobs. Many African Americans fail the voter registration tests as well. The CORE workers are also threatened with violence.

In August 1963, Anne attends the March on Washington, D.C. Then, on September 15, she learns of the Birmingham church bombing, which kills four young girls. This crime causes Anne to question the movement's nonviolent tactics. However, she continues her work in Canton. When high school students hold a rally, the police begin to harass the CORE workers on an almost-nightly basis. Anne finds out that she has been placed on a Ku Klux Klan blacklist, which makes her even more nervous. She begins to fear for her own life, as well as for her family back in Centreville.

Anne decides to take a break from her work and go to New Orleans to work and live with her sister, Adline. Mama, whom Anne has not seen in several years, comes to visit; however, she and Anne have little to say to each other. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963 encourages Anne to participate in CORE activities in New Orleans, but she finds it just as hard to register voters in the city as it has been in Canton.

In May, Anne returns to Tugaloo for graduation, where she learns of plans for an upcoming voter registration drive, so-called Freedom Summer, for which northern college students will come south to help. Anne visits Canton, where the CORE workers have organized Freedom Day to take place. During this march, the police brutally attack a boy, drawing the crowd to the brink of violence and almost putting an end to the protest.

After graduation, Anne returns briefly to New Orleans but then goes back to Canton. However, she is depressed by the situation African Americans face. When she gets to the CORE offices, she finds a bus is about to leave for Washington, D.C., transporting African Americans who will testify in congressional hearings about racial discrimination and injustice in the South. Without hesitation, Anne joins the group on the bus. While the others are singing "We Shall Overcome," Anne thinks about all the violence the whites have bestowed upon the African Americans. She wonders if African Americans will ever achieve their goal of racial justice.

# Part 1: Chapter 1

## Part 1: Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Four-year-old Essie Mae lives in a two-room shack with her father, mother, and younger sister. Her parents do all they can to make the structure comfortable for the family, but most of the decorations consist of mismatched bits of wallpaper stuck up with tacks and pieces of cardboard stuffed in the cracks. Essie Mae's parents work in the fields from daylight to dark all week except Sundays. While her parents are working, Essie Mae and her little sister, Adline, are watched by George Lee, Essie Mae's eight-year-old uncle. George Lee sets fire to the house one afternoon, but Essie Mae is blamed for the fire and is beaten by her father.

Essie Mae's father spends his free time gambling, and begins to see a mulatto woman named Florence. Even though Essie Mae's Mama engages in physical fights with her husband, he continues to see the other woman. Mama's stomach grows and Essie Mae realizes that her mother is pregnant. After the baby boy named Junior is born, Essie Mae's father takes the family to live with a great-aunt and then takes off with Florence. Essie Mae's mother secures employment at a Negro cafy and moves the family into a two-room house owned by a white family. Essie Mae turns five and is enrolled in school at a local church. She does not like the teacher and spends most of her time hiding in the outhouse.

By most accounts, Essie's family sounds typical of a poor black family living in the South prior to the civil rights movement. Her mother is a hardworking woman but has little to show for her life except her children. Even her kids are a testament to her hard life. If Mama had her choice, she would probably be living in a fancy house and attending tea parties instead of popping out baby after baby. Essie's father only adds to the tension in the household by taking what little money the family has and gambling it away. To him, Essie's mother is good enough when he wants her but in a pregnant state she is of little use to him. Even the birth of a son is not enough to return Daddy's wandering eye to his own family. Daddy teaches Essie that men can be the weaker sex when he runs off with Florence. Obviously, the responsibility of a family to care for is too much for him to handle and he would rather be out sowing his wild oats anyway. Mama, on the other hand, begins to lay a more solid foundation for Essie to build upon. Mama refuses to accept her husband's unfaithfulness without a fight. Mama physically stands up to Daddy and shows Essie that women are more capable than most men expect. Mama could have easily shirked her duty as well and left the children as wards of the state or to starve to death. Instead, she establishes herself as a money earner and provider for her family. For a time Mama takes on the role of both mother and father.

# Part 1: Chapter 2

## Part 1: Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

While Essie Mae's mother works at the cafy, Essie Mae is in charge of caring for her younger sister and brother. Their house is located near a swamp and snakes often come up out of the swamp to the house. Their mother decides that it is not safe for the children to be home alone, and her brother Ed comes to look after them. One day Ed takes them to his house. Essie Mae is dying to see where Ed lives and to visit her Grandma Winnie. She is also anxious to see Ed's younger brothers, Sam and Walter, whom she has never met before. When two young white boys come running up to great her, Essie Mae is shocked to discover that her mother has white siblings. She is unable to understand how such a thing could happen since her mother, Ed, and Grandma Winnie are all very dark-skinned. Essie Mae's mother refuses to talk about the white boys and smacks Essie Mae when she persists in asking about them.

Essie Mae's mother begins to get fat again but Essie Mae assumes that it is because she is able to eat whatever she wants at the cafy. One day Essie Mae looks at her mother and realizes that she is going to have another baby. The baby is a boy named James and his father is a soldier, Raymond. The soldier and his mother come to take the baby away. It is obvious that the soldier's mother, Miss Pearl, looks down upon Mama. The only difference between the two women that Essie Mae can see is that Miss Pearl is a mulatto women like Florence. Not long after Miss Pearl takes the baby away, Mama decides to move the family closer to town.

Essie Mae is excited about this house because it is located on a sidewalk and is only a mile from her school. The family stays only a short time before they move to another house. The family is doing financially better and as Christmas approaches, Essie Mae is excited because Mama bought them all new clothes. Just before Christmas, Junior sets the house on fire and all the Christmas presents are lost. The family is forced to move again. This time they live in the maid's quarters of a white family. This new house is not far from Miss Pearl and Raymond. Mama takes the children to see Raymond and baby James, but when Raymond goes back into the service Mama is afraid to visit Miss Pearl alone.

Mama's strong character is short-lived. She is a woman who knows her place in the world and willingly accepts it even if it means being a slave to others. Mama appears more comfortable if she has a man in her life to look after her. Raymond is mostly stable and he appears to care for her and not mind that she already had three children by another man. The reader may wonder how long it will be before Raymond also leaves the family, especially considering that his mother does not accept Mama, Adline, Junior, or Essie Mae, since they are darker skinned. Mama belittles herself and her children by continuing to see Raymond and taking a back seat to his mother. Mama's actions set the stage for Essie Mae to begin questioning her world.

Essie certainly does question Mama. When Essie meets two of Mama's brothers for the first time, she is astounded to learn that they are white. Mama does not want to talk about the issue and smacks Essie around. It is as if Mama is afraid to acknowledge the dark past of this family secret. Obviously, Mama's mother had to have an affair with a white man in order to have light-skinned brothers. However, Mama seems ashamed of this fact and does not want Essie to know the truth. Essie is unable to fathom how such a thing could have happened and the incident makes Essie look more closely at things around her.

# Part 1: Chapter 3

## Part 1: Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Mama quits her job as a domestic and the family moves two miles down the road. Mama starts working for another white family who lets them live in a house on their property. Essie Mae likes this house the best because it is made of new boards and has a new toilet. She also thinks that they have a position of honor because they are the only black family in the neighborhood.

Essie Mae, Adline, and Junior spend their time sitting out front in a trench watching the white children ride their bikes. The white children become intrigued when they hear Essie Mae making Indian noises and the two groups of children become friends. When all the children go to the movies together, Essie Mae gets in trouble for trying go into the main theatre with the white children instead of upstairs to the balcony. When Essie Mae tries to talk to her mother about the differences between whites and blacks, Mama gets upset and refuses to talk.

Mr. Johnson, the farmer who Mama works for, goes to Florida to fetch watermelons. Whenever he and his wife go out of town, Essie Mae stays with Mr. Johnson's mother, Miss Ola. At first, Essie Mae likes staying with Miss Ola because she is allowed to sleep in a real four-poster bed and use the indoor bathroom to bathe in. One day Miss Ola has a cold and as she prepares soup, her nose runs into the soup pot. Essie Mae is turned off by how unsanitary Miss Ola is and refuses to eat anything she cooks anymore. Miss Ola is not the only white lady that Essie Mae finds engages in unsanitary practices. Essie Mae works for a lady doing odd jobs around the house in exchange for seventy-five cents and two gallons of milk a week. However, when Essie Mae sees the woman's cats drinking from the main milk tub she refuses to drink it anymore. However, she continues to work for the woman and take the milk because bringing home something to contribute to the household makes her feel good.

Adline and Junior start school but they struggle to learn their lessons. Essie Mae, on the other hand, works hard and is an excellent student. She even befriends one of the teachers, Mrs. Claiborne, and begins working for her. The Claiborne's treat Essie Mae extremely well and she enjoys working for them. One day Essie Mae notices that Mama's stomach has gotten big again and knows there is another baby on the way. Raymond has come back from the service and he is working to build the family a house near Miss Pearl. Essie Mae is excited by the news because for the first time Mama is actually happy and now they won't have to live on white people's land.

Essie's eyes, which were beginning to open in the last chapter, now more closely observe the world around her. She begins to notice subtle differences between herself and other black families. She is conscious enough to realize that her family has been able to move into an all white neighborhood. However, she thinks this is a good thing and does not understand the possible dangers associated with living among whites. It is

difficult for Essie to ascertain why whites are treated differently than blacks. After all, she and her siblings are allowed to play with the white neighbor kids during the day, but Essie gets in trouble when she tries to sit with them at the movies. Mama still refuses to explain the differences to Essie, leaving her to try and figure them out for herself. Mama's lack of responsibility in teaching Essie the ways of the world will lead to later trouble.

As Essie continues to watch the whites around her, she begins to notice that they are not as well mannered as she has been led to believe. She is appalled to see Miss Ola's nose running into the soup and the other white lady's cats drinking from the milk pail. It is here that Essie begins to wonder why whites are considered to be elite compared to blacks. Essie knows that her family would never engage in such disgusting practices, but unexplainably because she is black she is considered dirty.

# Part 1: Chapter 4

## Part 1: Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

The house Raymond builds is five rooms and has a green frame and a gray porch. They still do not have indoor plumbing, but the water line has been run to the house and Raymond promises to add on a bathroom soon. Mama and Essie Mae go to town to buy furniture and wallpaper for the house. When Essie Mae asks for a white post bed like Miss Ola's, Mama tells her not to want everything that white people have and that the Claiborne's have ruined Essie Mae. Once the family is settled into their new home, Raymond brings James, who is four years old, to live with them.

Essie Mae, Adline, and Junior quickly make friends with Raymond's family, but Miss Pearl and the rest of Raymond's family refuse to accept Mama. When the children start school again, Mama pushes Essie Mae to do better than Raymond's sister Darlene, who is the same age. Raymond also tries to help Adline and Junior with their lessons, but he becomes so frustrated that Essie Mae takes over helping her siblings.

As Christmastime nears so does the time for Mama to have the new baby. This time the baby is a girl. Essie Mae is happy at the birth of this baby because her Mama looks content and happy for the first time in a long time. Mama's contentment does not last long though. Miss Pearl comes to see the child and Mama is upset at the other woman's superior attitude. Instead of naming the baby after Miss Pearl, they name the baby Jennie Ann. Mrs. Claiborne gives Essie Mae twelve dollars for helping her clean. As Essie Mae goes home, she thinks about the way white people have been so kind to her but how mean Miss Pearl is to Mama even though they are both Negroes.

Life seems to be getting better. For the first time in her entire life, Essie sees Mama happy. Mama enjoys having a new house and being able to stay home and care for her family. She also appears content to continue producing babies and is excited by the birth of her most recent daughter. However, not everything is as peaceful as it first seems. Mama has some deep-rooted desire to prove that she is just as good as Miss Pearl, even if their skin tones differ. Mama uses Essie as a pawn in her game of trying to prove her worth to Miss Pearl. Essie has a natural ability to do well in school, so she becomes the showcase child. Mama is proud of Essie only when she is able to show up Miss Pearl's children. Essie notices that whites are not the only ones to discriminate against blacks. Light-skinned blacks look down their noses at those with darker skin, and Essie cannot figure out why people of the same race would treat each other so terribly.

# Part 1: Chapter 5

## Part 1: Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Mama used to attend Mount Pleasant Church, but when the family moves in to Raymond's house, Mount Pleasant is too far away. Mama decides that she will try attending Centreville Baptist where Miss Pearl goes to church in hopes of getting on Miss Pearl's good side. Essie Mae likes Centreville Baptist because the sermons are not as long as at Mount Pleasant and she loves hearing the choir sing. However, Essie Mae does not like the way all the women cry when the pastor preaches and she is appalled to learn that the preacher was once in prison. Mama does not return to Centreville Baptist, but Essie Mae, Adline, and Junior continue to attend Sunday school, church services, and Baptist Training, in order to show Miss Pearl that they are just as good as her own kin.

For several months Mama hints that she would like to go back to Mount Pleasant and finally hauls the family back to the country church in August. Mama tells Essie Mae how many relatives they have at Mount Pleasant and says that they will all attend the upcoming revival. Essie Mae attends the revival against her own wishes and is determined not to fall under the preacher's spell. However, when the preacher starts shouting about all the sinners who need to repent, Essie Mae finds herself walking to the front of the church to be baptized. The baptism takes place several weeks later. Essie Mae wears a white dress and is baptized in a pond along with many other young children. Essie Mae is excited about the baptism until one of the boys points out that the pond is full of cow shit. Essie Mae becomes upset and feels that she has been tricked by her mother. For weeks after the baptism, she still smells the putrid smell of the pond lingering on her.

Religion and church attendance are important parts of a black community. The church is where people come together to disregard differences and worship together. At least that's what it should be, but Essie soon realizes that in the hands of a desperate woman even church can become a competition. Mama decides that attending Miss Pearl's church will ingratiate her to the woman. Unfortunately, Miss Pearl is just an extremely difficult woman to please and refuses to acknowledge Mama's efforts. It is interesting that Mama works so hard to please another black woman who discriminates against her, much like a white woman would, but does not wish to prove herself worthy to whites. Apparently, Mama and Essie's ways of thinking are not as far apart as they may think. Mama can see no reason why Miss Pearl should look down upon her. After all, Mama has given Raymond several children and he appears to be intent on staying with Mama. Mama does not expect such treatment from another black woman, yet is willing to accept it from a white woman.

# Part 1: Chapter 6

## Part 1: Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Raymond decides that he wants to become a big time farmer. He buys an old mule and rents a strip of land. At the beginning it seems that all is going well, but one morning Raymond storms into the house and drops something on the table. He tells the family that the object is an old hand grenade and that the lower portion of the field is no good because its full of old army equipment.

Essie Mae is still working for Mrs. Claiborne but knows that she will have to quit when school is out in order to work in the field. Mama and Raymond spend days praying for rain to help the cotton grow while Essie Mae prays just as much that the seeds will die. When school ends, the entire family goes out to the field to work at tending the small cotton plants. Essie Mae is fearful to work the fields because she does not tolerate heat well and fears that working under the sun will kill them all. Essie Mae does pass out the first day of working in the hot sun, but after several days without any other mishaps she actually begins to like the work. Mama runs around extolling the great benefits of farming, but Essie Mae is convinced that being a farmer is the hardest way to make a living. At the end of the season, the family does not even have enough money to buy new school clothes and if Mama had not planted a little garden, they would have starved to death over the winter.

Raymond's idea to farm sounds familiar. Farming to the poor seemed like an appropriate way to make a decent living when there were no good jobs to be found. However, farming is such an unpredictable gamble that it is not a wise one for a poor man to take. Only the lucky few succeed in managing their farms well enough to turn a fair profit, while most end up owing more than they borrowed and still not being able to provide for their families.

# Part 1: Chapter 7

## Part 1: Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

When the school year begins, Essie Mae is upset because they have to go in their old clothes. She hurries around trying to secure another job, but no one seems to need any housekeeping help. One day Mama tells the children to hurry up and eat so that they can go to Mr. Wheeler's farm and pick pecans. For two days in a row, the family picks pecans and Mr. Wheeler gives them half of all they pick. Mama and Raymond drive to Woodville where they can get a better price for the pecans and come back with one hundred and twenty dollars - enough to buy new school clothes.

Essie Mae takes a job with the Jenkins family looking after their young daughter, Donna. Mrs. Jenkins notices that Essie Mae is uncomfortable calling her "Mrs." And tells Essie Mae to call her Linda Jean instead. Because of that the only time that Essie Mae feels any difference between them is when Linda Jean pays her and when Linda Jean's mother, Mrs. Burke, comes over. Mrs. Burke does not try to hide her dislike of Essie. She speaks rudely to her, counsels her daughter not to be so free with her, and even gets Essie's wage cut in half. Linda Jean is not the only one with a parent who dislikes Negroes. Mr. Jenkins' father is said to be the sheriff in Woodville who is known to be a 'nigger hater.' Essie is afraid of Mr. Jenkins until she realizes that he treats her just as well as Linda Jean does. After that, Essie marvels that two nice people can have such awful parents.

Just before Mama has another baby, she and Raymond get married. The morning that they leave for the courthouse, Raymond appears petrified. He refuses to look in Mama's direction even when backing out the truck and ends up in the ditch. When they return, Essie notices that the music is blaring and Raymond is smiling. A few days later Mama has another boy, Raymond Jr., whom they call Jerry. Now Essie is surrounded by screaming babies and it stays that way for a long time.

The family banding together to make money is another familiar event in the lives of the poor. If the family is to survive then all members need to work cooperatively to make it happen. This idea has been largely lost in today's society of easy money and superstores. This moment speaks to the reader and shows what a family should be willing to do for one another. Not one member of Mama's family puts up a fuss when made to pick pecans and even the smallest children help in the task. The family that works together profits and Mama is able to buy the children new school clothes and have some money left over.

Essie's interaction with whites is increasing. She continues to work as a housekeeper for white families. This time she is blessed to work for Linda Jean, who does not seem to notice the color difference and enjoys Essie's presence. People like Linda Jean seem to create a sense of false hope in Essie. For a while, she forgets the other white women she has encountered and the disgusting ways they behaved. She begins to think that

most white people are like Linda Jean, but she is quickly reminded that not all whites are like Linda Jean. Mrs. Burke is a good icon of the white way of thinking during this time. To her, blacks are meant to work and they should not be treated well. To her, blacks are nothing more than menial laborers who do not have lives and feelings to be considered.

# Part 1: Chapter 8

## Part 1: Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

The following summer Raymond tries farming again and Essie is only able to work for Mrs. Jenkins on the weekends. Once again, the family has no money for new school clothes and Essie is forced to start school in last year's clothes, even though she has gained some weight and everything is tight on her. At first, the other children make fun of her, but then the other girls notice how the boys pay attention to Essie's new curves and they start wearing tight clothes on purpose.

In the fall Mrs. Willis, Essie's teacher, announces that they will be having a competition for Homecoming Queen. Each grade picks a queen to ride in the parade before the football game and when the eighth grade votes are counted, Essie is one of three eighth grade queens. In order to break the tie, the girls are divided into three groups and given the task of raising money. At the end of the contest, Essie is declared the clear winner. The only problem Essie now faces is finding a dress to wear for the parade. Her family still does not have enough money to buy new school clothes, so a fancy dress is certainly out of the question. Mama tells Essie that she spoke to Clara, Essie's aunt on her father's side, and that Daddy will send money to buy a dress. The day before the parade, Essie is told to go pick up a letter from Clara, but when she gets to Clara's house, Daddy is there with a big dress box.

Essie takes her time getting to school the morning of the parade, which causes some problems with the other students who accuse her of acting like a queen. Essie is told to hurry up and dress and then she is wrapped in a towel while several older girls work on her hair and make-up. Essie hardly believes that she is the same beautiful girl staring back from the mirror when the girls turn her around to look at herself. Essie enjoys riding atop the eighth grade float until she hears the crowd singing "Swanee River." Essie listens closely to the words of the song, which talk about the world being sad and dreary and how 'darkies' hearts grow weary. Essie is overcome by a strong feeling of sadness as she listens to the song and heads home right after the parade ends.

Homecoming is a big event for Essie. It is hard for the reader to remember that Essie attends an all black high school and so the reader may cheer extra loud when Essie wins her grade level competition because one may think that Essie has beaten out white children, too. However, Essie's accomplishment is not diminished because she attends an all black school. Her crowning as queen seems to bolster her self-confidence and propel her further forward into the person she is meant to become. This is the first time that Essie has received the bulk of attention from anyone. Even Mama realizes the importance of the event and makes sure that Daddy gets Essie a dress. More surprising is the appearance of Mama at the parade. The reader may begin to suspect how much Mama really cares for Essie since it seems that all she really does is yell and scream at her eldest child. Mama's attendance at the parade is special and makes Essie's big day even more important. It is even sadder then when Essie listens to the words of "Swanee

River" and realizes that life for Negroes is not full of parades and beautiful dresses. This one moment will have to sustain her spirit for a long time because her life will not be like this much longer.

# Part 1: Chapter 9

## Part 1: Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Towards the end of the school year, Essie has to bring her birth certificate to school for their records. However, Essie's records and those of her brother and sister were burned up when Junior set fire to the house. When the birth certificate arrives from Jackson, it states that Essie's real name is Annie Mae. Mama is upset and tries to get the name changed, but Essie fights to keep the new name and Mama finally relents. At school, the kids continue to call her Moody and at home, Mama will not let the other children call her anything but Essie.

That summer Raymond gives up farming and heads to California to find work. Jobs for Negro men are extremely scarce in Mississippi, but after a month, Raymond has had no luck and returns home. Times are extremely tough and Mama is pregnant with her seventh child. Anne continues to work for Mrs. Jenkins, but the Jenkins' are planning to move soon so Anne will also be out of work. While Anne works to help Mrs. Jenkins pack, she is sent over to Mrs. Burke's house. Anne is shocked when Mrs. Burke offers her a job, but since the family is in need of money, she agrees to take the job. Working for Mrs. Burke is like working for a drill sergeant. However, Anne refuses to be submissive to Mrs. Burke's matriarchal attitude and continues to do the work in her own way. After several weeks, Mrs. Burke stops trying to subdue Anne because she can find no reasonable complaint about Anne's work.

The change of Essie's name to Anne signals a huge movement in her life. Essie Mae has moved away from childhood towards adulthood and has also moved a little further away from becoming just another black mother to a passel of children. Anne's comment that she wanted to keep the new name because she always felt that Essie Mae was more suited to livestock signals her own desire to be recognized as someone and not just as another black child. Anne's awareness has been steadily growing and she is starting to speak out against the world around her.

# Part 2: Chapter 10

## Part 2: Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Shortly after Anne begins high school, the reality of racial violence hits home. A local fourteen-year-old boy named Emmet Till is killed by a group of white men. Anne is shocked by the news, but even more shocked that she has been oblivious to the things happening around her. Mama tells Anne to continue working as though nothing has happened, but Anne is unable to concentrate at Mrs. Burke's. She breaks several dishes and is sent to scrub the bathtub while the family eats. Mrs. Burke eventually approaches Anne about Emmet Till's death and Anne tries to play dumb. Mrs. Burke tells Anne that this is what happens to black people who get out of line with whites. For the first time Anne fears for her life simply because she is black.

Shortly after Emmet Till's death, Anne goes to work and finds that Mrs. Burke is having a meeting with several other ladies. Anne strains to listen to their conversation as she cleans and picks up the words "nigger" and "NAACP." Mrs. Burke realizes that Anne is listening to their conversation and sends Anne home, stating that the Guild will be eating elsewhere. When Anne gets home, she asks Mama about the NAACP, but Mama refuses to talk about it. The next day Anne asks her teacher, Mrs. Rice, what the NAACP means and learns that it is an organization trying to secure the right to vote for Negroes. After that, Anne spends time with Mrs. Rice and learns a lot more about the treatment of blacks in the South. Anne is appalled to learn that blacks are not even treated as well as animals when they are killed. Animals are at least used for food, but blacks are left to rot along the roadside.

Anne grows up quickly in this chapter. Emmet Till's murder is a shock to Anne's system. She has been trying for quite some time now to learn more about the Guild, the NAACP, and just the state of black affairs in general. However, since no one will openly discuss what is going on with her, she does not fully realize how serious the situation is. Mama continues her mantra of playing dumb so that nothing will happen to them, but Anne knows that remaining silent is not going to stop the killings. Since looking the other way does no good, Anne decides to seek out someone who is finally able to school her on civil rights. She learns a great deal from Mrs. Rice, including the lesson that opening one's mouth does indeed get one dismissed from the community.

# Part 2: Chapter 11

## Part 2: Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Following Emmet Till's death, Mrs. Burke and the Guild increase their efforts to organize whites in the area. As the popularity of the Guild grows, the blacks in the area start to hear about happenings that they never knew were going on. One of the most talked about subjects is how many white men have black mistresses. A sting operation is even staged to catch the sheriff in bed with his black lover. Even more outrageous is the fact that black men are taking white lovers. This news spreads like wildfire and black men are accused of wrongdoing simply for looking in the direction of a white woman.

One of Anne's classmates, Jerry, is beaten up by the sheriff for supposedly making obscene phone calls to a white operator. Shortly after this incident something more terrible occurs. In the middle of the night, Anne is awakened by voices in the street. Mama, Raymond, and Anne load themselves into the car and hurry in the direction of the people running down the road. From their distant vantage point, they can see that a house is on fire. Raymond asks a passerby what is going on and learns that the home of the Taplin family has been set ablaze. The entire family except an old woman and one child are burned alive inside. Rumors fly about what started the fire. The whites maintain that Mrs. Taplin left a kerosene lamp burning while the blacks say that the fire was meant to scare the white man next door, accused of carrying on with a black woman.

Anne is completely shaken by the Taplin fire and cannot understand why so many people around her continue to carry on as if nothing had happened. When school lets out for the summer, Anne writes her Uncle Ed in Baton Rouge and a week later packs her bags to spend the summer in Louisiana. At fifteen years old Anne has already lived a lifetime and she can no longer sit silently by while others pretend that nothing is wrong.

In some ways, Anne appears to be running away from the situation at home. She is unable to understand what is happening and her family continues to act as though nothing out of the ordinary has happened. Anne's move to Baton Rouge seems motivated more out of a desire to get away from the ignorance surrounding her than an act towards becoming involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Even though Anne does not become a member of NAACP or any other organization at this time, the experience of getting out of Centreville opens her already wide eyes even further and moves her further along the path of becoming an activist.

# Art 2: Chapter 12

## Art 2: Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Anne arrives in Baton Rouge expecting to make big money working for the white folks in town. However, her first job turns sour when the family can only afford to pay her three dollars a day and then leaves town without paying Anne for two weeks worth of work. A friend of Anne's gets her a job working in Ourso's Department Store. Anne has to lie about her age in order to get the position, but since she does such excellent work, her employers never question her. Another woman working at the store befriends Anne and Anne tells her the truth about her age. The following day Anne is dismissed from work and she realizes that the woman was jealous and was trying to get Anne fired.

When Anne returns to Centreville, she has new school clothes and sixty-five dollars in her pocket. Anne learns that another black family has been run out of town, but when she tries to ask Mama about it, she is met with anger and a refusal to talk. Anne decides that she must find something to take her mind off of everything that is happening or she won't survive. Anne decides to engage in as many school activities as possible and vows that she will return to Baton Rouge the following summer instead of staying in Centreville.

Things do not change during Anne's time away from Centreville. The only thing that is different is Anne herself. She now has a greater appreciation for the way life could be if only blacks would begin to use their voice. Although nothing momentous happens to her while in Baton Rouge, she sees that opportunities exist for a better life. There is not a reason that a black man should have to labor in the fields or suffer like a slave for white people when decent jobs are available. Anne is an extremely smart girl and her ability to plan ahead for her future suggests that she will soon be taking action of her own life in a way that will shock her family.

# Part 2: Chapter 13

## Part 2: Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Mrs. Burke comes looking for Anne to see if she will return to work for her. Anne agrees to come back but says she will start the following week after she has gotten her school things together. Mama is appalled that Anne would talk to Mrs. Burke in such a manner. Anne notices that Mama's attitude is different now and that Raymond also acts differently around her. However, she is unable to figure out exactly what has happened so she continues to put her plan into place.

When school starts, Anne joins the band and the basketball team. After school, she works for Mrs. Burke and when she comes home, she helps Adline and the rest of the children with their homework. She also takes piano lessons twice a week and teaches Sunday school and Baptist Training on Sundays. All of Anne's activities keep her busy all the waking hours of the day and yet she still manages to maintain a straight A average in school.

One day Mrs. Burke confides in Anne that she fears her son, Wayne, will not ever learn math. Anne says that she often takes over her algebra class in school and that she makes all A's in algebra. Anne begins to tutor Wayne and several of his classmates in the evenings. For a while Mrs. Burke tolerates the friendship that grows between Anne and Wayne, but eventually she tries to put an end to the relationship. Anne has trouble understanding Mrs. Burke's actions. One minute the woman is confiding in Anne like a trusted friend but the next she is yelling at Anne to go work on something. Mrs. Burke asks Anne what she thinks about the integration of schools and Anne comments that she would like to go to school with white boys like Wayne and his friends. Mrs. Burke is upset by Anne's comments and the next day she is not there when Anne shows up for work. Anne waits several hours for Wayne to show up for tutoring. When he fails to appear, she asks Mrs. Crosby what is going on. Mrs. Crosby says that they won't be coming today because Wayne had a fight with his mother. Mrs. Crosby tells Anne that she will help her go to college and then sends her home for the night.

Several days later Junior accompanies Anne to Mrs. Burke to do some yard work. Mrs. Burke comes to Anne and asks if she has seen Mrs. Burke's change purse. When Anne says no, Mrs. Burke goes out in the yard and confronts Junior. Anne becomes upset at Mrs. Burke's treatment of Junior and decides to quit working for the Burke's. A few days later Anne is approached by Mrs. Hunt to work in her ladies shop. Anne accepts the job even though the work is more handyman than store clerk. Mrs. Hunt grows to respect Anne and increases her duties to helping out at the Hunt's home. When school lets out for the summer, Anne writes to her Uncle Ed again and heads for Baton Rouge once again.

Anne appears to have succeeded in doing what her mother tried so hard to achieve - she has shown the whites that she is just as capable as their own children. Anne is a

hard worker. She maintains straight A's in school, she works six days a week, she helps her siblings with their school work, she is in several school activities, and she helps out at her church. Anne is a threat to the white community because she is not afraid to put herself out there and take on challenges. Mrs. Burke seems to pick up on this and sets a sort of trap to catch Anne.

Mrs. Burke does not do anything for the sake of being nice to a black person, so when she approaches Anne about tutoring her son the reader should realize that she has something else up her sleeve. If the reader recalls the earlier upheaval about white men having black lovers, one may suspect that Mrs. Burke is trying to set the stage for Anne to be accused of just this thing. What backfires in Mrs. Burke's plan is the fact that Anne is not interested in a relationship, outside friendship, with Wayne or any other boy. Anne so far has not shown any interest in dating and views the study group as just that. Why Mrs. Burke becomes upset it is for two reasons. First, Wayne, not Anne, is the one showing the increased interest. Here is Mrs. Burke, a leader in the guild, and her own son is fond of a black girl. Secondly, Anne does not play into Mrs. Burke's plan, and so now Mrs. Burke will have to formulate some other means of exposing Anne as a "bad Negro."

# Part 2: Chapter 14

## Part 2: Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Anne spends an entire month looking for a job in Baton Rouge without any luck. Frustrated with the lack of opportunity, Anne decides to head home. The day before she is to leave an old friend contacts her about a job working in a chicken factory. Anne becomes excited by the prospect of earning as much as seventy-five dollars a day and goes along for an interview.

Anne is disgusted by the work she does at the chicken factory. She is first put on an assembly line pulling the guts out of the chickens as they whiz past on hooks overhead. Before long, the foreman moves her but Anne has trouble keeping from getting sick at each station she is put at. That night Anne vows not to return to the chicken factory, but when morning comes, she is waiting outside for a ride. Anne works in the factory for about a month. She is disgusted by the way the chickens are processed, but even more disgusted by the way many of the birds come in with sores on them that also infect the workers. Anne still cannot eat boxed chicken, and years later struggles to eat any chicken at all.

There is no denying that this chapter may be the most disgusting of the entire book. This chapter does two things: it shows how desperate people are for money and it exposes the revolting practices of slaughterhouses. The reader may lose their appetite for chicken after reading about Anne's experience in the factory.

Anne falls into a desperate situation - she is in need of money. In order to obtain that money she is willing to do anything, including participate in the disgusting slaughter of chickens for processing. Perhaps the most interesting thing about Anne's decision to take this position is that she has never wanted to feel like a slave in any of her jobs. However, at the factory, Anne works long hours in less than comfortable conditions. She is not allowed outside on breaks and she must do the work as told instead of in her own manner. This job is everything that Anne has worked to avoid and now here she is engaging in the exact practices she rails about in Centreville. The reader wonders if the chicken factory would have been in Centreville and not Baton Rouge, would she still have taken the job.

# Part 2: Chapter 15

## Part 2: Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Anne returns to high school but quickly becomes bored with the petty routine of the other students. She maintains her A average with minimal effort and throws herself into her extracurricular activities. Anne is earning four dollars a week playing piano at church and she continues to work for Mrs. Hunt.

Towards the end of the school year, the school stages a Gymnastics and Tumbling Night. Anne excels during the presentation and is praised by her mother for possessing such abilities. A few weeks later the school Stunt Night is scheduled. Anne prepares two performances. The first is a play that she wrote about teenage girls tricking their mothers, and is a hit. The second performance does not receive such a warm reception. Anne and seven other girls perform an African dance dressed in bikini bottoms, crepe-paper skirts, and paper bras. The principal scrambles to herd the girls off stage, and Mama reprimands Anne all the way home.

School lets out for the summer and Anne heads for Baton Rouge again. When she is unable to find employment elsewhere, she heads for the chicken factory, but is turned away. Just as she is about to try writing another relative in New Orleans, Anne is offered a position washing dishes in a fancy restaurant with Grandma Winnie. Anne is not excited about working as a dishwasher, but she needs money and accepts the position. The people that Anne works with are an interesting lot, especially the men who act like women. Lola and Lily White are two men who act more like women and Anne is shocked at their behavior. Anne works hard and moves up to busboy and then on to waitress.

Anne also befriends Lola and Lily White. Lily White's real name is James and he does a striptease act at a local bar. Anne and another waiter go see James' act one night and Anne is impressed with James' performance. Lola starts giving Anne beauty tips and helping her fix her hair in new styles. When Anne returns to Centreville, she has a whole new wardrobe, including uplift bras, and wears make-up.

Anne is becoming a woman whether she realizes it or not. Throughout the book, there are few instances in which Anne comments on her sexuality, or acknowledges that she is female. Anne's approach to life has been very tomboyish and the reader does not picture her as a very feminine character. Therefore, it is almost comical to see her reacting to the male cross-dressers at the restaurant. Perhaps her reaction is due to the fact that she is not very feminine and is amazed to see men acting more ladylike than herself. It is also interesting that Anne learns how to be a woman from a couple of men. Mama should have been the one teaching Anne how to dress, how to wear make-up, and how to act like a woman. Compared to the previous chapter this one is much more lighthearted and the reader cannot blame Anne for wanting to return to Baton Rouge as soon as possible.

# Part 2: Chapter 16

## Part 2: Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Anne's new appearance attracts the attention of the boys in her class as well as several men around town. One of the men attracted to Anne is her basketball coach, Mr. Hicks. Mama encourages Anne to be nice to Mr. Hicks, and Anne realizes that Mama wants her to marry the coach. One day a fight breaks out between Anne and another girl on the team. After a week of cooling off, the girls reconcile and Mr. Hicks stops treating Anne differently from the rest of the girls on the team. However, Raymond now acts uncomfortable around Anne and she often sees him staring at her through her bedroom window.

Samuel O'Quinn is murdered several weeks later. He is killed by a shotgun blast to the back at close range. His death brings all Anne's repressed memories of the other killings to the surface. It is suspected that Samuel was killed because of his involvement with the NAACP. Anne begins to pull away from people and vows to leave Centreville at the end of the semester. She plans to go to New Orleans and work while finishing high school at night. It seems that her plan will go into effect sooner than expected.

One night she is playing the piano while her mother sings. After changing her clothes, Anne cannot find her mother and goes outside to look for her. Raymond is sitting on the porch but gets up abruptly and starts hollering about the lack of peace in the house. He goes inside and slams the door. Anne becomes enraged and starts yelling and swearing at Raymond. As she stands on the porch railing at Raymond, Mama walks up behind him. Mama refuses to help Anne and sides instead with Raymond. Anne walks down the road to her Aunt Clara's house and asks to be driven to the sheriff's house. After rousing the sheriff, Anne goes back to her house and takes all her clothes from it. She is upset that she cannot manage to take the piano she bought but she hurries to get out of the house.

The sheriff drives Anne to her father's home in Woodville. Anne's father lives with a woman named Emma in a rundown-looking shack, but the inside is surprisingly nice. Her father immediately takes her in and offers to beat up Raymond if he laid a hand on her. Anne decides to stay with Mama's friend Alberta, but when Mama continually sends notes and packages to her there, Anne decides to transfer schools and finish the year at Woodville. For a while Anne enjoys living with her father and Emma. They spend their weekends visiting Emma's family, whom Anne enjoys immensely.

Tensions both in the community and in Anne's own home are coming to a head. The shooting of Samuel O'Quinn sends a huge message to the black community: those who choose to become involved in the Movement risk losing their lives. Anne has already determined to leave Centreville once she graduates, but Samuel's death cements her resolve.

Raymond has been acting strangely toward Anne for a while now. She suspects that he secretly lusts after her and is becoming more aroused by her developing body. Raymond does not ever actually act on any impulse he may feel but he certainly makes life at home miserable for Anne in any way he can. Anne has been suspicious of Raymond since the first time she met him, but out of respect for her mother, she tolerated him. However, Mama does not respect her daughter enough to protect her from Raymond. Mama is too needy and fearful of living without a man to see that by failing to side with her own daughter she is helping to perpetuate the abuse of black women. When the reader realizes that Mama was party to Raymond's trap, one is appalled. Anne too cannot believe that her mother would aide Raymond in running her out of the house. It seems more Mama's actions that enrage Anne, although Raymond takes the full force of her anger.

Anne has really been on her own for a lot longer than most kids her age. So now the only difference is that she is physically separated from her family. Anne grew up a long time ago and now she must fend for herself without the limited protection of her mother's home. The reader is sure that Anne will succeed given her hardworking past, but at the same time, the reader hopes that the exclusion from the family home will not prevent her from graduating and leaving Centreville behind.

# Part 2: Chapter 17

## Part 2: Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

One Sunday evening as Anne, her father, and Emma are getting ready for bed they hear screams coming from next door. As they run next door to Janie's house, they see Wilbert, Janie's husband, trying to get in the house with a shotgun in his hands. Emma runs inside and helps Janie and the children try to bar the door shut. Wilbert steps back from the door, aims the shotgun, and shoots. A moment later Emma is heard moaning and Daddy rushes inside to help her. Daddy emerges with a blood-covered Emma and loads her in a truck to take to the hospital. The incident seems to shake the life back into Wilbert, who quickly jumps in the car with Janie to follow Daddy to the hospital.

The next morning Emma's brother Clift arrives to take Anne to the hospital in Centreville to spend the day with Emma. Part of Emma's foot has been blown off. Anne spends a week with Emma in the hospital and Emma is in upbeat spirits the entire time. However, when they return home, Emma begins to complain and boss Anne around the house. Anne cannot wait for graduation and her chance to leave them all behind.

At school, Anne is approached to join the basketball team. She is nervous to play with the new team because the other girls are much taller than she is. She joins anyway and ends up being one of the team's best players. Anne also becomes involved in the school's track team, organizes their first gymnastics squad, substitute teachers, and spends her Sundays at church. Before she knows it, it is time for graduation. All the schools in Wilkinson County are to be consolidated the following fall under the "Separate but Equal" movement. The new school building has been under construction for a while and Anne's class is the first one to graduate in the new building. Each school is to be represented at graduation by the student with the highest average. Anne should represent her new school but since her scores are the product of two different schools, she does not qualify to represent Willis High. Anne is surprised to see her mother in the crowd at the ceremony. When Anne sees how old and worn her mother looks, Anne promises to come stay with Alberta for a few days and visit Mama before she leaves for New Orleans.

The pleasant life Anne begins with Daddy and Emma is torn apart shortly after her arrival. Anne leaves the chaotic life with Mama and Raymond and manages to assume a bit of normalcy. When Emma is shot things begin to go sour and Anne is in pretty much the same situation as when she lived with Raymond. In order to keep herself from wallowing in misery, Anne throws herself whole-heartedly into school and extracurricular activities. As always, when times are difficult, Anne digs in and does her best to keep herself occupied.

Part of Anne's activities include joining the basketball team at her new school. Anne is at first reluctant to join because the other girls are so much bigger than she is, but Anne is not one to sit back when challenged. Anne steps forward and tries out for the team only

to discover that her size does not hold her back. Once again, Anne shows how different she is from her mother. Mama would have shrunken from the opportunity to engage in an activity she enjoys. Mama does not respond positively to adversity and seems a poor example for her children. However, Anne is smart enough to realize that her mother's way is not necessarily the right way, and chooses to forge a better life for herself.

# Part 3: Chapter 18

## Part 3: Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

After graduating, Anne heads for New Orleans hoping to work in the restaurant again to earn money for college. However, the restaurant business is slow and Anne isn't making as many tips as the previous summer. Out of money and worried about her future, Anne contacts her former basketball coach who tells her that she could probably get a basketball scholarship to a school in Mississippi. In late August, Anne hears from the coach at Natchez College. He has accepted her on the team and she will be receiving a full-tuition scholarship to Natchez.

When Anne arrives at Natchez, she is disappointed by the appearance of the dilapidated campus. The basketball team with its tall girls is just as scary to Anne until she realizes that her high school coach has built up her reputation so much that the other girls are afraid of her. The girls' coach, Miss Adams, is also the Dean's secretary and secret lover. She is hard on the girls and makes up silly rules for them to follow. When Miss Adams tries to punish Anne unfairly for missing class while being sick, Anne fights back by speaking directly to the college's president. Miss Adams is upset that Anne went over her head and drops Anne from first to second string. Basketball becomes boring for Anne and there is little else on campus to keep her busy. The girls on campus are treated like prisoners and Anne quickly becomes frustrated with her lack of freedom. She considers herself a loner, and by the end of the school year is so frustrated that she considers not coming back the following year.

Anne continues to work at having a life better than her mother's. Anne's resourcefulness and willingness to seek help from the right people land her a full scholarship to Natchez. Anne is excited about the prospect of attending college but her excitement is quickly tempered when she sees the campus. Instead of being a beautiful college that rivals what Anne has imagined, Natchez is a rundown second-rate institution. Anne feels like she is in prison and as always refuses to accept the situation without a fight. Anne does not actively cause trouble on campus, but when problems occur Anne is ready to step forward and organize the students. In many ways, Natchez provides Anne with a more valuable education than simple book learning. Anne's activities at Natchez are preparing her for her work with the Movement.

# Part 3: Chapter 19

## Part 3: Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

Anne returns to Natchez when she realizes that she cannot afford to attend school elsewhere. The second year brings a new change: the discovery that boys are attracted to her. By now, Anne is twenty years old and has never been kissed. She begins paying more attention to the boys on campus, especially the ones on the boys' basketball team.

One boy in particular catches her eye. His name is Keemp and all the girls think he is the best looking. Anne does not find him especially attractive, but she is impressed with his ability on the basketball court. It is not long before Keemp and Anne begin dating. They sit together on the bus to away games and Keemp begs Anne to kiss him. Anne is reluctant at first but soon realizes that she will have to kiss Keemp if she is to keep him as her boyfriend. At first Anne is embarrassed because their first kiss takes place in public on the bus ride home after a game, but she enjoys the kiss so much that she and Keemp are soon kissing all over campus. Despite the new level of their relationship, Anne and Keemp start to fizzle out. Anne refuses to do anything besides kiss Keemp and he soon finds himself another girl in town. Anne pretends she does not know about the other girl and considers Keemp her best friend.

One morning Anne is frustrated with having to constantly worry about money, so she decides to take her last ninety dollars and go out on the town. As she leaves the dorm, she sees a large gathering of students at the dining hall. The school is in an uproar because maggots have been found in the grits and the cook refuses to accept responsibility. The incident only increases Anne's frustration and she organizes the students into a boycott. She gives the boys fifty dollars to buy food for the campus and the girls spend their time in town gathering hot plates from students living in town. When the college president confronts Anne, she demands that the showers that are leaking over the kitchen be fixed, the spoiled grits thrown out, and the cook fired. All of her demands are met except that the cook stays on dressed in a new white uniform and hair net. While other students return to the dining hall, Anne refuses to eat there. Friends bring Anne food from town and Mama even sends a small care package of canned goods. As the end of the school year draws near, Anne takes a test to qualify for a full scholarship at another school. She is awarded the scholarship and will be attending the best Negro college in Mississippi the following year.

For the first time in the entire book, the reader gets a glimpse of Anne behaving like an average young adult. She begins to notice the opposite sex and to desire a relationship with a boy. Anne's relationship with Keemp is also the first time that the reader sees Anne acting very unlike herself. She becomes so caught up in dating Keemp that she temporarily loses her focuses. However, their relationship is also very Anne-like. She conducts herself with Keemp according to her own rules and not the way everyone else thinks she should behave. When she finally allows Keemp to kiss her, she is swept away like many girls kissed by their boyfriends, but Anne takes kissing to the next level

by thwarting school rules. Even in her first serious relationship Anne is utilizing skills that will aide her later in the Movement.

Anne's natural leadership skills prove useful when she takes charge of an upset at the dining hall. The reader is constantly impressed by the way that Anne is able to command attention and quickly organize others into action. The reader may wonder where the ability comes from since Anne never tells about being in charge of siblings very often or being the head of any organizations as a teenager. Anne's leadership qualities certainly seem inborn. Anne does not seem to recognize her natural ability and usually appears motivated more by frustration at others' inaction. Even though Anne may not realize the power she holds by being able to lead so well, she certainly is not afraid to act.

# Part 3: Chapter 20

## Part 3: Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

Anne is excited about attending a new college, but her spirits are dampened when other students tell her that Tougaloo College is for light-skinned rich Negroes. Anne begins to worry that Tougaloo is out of her league. While working in New Orleans for the summer she considers attending L.S.U. When September comes, Anne enrolls in Tougaloo. During her first night on campus Anne is still worried that she will not fit in, but the following morning when she sees the school in the daylight she is astounded by the beautiful campus.

In order to make a good impression, Anne decides to enter a campus talent show. She finds a few other students who are good at tumbling and puts together a gymnastics routine for the show. The group is awarded first prize. The Dean of the College is so impressed with Anne's ability that he tries to get her to major in physical education, but Anne refuses to change her major from biology.

By mid-semester, Anne is making good grades despite her many fears about attending Tougaloo. She learns that if she continues to do well she can make the honor roll at the end of the semester. Around the winter holidays, Anne begins dating Dave Jones, but when the semester ends and Anne has not made the honor roll, she realizes that Dave takes her focus off her studies. Furthermore, Dave wants Anne to sleep with him and when she refuses, he tries to take her. Anne gets upset with him and refuses to speak to him anymore. Left with nothing to occupy her time, Anne decides to attend an NAACP meeting with one of her roommates.

Anne is a natural born leader but when it comes to her personal life she is rather shy. Anne is both excited about attending a better college but also scared that she will not fit in or be good enough. Her mother's fears from childhood still resonate within Anne, and even though she tries to move past them, new situations cause her to hesitate. Anne's strong personality once again aides her when she arrives at Tougaloo. Rather than sit around and mope that she does not know anyone, Anne quickly goes out and makes a name for herself on campus.

# Part 3: Chapter 21

## Part 3: Chapter 21 Summary and Analysis

Shortly after Anne joins the NAACP, Medgar Evers comes to campus to give a speech. When several other students are arrested following a demonstration, the entire campus rallies behind them. The event spills over onto the football field and lasts long into the night. Anne becomes so involved in the NAACP that her grades fall. By mid-terms she barely has a one-point average and she is also running out of money. Anne must attend summer school to make up some credits, but the only way she can do that is to qualify for a student loan. Anne manages to secure a loan for one hundred and fifty dollars and is determined to make the money last her through the summer.

Over the summer, a new student named Joan Trumpauer moves in across the hall. Joan works for the SNCC and the two girls quickly become friends. Anne accompanies Joan on a voter registration drive in the Delta. Anne really enjoys her time in the Delta and working with the SNCC. For the first time Anne is directly confronted with the discrimination facing blacks. When she and the others visit local churches hoping to speak, they are turned away. Anne also witnesses blacks being fired from their jobs for registering with the SNCC. However, Anne also sees that change is coming and decides that she wants to be a part of what is going to happen.

One day Anne and another girl are out shopping in town. When they decide to head back to campus, they realize that they only have enough money to ride the bus. At the bus depot Anne proposes that they sit on the whites' only side. At first things seem to go smoothly, but then a drunken white man begins to make a scene. He screams at the girls and makes fun of them. Twice Anne and her friend miss their bus. Finally, Rose suggests that they leave before violence erupts. Anne agrees and the girls back out of the station unsure of what to do next. As they stand in the dark, a voice tells them to get in the car. The gentleman is a Negro minister who works part-time at the bus station and was on his break.

While most students would consider having to study through the summer a travesty, Anne actually welcomes the opportunity to stay on campus. After all, she really does not have a place to go since she left Mama's house in high school. What is interesting about Anne's summer school experience is that she barely mentions classes. The reader knows that she must make up credits and is told when classes end, but otherwise the focus of the chapter is on Anne's involvement with the Movement.

The moment that Anne seems to have been practicing for has finally come. She jumps at the opportunity to become involved with the SNCC. Interestingly, it is a white classmate who brings Anne into the Movement. Anne's strong character is tested when she begins working with the SNCC because she is personally confronted with discrimination. She is turned away from churches and she sees the people she has just worked so hard to recruit punished because they chose to become involved. Anne also

takes her involvement a little too far too early. She innocently stages an impromptu sit-in at the bus depot that quickly gets out of hand. Anne's rash decision almost ends badly for herself and another student. Thankfully, the other student remains calm enough to get them out of the depot and a helpful Negro minister escorts the girls safely back to campus.

# Part 3: Chapter 22

## Part 3: Chapter 22 Summary and Analysis

The following February the NAACP holds a convention in Jackson, Mississippi. Anne gets so excited about the scheduled speakers that she sends a pamphlet about the convention to her mother. Mama sends a letter back covered in dried up tears pleading with Anne to stay away from the NAACP. Mama says that if Anne doesn't stop her nonsense that she will be unable to come home again. Anne is upset by Mama's letter, but she attends the convention anyway.

Anne is unable to graduate because some of her credits from Natchez still have not cleared. Nonplussed, Anne decides to stay on campus and work with the Movement. She does not have enough money for bus fare to New Orleans and she is not welcome at home. Anne has become friendly with one of her professors, John Salter. She begins working closely with him as he stages sit-in demonstrations around town. A sit-in is organized for Woolworth's, and Anne is to be their spokesperson. Anne and two other students take up positions at the lunch counter and things go smoothly until the news media arrives. The same drunken white man from the bus depot shows up and begins to threaten the students with a knife. Several other men rush forward and throw the students from their stools and begin beating them. Anne and her friends regain their stools only to be pelted by food and spray painted on their backs. Finally, the president of Tougaloo College arrives and ushers the students out of the store into a car. After the demonstration, Anne is convinced that she acted correctly. She decides that she must continue to live her life as she sees fit but she also recognizes the possible implications of her actions for her family.

The frequency of the demonstrations increases following the sit-in. Several area ministers are picked to meet with the Mayor with a list of demands. The Mayor refuses to listen and issues a statement warning Negroes that the town is equipped to handle 100,000 demonstrators if needed. Cops roam the streets constantly and area businesses do their best to deter sit-ins and demonstrators. Anne and a large group of college students are thrown in jail and four hundred high school students are arrested. The NAACP does not have enough money to bail out all the high school students, so several of the college students try to get arrested and placed in the fairgrounds with them. Soon cops are arresting every Negro that they see on the street whether they are demonstrating or not. Medgar Evers is arrested while demonstrating at Woolworth's. One night Anne has to stay in Jackson because she missed the bus back to campus. She stays with Dave Dennis, a member of CORE, and his wife. As they sit around watching TV, a news bulletin flashes on the screen stating that Medgar Evers has been shot. The next morning they learn that Medgar was shot in his driveway.

Anne and another student go to Jackson State College hoping to get students to protest Medgar's death, but instead the students ignore them and the college president tells the girls to leave immediately. A rally forms at a nearby church and quickly escalates into

mass chaos. Cops in riot gear arrive and begin herding the demonstrators into paddy wagons. The cops leave one paddy wagon, with Anne inside, sitting in the hot sun and the heat for two hours. The group is then moved into the makeshift jail at the fairgrounds. John Salter is shot in the head. As Anne is herded into the crowded fairgrounds, she thinks about how the facility resembles a concentration camp.

After several days, the students are released. The following day is Medgar Evers' funeral. After the service, Anne climbs a hill and watches the scene below. A police brigade blocks the funeral procession. When the people attending the funeral become upset that they cannot pass, a riot breaks out. The cops bring out fire trucks and turn the hoses on the people. In response, the crowd throws stones and bottles at the police. One gentleman steps forward and speaks with the leaders of the crowd, and finally things disperse. Medgar's death leaves everyone in a state of confusion. Death threats flow into the remaining Negro leaders and the organizations begin to falter. The media takes the opportunity to publicize the chaos in an attempt to further the dissension among the Negroes.

Anne quickly becomes involved in the Movement. The Movement is the outlet she has been seeking all her life. Finally, Anne is able to get answers to her many questions. She now knows what the Klan and the NAACP are and she sees that there are people, blacks included, working for equal treatment of Negroes. Anne is too young and eager to fully grasp the danger she is placing herself in. For now, her involvement in the Movement is exciting and she feels that she is really working to make a difference.

Anne works with dynamic people who share her vision for a better life for Negroes. Although Anne does not state that she directly meet Medgar Evers she mentions him several times and the reader senses that she feels a certain degree of respect for the NAACP leader. Medgar's death hits Anne particularly hard. This is the first time that she has really witnessed the magnitude of the situation in which she is involved. Medgar is well known and his murder was calculated. She is no longer in Centreville where blacks are murdered at random.

# Part 3: Chapter 23

## Part 3: Chapter 23 Summary and Analysis

When a CORE office opens up in Canton, Mississippi, a hot spot of racial violence, Anne signs up to work at the office. Many of her friends are concerned for her welfare, but Anne is ready for a change of scenery and ready to face whatever lies ahead. Anne arrives in Canton and is immediately introduced to the Chinn's. C.O. Chinn and his wife own a cafy and are a very well-respected couple in the community. The Chinn's have already been targeted by the whites in the area, but they also have a loyal group of teenagers who help to canvass the area. Anne is amazed that the Negroes have so much trouble when they outnumber the whites three to one and own just about the same amount of land. Mrs. Chinn explains that the government sets the amount of land allowed to be utilized for profit by each person and that by the time whites get their share there is little left for the Negroes.

Anne soon learns that the Negroes in Madison County are the same as those in Wilkinson County: they are apathetic and indifferent towards voting. Things seem to be going well until five kids are shot. The five children survive the incident but when the details of what happened come out it is apparent that it was a planned and pointless attack. After that, the teenagers who canvassed for voters stopped coming to the office. An attempting shooting of a pregnant woman further reduces the number of people willing to listen to the CORE workers. In an attempt to rally the black community, Anne is to give a speech at a community gathering. The night of the meeting everything goes wrong and Anne ends up breaking down on the platform. Her emotional display appears to have affected the people who begin turning up to register to vote.

As response to the CORE programs picks back up, so do the threats to CORE workers. Anne and several other workers spend the night sleeping in the tall grass behind the house in order to avoid a group of whites who have threatened to kill the workers. Sometime during the night, a truck pulls up and voices are heard around the house, but the workers remain undetected. In the morning, the workers decide that the women will not go out without an escort until the tension dies down. C.O. Chinn also joins the organization. Shortly after he begins working with CORE, he is arrested for carrying a concealed weapon in his truck. Instead of being deterred by his arrest, Mr. Chinn stems up his involvement. The Movement seems to be regaining momentum.

Anne continues to increase her involvement with the Movement even as her personal safety continues to be compromised. Anne's decision to move to Canton does not seem to be the wisest choice for a young black woman. However, the reader should consider that Anne has finished college and she cannot return home. In essence, moving to Canton is the only thing Anne can do regardless of whether she wants to go work for CORE.

Anne is still living in an idealized state, believing that change will come and that it will come soon. Canton, Mississippi gives Anne a strong dose of reality. In Canton, Anne realizes that sheer number of blacks alone are not enough to bring about change. What matters is who wields the power and whether that person is willing to alter the way things have always been. Anne continues to work tirelessly to recruit black voters, but slowly the futility of her work begins to overtake her.

# Part 3: Chapter 24

## Part 3: Chapter 24 Summary and Analysis

At the end of summer is the March on Washington. Anne rides to Washington with Reverend King, his wife, Joan Trumpauer, and Bob. The ride up is slightly tense since only Bob and Anne are black and an integrated car could be dangerous depending on where they stop. Anne is disappointed with the march and the following speeches. Anne was hoping to hear a lot of speeches from strong leaders, but instead all she hears are men with dreams. On the ride back, Anne is the only black in the car and she is nervous about crossing through Alabama. Reverend King considers this fact as well and they stay in a Federal Park in Tennessee. The drive goes well and the group arrives back in Canton around 6 P.M.

Throughout the book it is interesting to see how Anne focuses or does not focus on events that are considered historical moments. Most history texts spend lots of time discussing the March on Washington, but for Anne the occasion is a disappointment instead of a positive event for the Movement. Most students learn about the great impact Reverend King's "I have a dream" speech had on the civil rights movement. Anne has a different point of view that makes the reader realize that not everyone was as infatuated with Martin Luther King as the history texts lead one to believe.

# Part 3: Chapter 25

## Part 3: Chapter 25 Summary and Analysis

When school starts in the fall, Anne realizes just how poor the people of Canton are. Many of the families cannot purchase new school clothes for their children. Anne is reminded of her own childhood and is determined to help out the area families. Several CORE workers visit a chapter of the SNCC nearby in an attempt to get clothing donations. In the meantime, Anne receives her first paycheck from CORE. Anne takes her check and buys clothes for two girls living across the street. When Anne returns from her shopping spree she learns that a shipment of clothing will be arriving next week.

For a week Anne works separating the boxes of clothing and preparing to distribute them. As she works, she becomes upset. Her twenty-third birthday is approaching but there is no joy in the occasion. She can no longer go home and no one here has any money to properly celebrate. When Anne's coworkers find out what is going on they buy her a cake and take her out for an evening in a local nightclub. The next morning a news bulletin interrupts Anne's birthday breakfast. Several Sunday school students have been killed in Birmingham. Anne runs out of the house and climbs to the top of a nearby hill. As she sits contemplating what is happening around her, she rails at God. Anne returns to the house and tells George that she is done with God and with the non-violent approach.

Canton is taking its toll on Anne. She is alone without a stable source of encouragement to fall back on. The only correspondence she receives from home are letters telling her to stop doing what she loves because she is endangering her family. Anne cannot continue on in the fashion that she has been without receiving some encouragement from those who mean the most to her. The Chinn's, the King's, and all her co-workers are wonderful, but they are not family. Compounding Anne's difficulties is her detachment from the church. Since she walked out of Mama's house almost five years ago, Anne has not been to church or mentioned having any connection with a spiritual life. It is no wonder then that when the young girls are killed in Sunday school, Anne completely loses her perspective. There is no one else for her to rail at, so she turns her anger on God.

# Part 3: Chapter 26

## Part 3: Chapter 26 Summary and Analysis

A young girl named Lenora moves into the house after being kicked off the plantation where her family lives. She, like Anne, became enraged following the killing of the young girls in Birmingham and the plantation owner asked her to leave. When Lenora discovers the cake and ice cream still in the freezer from Anne's birthday, Anne suggests they throw a party in an attempt to rally the local teenagers. The party is a success and seems to bolster Anne's spirits as well.

A few days later, Anne is ready to distribute the clothes to local families. Anne is at first disgusted to see the mass of people standing outside waiting for a free handout. When they open the doors, people flood in grabbing whatever they can find. At the end of the day there are barely any pieces of cloth left. Anne is even more frustrated that people are so poor in the land of plenty that they are willing to take rag handouts. People continue to drop by over the next several days hoping for some more handouts. None of the people are interested in hearing about voter registration and Anne begins to think that they had better come up with a better idea or get out of Canton.

A Negro girl is raped by a white farmer. Since the Negroes need money so badly none of them quit working for local farmers and the responsible farmer walks around bragging about what happened. Anne begins to fear that the Klan will soon come to Canton and then the blood will flow.

One of Anne's old friends, Doris, comes to work at the CORE office. They decide to organize another party for local teenagers and make a visit to the high school. The principal tries to stop them from coming in but his actions only fuel the teenagers desire to become involved, and a larger group of students attends than last time. The cops begin to harass Anne, Doris, and Lenora. The girls become so fearful at night that they all sleep together in one room. One day Anne returns to the house to find Doris with a rifle in her lap and Lenora oiling a pistol. Anne becomes even more afraid knowing that guns are in the house. Anne is becoming so agitated that she has to sleep with the help of pills and her weight has plummeted.

Anne attends a COFO meeting where the leaders talk about organizing a freedom vote. Anne is against the idea and voices her opinion. The freedom vote goes ahead anyway and Anne is now busy organizing voters. One night a meeting of local farmers is called and the building is surrounded by cops. The farmers are nervous at their presence but Anne gets up and shuts the shutters so that the police cannot see inside. The next day a car with two cops pulls up outside the house. One of the cops is identified by a neighbor as one who threatened Anne the night before.

The cop seems to follow Anne wherever she goes. A few days later Anne and Doris go to the local fair in order to contact Negroes for the vote. While on the Ferris wheel, Anne

and Doris are stuck at the top when the cop tells the ride operator to stop the ride. Doris becomes hysterical and the cop starts the ride again, laughing at the girls' scared faces. The incident really shakes Anne and she decides that she needs to get out in the country. She and Doris manage to secure a ride and head for Mrs. Chinn's mother's farm. Doris takes along the guns, insisting that they can get in target practice. Anne enjoys her day of relaxation even though it takes her most of the day to calm down. The car ride back to Canton instantly brings back all her worries.

Anne tries another trip to a friend's house to relieve some tension. However, the friend shows her a Klan pamphlet that lists Anne as one of their targets. Anne is even more agitated than before but decides not to share the news with anyone else. She also worries more for the safety of her family back in Centreville and about the mysterious cop who follows her around. While working the freedom vote, Anne decides to leave the project for awhile. She decides that she needs a break or else she will die of nervousness. She tells her coworkers that she will return, but even as she says it she is not completely sure. However, as she sits in the bus station, she realizes that she will never completely leave the Movement.

The frenzied pace at which Anne has been working for the past few years cannot continue without some reprieve. While Anne is excited by the influx of donated clothes to help poor local families, she is appalled that the people throng to the CORE office for a freebie. She is disgusted by the hungry way in which the families paw through the piles of neatly sorted clothes and take even the most ragged scraps. Anne wonders how she can possibly help people who are not willing to help themselves; people who do not mind living off of others' cast-offs. She cannot understand why the poor continue to let themselves be trampled upon instead of standing up and throwing the stained rags back into the faces of those who donated them. Only when the foragers realize that they are perpetuating their own misery will anyone be able to make changes for the better.

Anne tries several times to regain her strength in order to continue at CORE. However, she has pushed too hard for too long and simple day excursions to the country do not revive her as they once did. Anne must seek a stronger medicine to cure her pains if she is to survive. She needs to step away from CORE and retreat to a more mundane life in order to regain her perspective. Anne's decision to take a hiatus from CORE is necessary if she is to continue pushing for civil rights. She needs to return to a more ordinary existence for a while in order to remind herself about what exactly she is working towards and who she is doing it for.

# Part 3: Chapter 27

## Part 3: Chapter 27 Summary and Analysis

It is very late when Anne arrives in New Orleans. She goes to Grandma Winnie's house, but when Winnie hears that it is Anne, she turns Anne away. Anne goes to her Uncle George Lee's house where her sister Adline is staying. George Lee is happy to have Anne stay with them. She collapses on the pull-out sofa and sleeps until nine o'clock the next night. Anne sleeps for an entire day and still does not feel rested. She decides that she needs to get a job and find a place of her own.

Anne secures a job at the old restaurant on Maple Hill. A few weeks later, Anne and Adline have enough money saved to put down a deposit on a small apartment. Anne's brother Junior lives with Grandma Winnie just around the corner, so he comes over just about every night. Adline and Junior plan a birthday party for Mama when she comes to town and Anne begins to dread seeing her mother again.

When Mama comes to visit, her conversation with Anne is strained. It takes Anne a while to notice that Mama has a baby in her arms and to ask about her. Anne is late getting to the birthday party and people ignore her presence for the most part. Finally, Anne decides to leave the party and wanders around town considering what to do. Unable to decide on a course of action, Anne continues her current life. In November, President Kennedy is shot. Anne is working at the restaurant the day he is killed and the news rattles her. Anne stumbles out of the restaurant and boards a streetcar for home. As she sits in stunned silence, she realizes she is surrounded by faces hidden behind newspapers. She stares at the newspapers and realizes that the Negroes biggest source of hope is now gone. Anne wonders if anyone else feels as sad and frustrated as she does.

This chapter shows the reader how much Anne has changed while her family has somehow managed to stay relatively the same. Although, Anne hasn't really changed from the young girl asking questions and frustrated by the violence around her. Anne has pushed forward on her own path, despite knowing that she was going to distance herself from her loved ones. What Anne did not seem to realize was how big of a gap was going to be created between herself and her family, or how difficult it would be for her to see them again. She no longer has anything to discuss with her mother and she cannot act contented like Adline does. As sad as it seems to the reader, Anne's biological family holds nothing for her anymore, if they ever did. Anne's heart and calling belong to the movement.

# Part 3: Chapter 28

## Part 3: Chapter 28 Summary and Analysis

A week after President Kennedy's assassination, Anne decides that she needs to get re-involved with the Movement. She contacts a friend with the New Orleans CORE chapter and begins canvassing for voter registration. She soon realizes that getting Negroes in New Orleans to register is just as difficult as getting Negroes in Mississippi to vote. The biggest difference is that whites and blacks can canvass together without threat of violence.

Junior goes home to Centreville but returns a few days later in the middle of the night. He tells Adline and Anne that Emma's brother Clift has been killed. Junior says that now five Negroes have been killed in the past three months and none of the murders have been solved. Anne is unable to cry for Clift and realizes that she has seen so much death recently that she is unable to cry. Anne sends a letter to Emma with her condolences and an offer to help the investigation if she can. About a month later, Emma sends a reply listing the details of Clift's death and says that she will try to send more information as she finds it out, but Anne does not hear from her again.

In May, Anne receives a letter saying that her Natchez credits have finally cleared and she is invited to attend graduation at Tougaloo. Anne rummages around for something to wear and then boards a bus for Jackson, Mississippi. Her first night at Tougaloo she eats with Reverend King and his family. They remind her that the following day is the year anniversary of the Woolworth's sit-in. The group decides to stage a sit-in at Morrison's cafeteria, but when they arrive at the store, the cops have barred the entrance. Unable to formulate a plan, the group returns to the Kings'.

Reverend King tells Anne about the Mississippi Summer project. The project is designed to register Negro voters and also to establish Freedom schools and community centers where courses in remedial reading, government, humanities, and other vocational subjects will be taught. Anne decides to stop by the COFO office and see what is going on. The place is awash with activity. Boxes of clothes and books crowd the office, typewriters are going constantly, and FBI men are running around like crazy men. While there Anne runs into Bob Moses, a man who could help her uncover some details of Clift's murder. Bob has no information to help Anne out but he suspects that Clift's death was one of several terror killings used to keep Negroes in line. Anne pays a final visit to Dave Dennis before heading back to campus. Dave tells her there is to be a Freedom Day the next day and he will pick her up at eight o'clock in the morning to attend.

There is a surreal quality to this chapter. President Kennedy has just been shot, and now Anne receives word that her college credits have been finalized. The world is in a state of chaos, but at the same time it continues to move forward as its always done. There seems to be two worlds spinning at the same time but not spinning in the same

direction. Anne tries to participate in both, but she feels far removed from Tougaloo. She sleepwalks through her graduation ceremony and is barely conscious of the fact that she is now a college graduate.

What captures Anne's attention instead is the upswing in activity at the CORE office. Anne has been gone and it seems that the reader, and Anne, somehow assumed that work at CORE would come to a halt without her. Anne's return to CORE also appears to be prompted by Clift's death. Anne feels some degree of responsibility for Clift's murder and feels even more guilt because she is powerless to help Emma solve the crime. By returning to CORE, Anne hopes to find a way both to help Emma and to absolve her own guilt.

# Part 3: Chapter 29

## Part 3: Chapter 29 Summary and Analysis

The next morning, when Anne arrives in Canton, she sees Mrs. Chinn. Anne learns that they are expecting about five hundred adults to march and there are eight hundred high school students ready to march if the adults are stopped. Cops, some of whom appear to be whites pulled off the streets and deputized, line the streets. Anne spots the cop who used to follow her around Canton and he follows her as she walks toward a church. Inside the church Anne is astounded by the number of students who have turned out to support the march. Her spirits are lifted and she feels a returning sense of hope.

Back at the march's headquarters, the adults are preparing to begin their march. They have been granted permission to stage their demonstration but only if they walk two at a time and leave ten minutes' walking distance between each pair. An altercation where a young boy is beaten by several whites disrupts the start of the march. Once the commotion has settled down it is decided that a group of eighty volunteers will march instead of the entire assembly. An eighty-year old man volunteers to lead the procession. The old man begins walking down the street and as he nears the line of cops armed with riot gear, he picks up his cane and seems to walk with a new vigor. The cops quickly round up the volunteers and cart them off to jail.

The next morning Anne finds herself in line preparing for graduation ceremonies. After the morning sermon, Anne returns to her room to sleep before the actual graduation. When she heads out the door in the afternoon, she is running late and it is raining. By the time she arrives at the ceremony site, Anne is soaked and half asleep. The day after graduation, Anne and Joan Trumpauer are the only students left on campus. They go to visit the Kings but they are leaving for the coast. The girls take the Kings' offer of a place to stay while they are gone. After talking to several people at the COFO office, the girls decide to return home for a few weeks and then come back to work on the Summer Project. When Anne returns home she finds Adline there. Adline had promised to attend Anne's graduation but instead she used the money to buy Anne a new dress. Adline is impressed by Anne's degree and says that maybe someday she will get one too. It is then that Anne realizes that she is the only person in her family to graduate college.

Anne accomplishes something that probably seemed impossible at the start of the story: she graduates college. What should be a joyous and momentous occasion is darkened by the fact that her family is not there to support her. It is fitting that it rains right before the ceremony and Anne arrives at the hall soaking wet. Anne has been dumped on all her life. By all rights, she should not have succeeded as well as she has, except that her determination and fighter spirit have kept her going. Anne has led a truly amazing life. She has seen things that frightened the average citizen into inaction. For Anne, the violence and injustice only fueled her natural fire to question and work for a better life. She should be applauded by her family, not abandoned. Although it is of little comfort to a soaking girl, Anne's choices will eventually benefit those she loves.

# Part 3: Chapter 30

## Part 3: Chapter 30 Summary and Analysis

Anne ends up staying in New Orleans only a few days because she has no way of making money. When Anne arrives back in Canton, she goes to visit Mrs. Chinn. Mrs. Chinn tells her that C.O. has been put in jail and she is losing hope. Anne takes a walk around Canton and sees Mr. Chinn walking with a chain gang. He tries to appear happy when he sees Anne, but the image of Mr. Chinn on the chain gang disheartens her.

When Anne gets back to the COFO office there is a bus out front. Bob Moses sticks his head out and hails Anne. He asks her to accompany them to Washington so that she can testify with them. Anne boards the bus and takes a seat next to a twelve-year-old boy. As the bus pulls out of town, the people begin singing, "We Shall Overcome". Anne is no longer sure that they can overcome and does not join in the song. The young boy tries to get Anne involved and tells her that they will get things straight in Washington. Anne just looks out the window and does answer.

The excitement that Anne felt about joining the Summer Project is erased when she returns to Canton and sees how quickly things have deteriorated. The toll of working with the Movement has set in and Anne is beginning to see how far the problem really stretches. Anne's strength will keep her going, but the reader assumes that she will not be quite as adamant about achieving immediate changes. The twelve-year-old boy represents what Anne used to be and what is still needed to fuel the Movement. Anne is now the wiser adult, able to see the big picture and understand what the twelve-year old cannot: that change will take longer than any of them know.

# Characters

## Miss Adams

Miss Adams is the basketball coach at Natchez College. She rules her team strictly, and unlike the rest of the students, Anne speaks up for her rights. Because of Anne's actions, Miss Adams is forced to treat the girls more fairly.

## Mrs. Burke

Anne meets Mrs. Burke, "one of the meanest white women in town," while working for Mrs. Burke's daughter, Linda Jean Jenkins. Mrs. Burke thinks that Linda Jean treats Anne too well and constantly tries to convince her to change this behavior. Anne goes to work for Mrs. Burke after Jenkins moves away. While Anne forces her into certain concessions, such as allowing her to use the front door, Mrs. Burke remains bigoted in her beliefs. She also helps stir up other white women against Centreville' s African-American community.

## Wayne Burke

Wayne is Mrs. Burke's son. He is in the same grade as Anne. During the tenth grade, Anne starts to tutor Wayne and his friends in mathematics, and the two teenagers become friends. Their relationship angers Mrs. Burke a great deal.

## Ed Cassidy

Ed Cassidy is the sheriff of Centreville. He is known among the African-American community as the "quiet nigger hater." Despite this label, Anne finds herself turning to him when she runs away from Raymond and Mama's home.

## Mr. C. O. Chinn

When Anne arrives in Canton, C. O. Chinn and his wife, restaurant owners, are the wealthiest African Americans in town. C. O. is a powerful man in the town. The African Americans respect him, and the whites fear him. His support of the civil rights workers brings more African Americans to the cause. Because of his involvement, however, C. O. loses his business. At the end of the memoir, Chinn is serving on a chain gang. Despite his difficult situation, when he sees Anne, he waves and tries to look happy.

## Mrs. Chinn

Along with her husband, Mrs. Chinn owns a successful restaurant in Canton. She becomes involved with the CORE movement, which leads the Chinns to lose their business. She is very supportive of Anne and the work that she and her colleagues are doing, but by the end of *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, she is depressed with the situation in Canton; the African Americans are afraid to demonstrate, her husband is in jail, and the police are harassing her. She tells Anne, "We ain' t big enough to do it by ourselves," a sentiment that Anne seems to take to heart.

## Mrs. Claiborne

Mrs. Clairborne is one of the kinder white women for whom Anne works. Mrs. Clairborne and her husband treat Anne with respect, inviting her to sit at the dinner table with them and supporting her efforts in school.

## Daddy

Anne's father deserts his family when Anne is only four. From that point on, until her senior year in high school, he has little contact with his three children. Anne lives with him and his wife Emma during the final weeks of high school, and he is pleased to have the chance to spend time with her. The two develop a caring relationship.

## Dave Dennis

Dave Dennis is a CORE worker. He works with Anne in Jackson and in Canton.

## Diddly

*See* Daddy

## Emma

Emma is Daddy's second wife. Anne goes to live with Daddy and Emma after she leaves home in high school. Emma is a strong, smart woman, and at first, Anne respects her. However, housebound with an injury, Emma starts to feel sorry for herself and takes out her frustration on Anne. Anne and Emma continue their relationship after she moves out of the house, and Emma gives Anne money when she is able to do so.

## Doris Erskine

Doris Erskine is a CORE member. She works with Anne in Jackson and decides to join her friend in Canton. However, the threat of violence that she continuously feels there makes her nervous and she irritates Anne.

## Medgar Evers

Medgar Evers is the NAACP field secretary. Anne gets to know him during her work in Jackson. Edgers is killed by a white assassin in 1963. His murder scares some civil rights leaders.

## Mrs. Linda Jean Jenkins

Anne works for Linda Jean Jenkins, Mrs. Burke's daughter. Linda Jean is a kind, liberal woman. She treats and pays Anne well. Anne is allowed to call Linda Jean by her first name.

## Jerry

Jerry is a classmate of Anne's who is beaten by a group of white men. This beating, which results from tensions stirred up by the white "guild" members, worries Centreville's African-American committee.

## Reverend King

Reverend King comes to Tugaloo as the new minister. At first Anne mistrusts him because he is white. However, Reverend King takes part in many demonstrations and proves himself a person worthy of respect. Reverend King and Anne become close during their civil rights work.

## Lenora

Lenora is from Canton, but she is thrown off the plantation where her father works after voicing frustration over racial injustice. She comes to live and work at Freedom House with Anne.

## Mama

Mama is Anne's mother. As the autobiography begins, she is the mother of two children and a field worker. She has little time to spend with her children, even less after her husband deserts her. Mama has the responsibility of raising the children alone and

takes various jobs as a maid and a restaurant worker. She relies on other members of her family to help out watching the children, when they can, but she gets little financial support from others.

Mama begins a long-term affair with Raymond, which results in six more children and their eventual marriage. Although Raymond helps Mama and the family by building a house for them, his family, among whom they live, treats Mama with disdain. Mama is perpetually unhappy because of this. Raymond also turns out to be unable to make a living, and as the family expands, more financial responsibility falls on Mama. After Anne leaves home in her senior year, Mama begs her to return. When Mama comes to Anne's high school graduation, Anne sees that her mother appears to have aged many years in just six weeks.

After Anne becomes involved in the civil rights movement, she tries to get her mother involved. Instead, Mama writes her letters asking her to stop such activity and telling her that if she continues, she will not be able to come back to Centreville. Mama continues to write such letters over the next few years. When Mama comes to New Orleans for a visit, Anne and her mother have not seen each other in two years. Although Anne feels the love her mother has for her, the two women are unable to get past their barriers, and they find little connection.

## Adline Moody

Adline is Anne's younger sister by about three and a half years. Adline is unlike Anne; as a child, she shows little interest in schoolwork and as an adult, she lacks Anne's discontent with the plight of southern African Americans. Adline and Anne become reacquainted in New Orleans, when Anne takes a break from her CORE work. At first, Adline is uninterested in the mistreatment of African Americans or in improving herself. By the time Anne moves out of the apartment, however, it seems that Anne's accomplishment may inspire Adline to achieve goals herself, such as graduating college.

## Anne Moody

Anne Moody narrates her autobiography. She is born to a poor, rural southern African-American family. Although she grows up in abject poverty, Anne is always determined to better herself. She studies hard and makes excellent grades in school. She starts working when she is only in the fourth grade, and she gives some money toward the upkeep of her family, but she also starts saving for college.

When Anne is fifteen years old, Emmett Till is murdered. This example of racial violence sparks Anne's awareness of the social injustice that pervades the South. She comes to hate everyone: whites for treating African Americans so badly, and African Americans, for not standing up for their rights. She learns about the NAACP from a teacher, but this teacher also tells her to take her mind off the killings and beating because the African-American community in Centreville won't take action against such mistreatment. Anne

tries to subvert her thoughts by joining many extracurricular activities, such as dance, piano, and basketball. However, she remains acutely aware of the racial violence and tensions that go on in the town, more so than most of the people around her. She plans to leave Centreville as soon as she graduates from high school.

Anne's skill at basketball wins her a scholarship to junior college, which she attends for two years. She has her first experience with social activism at Natchez College, when she leads a boycott of the school cafeteria. Her high grades win her a full-tuition scholarship to Tugaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, where Anne gets involved with the NAACP. She participates in demonstrations, makes trips to the Mississippi Delta, and is one of three students to stage a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Jackson. She is arrested and verbally abused repeatedly for her activities.

Dismayed by the infighting among Jackson's civil rights organizations, Anne volunteers to go to Canton, Mississippi, to work in the voter registration campaign. She thinks she and her fellow CORE workers have a good chance of success because there are so many more African Americans in Canton than there are whites. However, throughout her year in Canton, she is often disillusioned by the attitude of the African Americans. They live in poverty and are scared by the violence of the whites. While in Canton, Anne finds out that she has been placed on a Klan blacklist.

After a year in Canton, Anne goes to New Orleans, unsure if she is leaving the movement for good. However, she finds that she cannot tolerate the air of contentment that surrounds her; she knows that African Americans are being treated unfairly, even if no one else does. After her college graduation, Anne boards a bus for Washington, D.C., with other civil rights workers to testify at congressional hearings on racial inequities in the South. Despite making this journey, Anne wonders if she and her fellow African Americans will ever achieve freedom.

## Elmira Moody

*See* Mama

## Essie Mae Moody

*See* Anne Moody

## Fred Moody

*See* Daddy,

## Grandfather Moody

Grandfather Moody takes care of the children while Mama is at work. He is ashamed of the way his son treats his family and helps out the family with money.

## Miss Ola

Miss Ola is an elderly woman who lives in one of the homes where Mama works. She reads to Anne and helps her with her schoolwork. She teaches Anne how to read, write, and spell.

## Miss Pearl

Miss Pearl is Raymond's mother. A mulatto, she dislikes Mama, whose skin is much darker than her own. She treats Mama meanly despite her long relationship with Raymond, which is one of the reasons that Anne comes to dislike Raymond so much.

## Raymond

Raymond, a former soldier, is Mama's second husband and the father of six of her children. Raymond fails as a farmer and fails to find decent work. When Anne is in high school, he begins to have sexual thoughts about her, which leads Anne to leave the house permanently. After she has left, Raymond does not allow Mama to give Anne any money.

## George Raymond

George Raymond works with Anne in Canton.

## Mrs. Rice

Mrs. Rice is a high school teacher who tells Anne about the NAACP. She also teaches Anne about the way that whites have historically treated southern African Americans. Although Mrs. Rice became "something like a mother" to Anne, she gets fired at the end of the year, and Anne never sees her again.

## Emmett Till

Emmett Till is fourteen years old when he is killed by a white lynch mob for whistling at a white woman. His murder makes Anne become aware of racial injustice and the problems that African Americans face in the South.

## Toosweet

*See* Mama.

## Joan Trumpauer

Joan Trumpauer is a white student who serves as a secretary for SNCC. She asks Anne to participate in the voter registration drive that the organization is starting in the Mississippi Delta. Over the next few years, Joan and Anne work together and become friends.

## Essie Mae/Anne

## Mama

## Raymond

## Adline, Junior, James, Jerry, Jennie Ann, Ralph

## Mrs. Burke

## Emma and Daddy

## Mr. and Mrs. Chinn

## Reverend King

## Dave Dennis

## Medgar Evers/ President Kennedy/Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

# Objects/Places

## The Houses of Whites

The most common place of employment for black women is in the houses of whites. The women work as housekeepers, cooks, and nannies. Sometimes the women are lucky enough to find work with a white family that is more tolerant than most whites. In these cases, the pay is better and the work environment is less slave-like. Anne works for several years in various houses. She is usually lucky enough to have an employer who likes her and treats her well.

## CORE

CORE stands for the Congress of Racial Equality. Like several of the other organizations mentioned in the book, this one is not defined. However, the reader can deduce that the group's mission is to work towards the equality of all blacks. Anne works for them to increase voter registration among blacks in order to effect change.

## Canton, Mississippi

Anne decides to take a position working for CORE in Canton, Mississippi. She mistakenly thinks that the organization will be successful there because blacks greatly outnumber whites. However, the power of the whites over the black community is extremely strong in Canton. Anne quickly becomes identified as a leader of the Movement and is targeted by local police. Anne witnesses countless unspeakable acts against blacks in Canton and becomes increasingly discouraged with her CORE work.

## Babies

Anne's mother has several children throughout the book. For a while during Anne's younger years, it seems that her mother is always pregnant. Even when Anne is grown and living with Adline, her mother comes to visit with another baby in her arms. Anne's continual birthing of babies is representative of the role expected of black women at that time.

## Homecoming Queen

When Anne is in the eighth grade, she is nominated for homecoming queen. The school that she attends nominates several girls from each grade to be queen and then one is chosen to ride a float representing that grade. Anne's family is extremely poor, but when she wins her long-absent father comes through with a dress for her big day.

## Woolworth's Sit-In

When Anne is a student at Tougaloo College, she takes part in a sit-in staged at the local Woolworth counter. She and two other students try to obtain service at the whites-only counter. The occasion turns into a two-hour standoff in which Anne and her fellow demonstrators are beaten and harassed by white customers. Anne is recognized in the local paper for her involvement in the occasion and begins to earn her reputation for being a leader in the Movement.

## The Taplin Burning

When Anne is about fifteen years old, she begins to hate people. One of the events that brings about this change of feeling is the burning of the Taplin house which kills the entire Taplin family. The investigation says that the fire was an accident, but the Negroes in the community know that it was started by whites trying to send a message to the rest of the black community.

## Wilkinson County, Mississippi

Anne is born in Wilkinson County and this is where she spends most of her childhood. Her family moves around several times during her childhood before finally settling near Raymond's family, close to Centreville. Wilkinson County becomes one of the hotbeds of racial tension. Anne's involvement with the Movement prevents her from ever returning to Wilkinson County because she has been blacklisted by the Ku Klux Klan and her presence at home would place herself and her family in great danger.

## Tougaloo College

Anne receives a full-tuition scholarship to Tougaloo College. After spending her first two years of college at Natchez College, Anne completes her education at Tougaloo, one of the best Negro colleges in Mississippi. Tougaloo is also where Anne becomes heavily involved in the Movement.

## NAACP/COFO/SNCC

Anne does not provide any definition of these organizations that she become involved in. They are all part of what Anne calls "the Movement" and work for equal treatment of blacks. The NAACP stands for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. COFO is the Council of Federation Organizations, which is a blanket group of civil action organizations working mostly out of Mississippi. SNCC is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a group that practiced passive demonstration techniques to protest civil action.

## New Orleans

Anne goes to New Orleans several times during her high school years in order to escape the pressures of home. Anne is able to secure a good job while in New Orleans and save money for college and buy clothes for herself. Anne also gains a great deal of self-confidence and knowledge about the world around her. Her eyes are opened to a world larger than Centreville.

# Themes

## Racism

Moody' s development and life are greatly shaped by the tremendous amount of racial discrimination and prejudice that African Americans face in the South at the time she is growing up. In the 1940 and 1950s, before Anne joins the civil rights movement, African Americans lacked many essential rights, such as the right to obtain an education equal to those offered to white children, and were often unable to exercise those rights they had, such as the right to vote. The African-American population of Mississippi face racial injustice in different ways. Most African Americans are relegated to low-paying, menial jobs; schools have inadequate facilities; and African-American farmers are not allowed to produce enough on their land to make a decent living. African Americans also face prejudice in the form of violence. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* provides many examples of beatings and murders inflicted upon African Americans. The provocation for these crimes often stems from wanting to intimidate African Americans or to punish them for doing something that goes against the segregationist codes of the South. The white police force does nothing to prevent these crimes and even participates in them at times.

Some whites in the book are openly and unquestionably racist, such as Mrs. Burke. Like so many other whites, Mrs. Burke thinks that African Americans are inferior and undeserving of proper treatment, and she wants her only contact with them to be in an employer-employee relationship. Other whites whom Anne meets support her as well as the African-American cause. Miss Ola, Mrs. Claiborne, Linda Jean Jenkins, and Mrs. Burke's mother are all people who treat Anne with respect. Revered King, his wife, and Joan Trombauer are examples of whites who work hard and risk their own safety to secure civil rights for African Americans.

However, the African-American community also is racially prejudiced. The mulatto population often looks down on the darker African-American population. Miss Pearl, a "yellow" woman with straight hair, dislikes Mama because her skin color is dark. Anne almost turns down the scholarship to Tugaloo because she hears that all the other students are mulattos and fears that they will mistreat her.

## Poverty

Anne and her family live in severe poverty. Until they move into the house that Raymond built, Anne never feels like she has lived in a real home. In this home, they have furniture and live in more than two rooms. However, Mama is unable to earn enough money to care for the family well. Meals often consist of bread or beans; meat is an almost unheard-of luxury. When Anne is in junior high school, she has no money to buy school clothes and almost does not attend homecoming, though she is queen, because she does not have the money to buy a dress. Anne also comments on the

poverty that she sees in other African-American families. With her first paycheck from CORE, Anne buys school clothes and supplies for two girls who are unable to attend school without these necessities. She sees in these girls echoes of her own life.

## Family

In *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Moody presents a number of estranged families, including Moody's own. Her childhood lacks any positive example of a family; her father deserts the family for another women, and her mother eventually marries a man whose family disrespects and dislikes her. As a teenager, Moody also feels sexually threatened by her stepfather, which causes her to leave home when she is still in high school. Moody sees her natural father rarely throughout her life. She also does not develop close ties with any of her eight brothers or sisters.

The only positive example of a family that Moody has is Emma's kin. In the weeks that she lives with Emma and Daddy, Moody often goes with them to visit Emma's relatives. Walking inside the family café, Moody immediately "felt the closeness of Emma's family."

When Moody joins the civil rights movement, her actions have serious repercussions on her relationship with her family, which is already strained. She finds herself completely cut off from them. She cannot send letters home, for fear they will bring violence upon the family, nor can she visit. Her mother, however, sends her numerous letters asking her to quit the work and pointing out that Moody is putting her family in danger. When Moody leaves Canton and goes to New Orleans, she sees several family members for the first time in years. While she becomes reacquainted with her sister Adline, with whom she shares an apartment, and her brother Junior, her grandmother won't let her in the house. Mama also comes to visit, but she and Moody have little to say to each other. Moody's isolation hits her most strongly when she attends her college graduation and has no members of her family present, especially since she anticipates that her feeling of being alone will only get worse.

## Black vs. White

The theme of black vs. white is certainly too big to cover in great detail here, but it is an important theme of the book and should be discussed in some manner. The interesting thing about this theme is considering it from Anne Moody's point of view. As a black woman the reader may suppose that Anne will be biased towards the position of the blacks. However, Anne's story is unique because she has the ability to see both sides of the issue. She also becomes just as angry with blacks for their behavior as she does for the whites' unfair treatment of Negroes.

The civil rights movement brought out the worst in both whites and blacks. The time was volatile for both races. Whites known to fraternize or sympathize with blacks become targets of violence. Blacks who had no involvement in the movement were arrested or beaten just because they were black. Each side felt they were the "right side" but

neither side was able to stand back and remain calm enough to realize that the reasons for the conflict were essentially petty.

Perhaps the best examples of the black versus white issue are Mama and the cop who follows Anne around Canton. Mama is a quintessential black woman whose main concern is for the safety of her family. The reader is never given the opportunity to learn much about Mama's personal feelings, so the reader is prevented from knowing if Mama harbors any deep seated desire to fight back like Anne does. Instead, Mama appears content to live her life in the overpowering shadow of whites and keep her opinions to herself. She is of the school of thought that things will be better once she gets to heaven and does not realize that things could be better now. Mama is the kind of easy target the Canton cop is seeking. He wants to finds someone that he can boss around and intimidate. He is the token white male. As a cop, he is in a position of power and wields that power any way he sees fit simply because he can. These two people portray the root of the struggle between whites and blacks - blacks afraid to stand up for themselves and whites eager to take advantage of that power.

## Black vs. Black

Anne's story opens a door for the reader that he or she may not have ever had the opportunity of entering before. Most historical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement talk about the struggle between blacks and whites but do not emphasize that tension also exists between blacks and blacks. As odd as it seems to say, blacks categorize themselves according to the darkness of their skin.

Anne first realizes that she is of the lower class of blacks when her father leaves the family for a mulatto, or yellow skinned woman. This incident is the first time Anne comes in contact with any form of prejudice. It seems odd to think that people of the same race would discriminate against one another, especially in a time of racial upheaval.

Anne continues to see instances of blacks discriminating against blacks in her life. When Raymond brings his mother to see newborn James, Miss Pearl does not acknowledge that Mama is the woman who has given her a grandson. Instead, she takes the baby away from Mama, insisting that the child will be better cared for if it lives with her. The implication is that Mama cannot care for the child as well as Miss Pearl, who is a lighter-skinned black. Miss Pearl never does come around to accepting Mama as part of her family.

As Anne works for the Movement, she becomes increasingly frustrated with the blacks' lack of involvement. The threat of violence from whites is too powerful and prevents many Negroes from voting or attending demonstrations. However, when Anne organizes food or clothing drives to help the poverty-stricken blacks of Canton, they turn out in droves to scrounge up as much of the free handouts as possible. Anne internally rails at the fact that the Negroes are willing to take handouts but are not willing to stand up for themselves to obtain a better life. As Anne grows more and more exhausted, her

breakdown seems to come more from the sheer frustration of blacks fighting each other than from the violence surrounding her.

## Fear

Fear is a great motivator - both of action and of inaction. Fear drives people to do things that they might not otherwise do. It is interesting to have Anne compare the arrests and imprisonment of the students from Tougaloo to the Nazi concentration camps, which illustrates how much fear drove the attacks on blacks. Both events are very similar, in that people afraid of what someone else maybe able to do to them motivates them into acting against those potential threats. The threats in both cases are largely unfounded but are only accomplished because of fear.

Mama constantly encourages Anne to keep her mouth and ears shut to the violence erupting around them. Anne wants to know why things are happening, but Mama refuses to acknowledge that anything out of the ordinary is going on. Part of Mama's reason not to discuss the killings or NAACP with Anne seems to be her own fear. If she talks about what is going on in the community then maybe someone will think that she is involved and come after her too. Her fear stems from a natural desire to keep her family safe. However, her fear does not translate in the same way to Anne; in fact, Anne embraces her mother's fears. Anne is unwilling to become the same fearful, shrunken woman as her mother. Instead, Anne challenges the fear that suppresses so many of the people around her. She stands in front of the fear and openly defies it. Anne deals with a different kind of fear - the fear that she will miss out on a better life if she does not act.

# Style

## Autobiography

*Coming of Age in Mississippi* is Moody's fictionalized autobiography, which means that Moody uses fictional and novelistic techniques, such as recreating conversations and presenting events in greater detail than she could possibly remember, to tell the story of her life. Her autobiography covers her life from her earliest memories, when she was about four, until 1963, when she headed to Washington, D.C. It is likely that she chose to end her autobiography at that point because later that year she went to Ithaca, New York, to coordinate civil rights efforts. Thus, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* encompasses her entire civil rights career in the South.

Although the essential events of *Coming of Age in Mississippi* are indisputable, Moody uses authorial liberty to shape them. For instance, she chooses to describe certain events in detail, such as the Woolworth sit-in, while at other times she glides over entire years of her life. This method allows Moody to emphasize what she considers to be the most formative events over the twenty-three years about which she is writing.

## Dialect and Dialogue

Moody renders the poor, rural, African-American speech that was commonplace to her background in the 1940s through 1960s. Moody captures nuances of speech such as saying, "Mama them" instead of "Mama and them." She uses standard jargon, such as calling African Americans who kowtow to white people "Toms." The figures in the story rarely speak with proper grammar or enunciation. Even the well-educated Moody demonstrates many lapses in grammar though scenes between her and other CORE members show that she can speak perfect English when she wants. At times, however, she and her colleagues play upon the dialects that surround them. When Lenora and Doris bring guns back to Freedom House, they respond with strong accents to Moody's questions. "Ts ooilin' mah gun,'" says Lenora, and "'This heah baby is a takin' a nap,'" says Doris. Their playfulness in light of a serious incident annoys Moody, and they revert to their more customary way of speaking.

## Setting

The setting of *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is the Deep South of the 1940s through early 1960s. This is a region marked by deeply ingrained racism. African Americans have many rights in the law books but in daily life are still enchained by prejudice. Southern society discriminates against them; for the most part, the only jobs available to African Americans are menial ones such as domestics or factory workers. Moody notes that even though she has a college education, the only professional career open to her is teaching.

The physical location where the African Americans live and work further points out the racial injustice inherent to this setting. Her life begins in a sharecropper's shack on a white farmer's plantation. For the most part, her succeeding homes are flimsy, decrepit shacks in neighborhoods that usually lack paved streets and sidewalks. The African-American community in and around Canton, Mississippi, suffers in the same manner. Although African Americans in Canton own a great deal of land, laws prevent them from farming it, so they continue to be tied to the land of white farmers, as they have been for decades.

## Perspective

Anne Moody writes about her life as though she is writing while it happens instead of from the distance of adulthood. Her memories remain vivid and clear and she is able to convey the emotions and frustrations that she felt during her childhood and young adult life. Anne came of age during a time of intense civil activity in the United States. Rather than standing passively by, she chose to become a central figure in these events. Her passion for equality for Negroes and her desire to see her people united drag the reader into these events and put one front and center alongside Anne.

Anne does not come out and bluntly state why she chose to write this book, but the reader is able to ascertain her reasoning. Anne's purpose in writing the book seems to be that she desired to present a first-hand account of what life was like for Negroes in the South during the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than focusing on the traditionally emphasized events like Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech or Medgar Evers, Anne's story focuses on the everyday struggle faced by Southern Negroes.

Most readers have been taught the historical facts of civil action but many may have not been exposed to what the average black individual faced during this time or what their everyday lives were like. Anne writes in the language of her people so that the reader can become intimately associated with her way of life. Anne lays out the struggles that blacks faced prior to and during the struggle for equal treatment. What is interesting about Anne's perspective is that she does not place all the responsibility on whites. Anne readily acknowledges that blacks were just as responsible for their unfair treatment since they refused to stand up for themselves. Anne's experience is unique in that she has the ability to see all sides of the situation and can accurately portray them to the reader so that they too can see them.

## Tone

The tone of the book seems to be a mix of subjective and objective. The events of the story are undeniably true, but the author interprets those events according to her own experiences. The author's opinions and viewpoints about what is happening to and around her influence the reader's own perception of events. At the same time, because the author's interpretation differs from the point of view usually taught in history texts,

the reader is able to combine previous notions with this new information and form a more complete opinion of the events described.

The overall feeling that the reader gets from the book is one of intense frustration. Anne is extraordinarily aware of her surroundings and the volatile environment in which she lives even at a young age. Anne is not content to become like her mother and struggles against following in the footsteps of other Negro women. Anne is able to see that a better life is available for Negroes if only they are willing to fight for it. Anne's frustration seems to come as much from her interactions with whites as from watching her fellow Negroes shrink in the face of white intimidation. Her final statement of, "I wonder," certainly captures the entire theme of the book. While Anne is living through her experiences, she is never certain that she will ever see change; as an adult woman writing about her life, she is probably still wondering if there has been a substantial change. The violence may have subsided compared to what Anne experienced, but the world is still in a volatile and unstable state when it comes to race relations.

## Structure

The story is told in thirty chapters that are divided among four sections. The chapters are not divided evenly among each section. Each chapter is numbered but lacks a title. The four sections are designated with a number and a title: Part One: Childhood, Part Two: High School, Part Three: College, and Part Four: The Movement. The four parts signify distinct portions of Anne's life and alert the reader that Anne is moving into a new stage of awareness and maturity.

The chapters move quickly because the author's style of writing is clear and concise. The first person point of view draws the reader quickly into Anne's life. The reader is caught up in the pace of Anne's life and becomes eager to see how she will handle the difficulties of her Southern life.

# Historical Context

## African Americans in the 1940s

World War II offered increasing economic opportunities for many African Americans as the war machine demanded soldiers and factory workers. Almost one million African-American soldiers served in the armed forces; however, they were forced to serve in segregated units. Most were kept out of combat. Although at first many war plants would not hire African Americans or would only hire them as janitors, the 1941 Fair Employment Practices Committee changed this practice. It helped protect African Americans from employment discrimination. An executive order issued two years later required nondiscrimination clauses in all war contracts. Over time, many African-American workers moved into better-paying industrial jobs.

In the aftermath of World War II, many Americans lost their jobs to returning veterans, and African Americans were particularly affected. Their situation was further worsened when Congress abolished the Fair Employment Practices Committee. African Americans throughout the nation faced segregation in schools and public places as well as discrimination in housing and employment. Lynchings also continued to take place, particularly in the South. In 1946, civil rights groups urged President Harry S. Truman to take action against racism in American society. Truman responded by creating the multiracial Committee on Civil Rights. The committee's report, published the following year, documented widespread discrimination, civil rights abuses, and violence perpetrated against African Americans. Based on these findings, Truman urged Congress to pass an antilynching law and an anti-poll-tax measure. He worked to end discrimination in federal agencies and the military by banning discrimination in hiring, and he desegregated the military. He also took steps to end employment discrimination by companies holding government contracts.

## The Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s

In the 1950s African Americans began to more actively demand their civil rights. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had long sought to end segregation in education. The 1952 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* successfully overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine that had long allowed segregation in public schools. Despite this ruling, by the end of the 1956-1957 school year, most southern schools remained segregated. The school board of Little Rock, Arkansas, was the first in the South to announce that it would follow the *Brown* decision. Nine African-American students were chosen to attend Little Rock's Central High. They faced a mob of angry whites and a line of state-sanction, armed National Guardsmen when they tried to go to school. Guarded by one thousand federal troops, sent by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the African-American students entered the school, desegregating Central High. The first African-American student graduated from Little Rock's Central High in 1958.

Civil rights leaders also determined to end segregation on southern transportation systems. To challenge the practice of forcing African Americans to ride in the back of city buses, they organized Montgomery's African Americans in a city wide boycott. For close to a year, the African-American population refused to ride the public bus system. In 1956, the Supreme Court declared such segregation laws unconstitutional. By the end of the year, Montgomery had a desegregated bus system. President Dwight D. Eisenhower also passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957□the first civil rights law passed since Reconstruction□making it a federal crime to prevent any qualified person from voting.

Through his role in the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King Jr., a young Baptist minister, emerged as an important leader in the fight for civil rights. He believed in the use of nonviolent resistance in protests. Some of the earliest protests were sit-ins launched at segregated lunch counters throughout the South, beginning in 1958. More than 50,000 students, African-American and white, took part in such protests, and by the end of 1960, most restaurants were integrated.

## The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s

By the 1960s, several civil rights organizations were active. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a northern-based, integrated civil rights group, worked to end segregation in bus facilities, which was ruled illegal by the Supreme Court in 1960. The following year, CORE organized black and white Freedom Riders to travel through the South on public buses. When they reached Alabama, they were attacked by white mobs. In Jackson, Mississippi, state officials arrested the riders. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) then sent in new riders to take their place. Over the summer, more than three hundred riders traveled the South to protest segregation. Their actions helped persuade the Interstate Commerce Commission to strengthen its desegregation regulations, and segregation in interstate buses ceased to exist by 1963.

Civil rights workers also had success in desegregating public universities. A violent attack on 1,000 youths marching peacefully in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 led to increased support for the civil rights movement. President John F. Kennedy determined to take a stand on civil rights. Civil rights leaders called for the March on Washington, D.C., which drew more than 200,000 people to the nation's capital, to encourage passage of civil rights legislation. The resulting Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred discrimination in employment and public accommodations, and it gave the Justice Department the power to enforce school desegregation.

## Registering Voters

Other civil rights activists turned their attention to voter registration. They chose to begin their work in Mississippi, where African Americans made up about forty percent of the population in the state, but only five percent of eligible African-American adults were registered to vote. State officials used a variety of means to prevent them from

registering, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation, and violence. SNCC organizers believed that the state was key to their efforts to get rid of racial discrimination.

McComb, Mississippi, a town of 12,000 citizens with only 250 registered African-American voters, was their first target. Robert Moses of SNCC arrived there in July 1961. In less than a month he had registered six voters as well as been jailed, beaten, and chased by an angry mob. Violence increased with the murder of Herbert Lee, who had worked as Moses's driver. Despite evidence to the contrary, Lee's murder was ruled an act of self-defense. In the midst of arrest and mob attacks, the McComb voter registration drive came to an end.

Although activists continued the drive, the intimidation tactics practiced by southern whites kept many African Americans from registering. In 1963, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) conducted two mock elections to show that African Americans in Mississippi were interested in voting. Some 27,000 African Americans voted in the first election and some 80,000□four times the number of registered African-American voters in the state□ voted in the second election. In 1963, SNCC decided to recruit white volunteers from northern colleges to come to Mississippi to help in the voter registration efforts. These activists launched Freedom Summer in 1964 and rallied African Americans in Mississippi and in Alabama to register to vote. Their actions, and the violence with which whites met these workers, contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which put the voter registration process under federal control and greatly increased the number of registered African-American voters in the South.

# Critical Overview

*Coming of Age in Mississippi* was published in 1968 to overwhelmingly enthusiastic acclaim. Around the country, journalists, reviewers, even politicians, remarked upon Moody's stirring story and the historic chain of events to which she bore witness. Senator Edward M. Kennedy became the spokesperson for the *New York Times* with his 1969 review in which he declared that *Coming of Age in Mississippi* was "a history of our time, seen from the bottom up, through the eyes of someone who decided for herself that things had to be changed." Kennedy was certainly not alone in his thinking. C. N. Degler also remarked in the *Nation* on the timeliness and importance of Moody's work: "Though the author of this autobiography is only twenty-eight years old, her life has already spanned the revolution that has ... made racial equality the central issue of our time."

*Coming of Age in Mississippi* was successful because it evoked for so many readers a picture of a world they could not heretofore imagine. Moody's autobiography brought to life the rampant discrimination and violence inflicted upon southern African Americans on a daily basis, as well as the lengths to which whites would go to perpetuate this oppression. Many reviewers commented on the truthful ring of Moody's prose. Wrote Degler, "Moody's candor and refusal to overdramatize create an air of verisimilitude that is the book's signal achievement." Kennedy asserted that in her work, Moody was "personalizing poverty and degradation and making it more real than any study or statistic could have done."

Although an audience for *Coming of Age in Mississippi* may have developed out of interest in the civil rights movement, which had taken particularly violent turns the summer before the book was published, many readers also appreciated it for its portrayal of the rural southern African-American world. Mary Ellmann maintained in *Nation*, "The first section, Childhood, is different from, and better than, all the rest.... It hits the page like a natural force, crude and undeniable and, against all principles of beauty, beautiful." Shane Stevens went much further with his praise in *Book World*: "Some [books] have tried to sketch a picture of these years from the American black man's point of view. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is, quite simply, one of the very best of them."

However, the attention that Moody's autobiography drew to the civil rights movement, at a time when an American would be hard-pressed to ignore it, was perhaps more important. For, as Senator Kennedy noted, even in 1969 discrimination and inequity still prevailed. In closing his review, Kennedy admonished, "Anne Moody's powerful and moving book is a timely reminder that we cannot now relax in the struggle for sound justice in America or in any part of America. We would do so at our peril.

In the years since its initial publication, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* has evolved into a staple on college reading lists and a key text to understanding the civil rights movement in the United States. While Moody herself moved outside of that sphere, her enduring work has placed her presence and influence firmly within the movement.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

# Critical Essay #1

*Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she explores the pervading racism that characterized the southern United States prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s*.

*Coming of Age in Mississippi* is a stark testimony to the racial injustice that characterized the southern United States until the civil rights movements of the 1960s brought lasting changes to the region. African Americans had been given full voting and citizenship rights after the Civil War, but with the exception of a brief period immediately following this conflict, many southern African Americans were unable to enjoy these rights for close to one hundred years. The southern world into which Moody was born in 1940 was one ruled by whites. Her autobiography is filled with incidents that serve as a reminder of this disheartening truth. Seen as a whole, they can help explain Moody's lack of optimism as expressed at the end of *Coming of Age in Mississippi* and her departure from the civil rights movement, which had already occurred by the time she wrote her autobiography.

The racial oppression that Moody describes is insidious because it is so pervasive a part of southern society. Mississippi is a state where a member of the legislature can kill an African American "without provocation" and still be found to have acted in self-defense. The majority of adult African Americans, in Centreville and other rural areas, have come to accept this oppression and try to avoid bringing the anger of the whites upon themselves. They often speak of African Americans who have been killed by whites as going on to a better place in heaven. As a young child, Moody hears adults talking about "Negroes found floating in a river or dead somewhere with their bodies riddled with bullets." The only explanation given to her is that an "Evil Spirit" killed these people. Moody is left to figure out for herself that this Evil Spirit is actually the white southerner.

Moody comes to comprehend the African American' s place in the white world at the age of fourteen. At this time, Emmett Till, a fourteen years old from Chicago, is killed. Although other teenagers have heard about his murder, Moody is taken by surprise. She recalls how she suddenly "realized I didn't really know what was going on all around me." The African-American complicity in ignoring the murder, which arises out of justifiable fear, is inherent in Mama's reaction: she gets angry when Moody asks about Till's murder and refuses to talk about it. Her reason for doing so is clear when she says, "Eddie them better watch how they go around here talking. These white folks git a hold of it they gonna be in trouble." In contrast to Mama, the racist Mrs. Burke is more than willing to talk about the murder. She explains to Moody that Till was "killed because he got out of his place with a white woman." Perhaps she sees some suggestion of anger on Moody's face, for when Mrs. Burke learns that Moody is the same age as Emmett Till was, she comments, "It's a shame he had to die so soon"□what certainly could be construed as a veiled threat from the "meanest white woman in town." On some level, Moody senses this threat□ "when Mrs. Burke talked about Emmett Till there

was something in her voice that sent chills and fear all over me." Till's murder and Mrs. Burke's reaction to it give Moody a new fear: "the fear of being killed just because I was black."

From then on, Moody becomes increasingly aware of racial and social injustices. She willingly talks about the incidents of racial violence that take place and actively seeks out information. There are few other members of the community who are willing to talk about these subjects. However, Moody learns from a teacher about the NAACP as well as about "Negroes being butchered and slaughtered by whites in the South." Despite acknowledging this truth, the teacher wants to keep their conversation secret and then advises Moody, "It's not good for you to concern yourself too much about these killings and beatings and burnings," because the "Negroes here ain' t gonna do nothing about them." When Moody talks with a schoolmate, Jerry, about his beating at the hands of a gang of white men, he says that his parents wouldn't even take him to the hospital because "they were scared to take me to white doctors." A few weeks later, the occupied house of an African-American family is deliberately set on fire. Along with about a hundred people, Moody silently observes the debris and charred bodies. The expressions on the faces of the African Americans would haunt her forever in their "almost unanimous hopelessness."

Even more appalling is the revelation that African-Americans themselves are sometimes involved in these murderous incidents. Samuel Quinn is killed for attempting to organize the Centreville African Americans into the NAACP. The whites found out about his efforts because he went among the African Americans "he thought he could trust" to get people interested, but "someone squealed." This "someone" is later revealed to be the high school principal who, "[I]t was said... also helped plot his death." Also, it was African Americans, not whites, who put the fatal bullets in Quinn.

Her understanding of the racial violence that wracks the South causes Moody to hate people, the whites who were "responsible for the countless murders" as well as the African Americans "for not standing up and doing something about the murders. " For a few years, however, Moody attempts to replicate the behavior of the African Americans who surround her. She immerses herself in school activities and studies, and while Quinn's murder brings "memories of all the other killings, beatings, and abuses inflicted upon Negroes by whites" and makes her take to her bed for several days, Moody does not follow through on her fleeting idea of "waging a war in protest against the killings all by myself." Instead, she internalizes her feelings of self- and race-hatred and "slowly began to escape within [her]self again." Her only outward reaction is her sustained plan to leave Centreville and Mississippi.

Forced to remain in the state to obtain a college education, Moody is drawn within a few years into the civil rights movement. While she participates in sit-ins and other demonstrations in the city of Jackson, back in Centreville her protest activities bring threats upon her family. When Moody goes to Canton, in Madison County, a place "where Negroes frequently turned up dead," she finds many of the same problems that existed in Centreville. To intimidate the African Americans and keep them from working with CORE and registering to vote, the whites of Canton rely on violent scare tactics.

They shoot at high school students with buckshot pellets. They fire at a pregnant woman who is walking with her two sons. A man rapes a high school girl while she works in the cotton fields and then goes "around talking about it." The African Americans react as anticipated: they drop their participation with CORE and look at Moody as if to say, "Why don't you all get out of here before you get us all killed?"

In Canton, Moody comes to have firsthand experience with the intensity of whites' desire to continue to oppress African Americans. Even the so-called law enforcement officers actively participate in the harassment of the CORE workers, and one police officer in particular seems to target Moody. Even federal officers show disdain for the rights of the African Americans. FBI officers who come South to find out about the shooting of the Canton teenagers do little to investigate and nothing to prevent such violence from happening again; Moody senses their unspoken words: "'What a shame these niggers have to come into a place and open up ajoint like this and cause all this trouble for us.'" In another incident, the FBI impassively observes Canton police officers brutally beat a protest marcher. Another killing might have been prevented if the Justice Department had paid attention to Louis Allen, who identifies a white man as a murder and later reports threats on his own life. However, this law enforcement agency tells Allen, "'We can't protect every individual in Mississippi.' " Moody affirms this base injustice when she notes that "the United States could afford to maintain the Peace Corps to protect and assist the underprivileged of other countries while native-born American citizens were murdered and brutalized daily and nothing was done. "

After more than a year in the civil rights movement, Moody comes to question the workers' ability to bring about change in the South. As Moody heads off to Washington, D.C., on the CORE bus, she brings *Coming of Age in Mississippi* to a close. She ends her story in remembering all the bad things that have happened: "the Taplin burning, the Birmingham church bombing, Medgar Evers' murder, the blood gushing out of McKinley's head, and all the other murders." She thinks of her friends, the Chinns, the first African Americans in Canton to welcome the CORE workers. On this last day, Mrs. Chinn tells her, despite all the work they have done in Canton, "things are even worse than they were before." Mr. Chinn, who has "sacrificed and lost all he had trying to get the Negroes moving," is now locked up with a chain gang. She wonders if Mrs. Chinn is right when she says, "'This ain't the way. We ain't big enough to do it by ourselves.'" On the bus to Washington D.C., the other African Americans begin singing "We Shall Overcome," but Anne is left with the following words that echo in her head: "I wonder. I really wonder."

**Source:**Rena Korb, Critical Essay on *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

# Critical Essay #2

*Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and is a published writer of literary themes. In this essay, she compares the personal, social, and historical circumstances surrounding Moody's book with Richard Wright's autobiography* Black Boy.

In Moody's autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi* readers learn that Moody was born in Centreville, Mississippi. This small Southern town, as it turns out, is only about fifty miles south of Richard Wright's birthplace, Roxie, Mississippi. The proximity of these towns and these writers' shared African-American ancestry make their life stories strangely similar. However, their autobiographies are significantly marked by the different time-frames in which the authors grew up, Wright in the 1920s and 1930s and Moody in the 1950s and 1960s.

Juxtaposing Wright's *Black Boy* and Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* suggests changes in black experience in the South during two turbulent periods and gives views of the development in the U. S. civil rights movement. Conditioned by their environments and times, these writers were driven by a similar combination of fear and anger. However, they chose different paths in their attempts to acquire their own freedom and promote freedom among their peers.

Early circumstances in Moody's and Wright's lives, though separated by nearly thirty years, were comparable, but one important difference. Both writers were born into families of sharecroppers, the most common means during the first half of the twentieth century for African-American families in the South to make their living. Both Moody and Wright lost their fathers, who left their mothers behind to raise the children. One important difference is that Moody's mother had good health and eventually married a man who was able to provide a decent home and minimum meals for his family. Wright's mother, by contrast, had several debilitating strokes and never remarried. While Wright was quite young, he was forced to drop out of school and find menial jobs, pick through the rubble in the street for pieces of coal, and take care of himself and his younger brother without adult help. This pattern of working on his own began before Wright reached the age of ten and continued throughout his childhood. Wright's severe poverty also left him constantly hungry, a condition that continued until he was well past his twenty-fifth year. Although both writers suffered, Wright had less hope for future freedom.

A more obvious difference between the two writers is seen in the social pressures of their early years. So-called Jim Crow laws, under which regulations were created to promote strict segregation, prevailed in the South during both Wright's and Moody's experiences there. However, as Wright was growing up, the Ku Klux Klan was extremely active in enforcing racial separation. The Klan committed acts of brutality, torture, and murder to warning all black people. When African Americans stepped across the invisible but well-defined lines of social conduct as defined by the Jim Crow laws, they knew they would probably be severely punished. Although some social

protests in the form of boycotts were carried out during Wright's youth in the South, most members of African-American communities learned survival behaviors that expressed a surface submission to the white supremacists. The KKK was so dominant in the 1920s and 1930s that some Southern U. S. congressmen openly supported activities of the KKK by attending and speaking at Klan meetings without their being considered immoral.

In contrast, during Moody's childhood, slow, but nonetheless dramatic, social changes developed. At first, these changes were subtle and were mostly witnessed by the younger generation. Moody's parents as well as the other adults around her continued to accept the mandates of segregation out of justified fear of KKK reprisals. However, despite the fears of her elders, the very young Moody experienced limited friendship with some white children, who lived close to her neighborhood. The children were curious about one another and shared toys for brief periods of play. This contact contrasts sharply with Wright's experience of brick-and-stone battles between groups of his black friends and groups of young white boys, who lived on the other side of the railroad tracks. They hurled their weapons at one another so violently that serious wounds often resulted.

Moody, on the other hand, relates that the son of one of her white employers openly flirted with her in front of his mother while Moody tutored the boy in Algebra. Two elements stand out in this scene: first, the blatant cross-racial flirtation and, second, the white mother's acknowledgement of Moody's intelligence and exceptional ability in math. During Wright's childhood, whites tended to believe that an education past eighth grade was a waste of time for most African-American children, who would grow up to hold only manual labor jobs. The majority of African Americans, whose poverty forced them to take jobs early, did not challenge these assumptions; few received high school diplomas. Black children were not expected to graduate from high school, let alone go on to college. Thirty years later, however, not only did Moody finish high school and proceed to college, she did so amid discussions, albeit heated ones, about the desegregation of schools.

In Wright's time, the legal precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) still dictated a separate but equal status to white and black populations throughout the states, with the sanction of the U. S. Supreme Court. It was through this court decision that the segregationist Jim Crow laws came into existence. Many prominent black leaders and intellectuals, during this time, became caught up in a debate over how to define the role of African Americans and how to fight for their civil rights. Conflicting philosophies disallowed agreement; the civil rights movement in Wright's time became embroiled in controversy and did not make much progress. Some groups, inspired by Marcus Garvey, advocated creating a Black Nation in the United States or moving to Africa. Another philosophy, based in part on Booker T. Washington's beliefs, stated that blacks should accommodate segregation and make the best of it.

However, during the 1950s, the political climate was changing, fueled in part by a new decision that was to counteract the older decree. From 1951 until 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court heard cases and finally made a decision in the case *Brown v Board of*

*Education ofTopeka*, Kansas. Due to this landmark ruling, segregation of all schools became unlawful. This court decision was the first major move toward the end of legal segregation in the United States.

Moody did not feel the full effects of desegregation in high school, but she cites that, shortly after her graduation, a new, and supposedly improved, "separate but equal" school was opened in her county under the influence of the 1954 court decision. It was not until she entered her junior year in college that Moody experienced a hint of school integration. She was very nervous about attending Tugaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, because most of its professors were white. Although Tugaloo was traditionally an African-American college, it did promote an integrated faculty. Moody was also warned by her friends that only "high-yellow" African-American students attended Tugaloo. This comment illustrates prejudice within the black community based on skin color. Moody's skin was dark. In addition to feeling that her skin might be too dark, she also was concerned about her educational background, fearing that the white professors would demand more of her than she could fulfill given the education she received in the impoverished African-American school system. However, she soon rid herself of these apprehensions, especially after her first term grades, which renewed her confidence in her intelligence and preparedness.

With only a ninth-grade education, Wright taught himself. He was a voracious reader. Every night upon returning home from work, he devoured books on psychology, philosophy, sociology, and classic literature. In addition to this study, he found intellectual stimulation by joining young, highly educated adults (mostly white) in writers' groups that had been created during Roosevelt's administration which spanned the Great Depression. At this time, Wright left the South and moved to Chicago in desperation. He feared that if he remained in Mississippi, or in Tennessee where he had subsequently moved, he would be killed. His hunger for knowledge and personal freedom would not be tolerated in the oppressive environment of the South.

In Chicago Wright became interested in the Communist Party, which was at that time the most prominent political movement for equal rights. The Party promoted labor unions, social security, and a brotherhood that promised to be race neutral. Although Wright claimed that he did not have political interests, he eventually influenced the course of the civil rights movement. He influenced others through his writing, which took on an angry tone. His books, *Uncle Tom's Children, Native Son*, and finally his autobiography, *Black Boy*, presented deeply personal, painfully realistic depictions of African-American experience. National bestsellers, his books affected African-American authors who followed Wright and the white population in both the North and South who read them. Many white people in the South would deny that what Wright had described was true, but other, more liberal whites, including Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the president, were educated and emotionally moved by Wright's work.

Moody's political activism took a different path. While she also became a writer, she first committed herself to trying to create change in the African-American community. Moody was in college during the 1960s, a decade when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was about to achieve some of its goals.

Inspired by one of the NAACP's most outstanding speakers, Medgar Evans, Moody took part in a sit-in at a whites-only lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi. She was assaulted by a group of white hecklers who quickly gathered at the scene, while white police offices stood outside watching□a scene of law enforcement passivity that repeated many times. This was the first of many such acts of defiance against the Jim Crow laws in which Moody was involved. Jackson, Mississippi, was soon the subject of national attention as groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) focused their activities there. Mississippi was one of the poorest and most radically racist states in the South during the 1960s. Moody was right in the middle of this tension.

Moody worked hard, ending up in jail several times, depleting her health at other times, and trying hard to ignore threats against her life, all in the name of freedom. The main thrust of her political activity was to get Southern black people registered to vote. Although she fought hard, her book, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, ends on a note of frustration. The precise date at the end of her autobiography is not clear, but Moody writes the words, "I wonder. I really wonder," referring to her doubts about the effects of all her work. Would the demonstrations, the political rallies, the sit-ins, the fights for voters' rights ever make a difference?

It is also unclear what Moody has done with the remaining years of her life, as she refuses interviews, tired of public attention. Rumors have her living in New York, removed from many of the reminders of her Southern childhood. In the end, Wright's and Moody's lives once again take on similar elements. Wright, frustrated and demoralized by prejudice in the United States, made a permanent move to Europe during the last decade of his life. Both writers, once fueled by the anger caused by injustice, turned their frustrations into unselfish acts. Wright had the courage to expose his most personal emotions through his writing; while Moody fought off her fears in an effort to break the barriers that inhibited African-American life. They chose different ways to voice their antagonism, and then both of them, as if depleted by the intensity of their work, disappeared from the scene.

**Source:**Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

# Critical Essay #3

*Kryhoski is currently working as a freelance writer. In this essay, she considers Moody's work as it relates to events of the Civil Rights movement.*

"I couldn't believe it, but it was the Klan blacklist, with my picture on it. I guess I must have sat there for about an hour holding it," says Moody in her autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. In Moody's response to the list, it is easy to see that she is different, different, in fact, from many young teenagers of her race, gender, time. She is one of the many voices of the Civil Rights movement, one of the unsung heroes courageously following in the steps of Martin Luther King, Jr., to realize freedom and gain self-respect, for herself and for her people as well.

Early in the autobiography, the author describes her experience as a victim of racial injustice in a vivid example. In a particular moment in a local movie theater, Moody begins to understand the far reaching implications of the color divide, what it is to be black in her own community. Arriving at the same time as her white playmates, Moody and her siblings are naturally compelled to join their friends in the white lobby. Amidst the joy comes confusion, when Moody, along with her sister and brother, are violently snatched away from their friends; she writes, "when we got outside, we stood there crying, and we could hear the white children crying inside the white lobby." Moody explains, "I never really thought of them as white before. Now all of a sudden they were white, and their whiteness made them better than me." Moody's curiosity, her need to question the world around her, is perhaps also defined at this moment. Moody is determined to discover the meaning the skin color imposes on friendships and the secret to the benefits of being white. Playing the game doctor, she looks over her white friend's "privates," and puzzled, responds, "I examined each of them three times, but I didn't see any differences. I still hadn't found that secret." Moody is not content to accept the role society imposes on her. As a child, she is able to question social convention, and this ability defines her actions throughout the autobiography.

Moody continues to push at the boundaries of society, in part as a way to define her individuality, her blackness. After the wife of a Klan member mentions the NAACP over tea, Moody asks her mother to elaborate and receives harsh words; Momma commands her never to mention "that word" to "no other white person." Moody responds, "With a momma like that you' ll never learn anything." Without hesitation she asks another adult about the organization and is offered five hours of history from a teacher who eventually disappears. As Moody learns about the NAACP, and as events in the community unfold, Moody's refusal to remain silent increases her sense of alienation. In response to the racism and violence surrounding her, Moody states, "I couldn't go on pretending I was dumb and innocent, pretending I didn't know what was going on ... I was sick of pretending, sick of selling my feelings for a dollar a day." Apart from her racial identity, she is truly a woman of unusual beauty, as well as intellect. These gifts certainly distinguish her from her peers. Moreover, her wisdom, her clarity of vision, and purpose, all set her apart from her classmates. It is this different perception and the willingness to act on it that isolate Moody from the people most familiar to her.

Moody's refusal to accept social limitation and her dogged determination to rise above her family circumstances put her in conflict with those close to her. This conflict further alienates Moody. There is a force moving Moody, a spirit compelling her to do the next right thing. Prior to her attendance at her first NAACP convention she receives a condemning letter from her mother. Moody comments on the probable reaction of her hometown of Centreville to her participation: "I knew I could never go to Centreville safely ... I kept telling myself that I didn't really care too much about going home ... it was more important to me to go the convention." This sense of spirit, this willingness to forsake her former life to follow her beliefs about activism, pervades the text. In her quest for civil equality, Moody takes a stand without family support. In letters, her mother repeatedly pleads with Moody, as she summarizes here: "Why was I trying to get myself killed? [Momma] kept asking. What was I trying to prove?" Moody reports that her mother pointed out the uselessness of trying to change racial givens in the South: "Over and over again she said that after I was dead things would still be the same as they were now." Moody's participation in CORE does not come without great personal expense□to support the group's efforts, she sacrifices teenage life, the support of her family, and possibly her future.

The courage Moody demonstrates in her quest for social equality is phenomenal considering the humiliation and danger she confronts. Ketchup, mustard, and sugar are smeared all over her hair and clothing at a lunch counter sit-in at Woolworth's. After another arrest on a hot summer day, Moody and fellow marchers are confined in a police wagon with no water or air with the vehicle's heater left on to torture them. In this instance, her release from the truck does not earn her freedom. Moody and her companions are herded into cattle buildings at the State Fairgrounds, surrounded by barbed wire, guarded with policemen bearing rifles. Her immediate associations are those of Nazi Germany: to her the Nazi soldiers "couldn't have been any rougher than these cops." In another moment, with only the tall grass to disguise her, Moody hides with other residents of Sonny's house to avoid being killed by white vigilantes.

In addition to danger, Moody faces repeated rejection by members of her own race. The role of a CORE worker is not only dangerous but also thankless. Time and time again Moody's work goes unfulfilled. In one instance, she responds to the murder of Medgar Evers by taking the opportunity to recruit students at Jackson State College for a march. After a heartfelt speech, Moody's frustration shows: "How could Negroes be so pitiful? How could they just sit by and take all this [sh□] without any emotions at all? I just didn't understand." Any success in her work is tempered by the prospect of interference by hostile whites. In Canton, for example, Moody speaks of the great success CORE realizes in its ability to gain support of the black community. Although large numbers of blacks register to vote, only a few are actually registered; the rest are rejected by white members of the community who oversee the process. To face such passivity and frustration, to meet danger head on and continue to work for the advancement of Civil Rights despite great personal risk, these traits distinguishes Moody from her fellows. Her vision and what she personally describes as her inability to suppress feelings of discontent motivate her.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights leader, wrote *Why We Can't Wait*, a classic exploration of the events and forces behind the Civil Rights movement. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King discusses what propels the movement in the face of great opposition and at such great personal expense. The objective in a nonviolent direct-action program for King, first and foremost, is "to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will eventually open the door to negotiation." The impact of sit-ins, of peaceful demonstrations is found in the activities of the objectors. By subjecting themselves to violence and abuse without retaliation, King recognized the power of creating crisis to "foster such a tension that the community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue." In light of racial violence that has historically plagued the black community, King's vision is not hard to understand. He adds, "For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' ... This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'" In King's view, this justice too long "delayed" is "justice denied." The motivations of Moody and countless others are beautifully summed-up by King, as he explains why "we" can't wait.

when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'□then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

Moody's autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is more than just the story of a young woman's transitions into adulthood. It is the chronicle of a brave young woman who refuses to sacrifice her self-respect, a woman who stands up for her beliefs, despite great personal cost. The final words of her personal account mirror the frustration of such taxing work. As she sits listening to her friends singing, "We shall overcome," she responds: "I wonder. I really wonder." One has to wonder how such vision, such courage, carried Moody in her journey, and if she, like many of us, is still wondering today.

**Source:** Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

# Quotes

"Daddy must have beaten me a good ten minutes before Mama realized he had lost his senses and came to rescue me." Chap. 1, p. 6

"Before the evening was over, I finally realized that the two boys actually were Ed's brothers. But how Ed got two white brothers worried me." Chap. 2, p. 19

"I wanted to enjoy and preserve that calm, peaceful look on her face, I wanted to think she would always be that happy, so I would never be unhappy again either." Chap. 4, pp. 43-44

"After much persuasion on my part, Mama decided to let me keep the name Annie. I was so glad, I had always thought of Essie as a name suitable for a cow or hog." Chap. 9, p. 93

"I guess all the maids she had had before catered to these little wishes of hers. But I had no intention of doing so, and I had my own little ways of resisting her rule." Chap. 9, p. 99

"But I didn't know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed. Probably just being a Negro period was enough, I thought." Chap. 10, p. 107

"Lola had long wavy auburn hair hanging down to her shoulders and wore what might have been a man's or woman's sport shirt with skin-tight pants. I was startled when she dashed into the men's room." Chap. 15, p. 153

"I wanted to take my savings, buy a machine gun, and walk down the main street in Centreville cutting down every white person I saw." Chap. 16, p. 165

"'I'm sorry, Mama, but I'm never comin' back in this house again. I wish you have a long happy life with Raymond. And if I ever see you again it won't be here.'" Chap. 16, p. 171

"After about two months of Natchez College, I was completely fed up with it. I had never in my entire life felt so much like a prisoner, not even when I worked for white Klan members at home." Chap. 18, p. 199

"The more I remembered the killings, beatings, and intimidations, the more I worried what might possibly happen to me or my family if I joined the NAACP. But I knew I was going to join, anyway. I had wanted to for a long time." Chap. 20, p. 221

"We sat there for three hours taking a beating when the manager decided to close the store because the mob had begun to go wild with stuff from other counters." Chap. 22, p. 238

"It had gotten to the point where my weight was going down to nothing. I was just skin and bones. My nerves were torn to shreds and I was losing my hair." Chap. 26, p. 296

"I couldn't believe it, but it was a Klan blacklist, with my picture on it." Chap. 26, p. 306

"Graduating, I thought, and I had no idea of where I was going or how I would get there. The only thing I knew was what I would have to face as a Negro trying." Chap. 29, p. 342

"I sat there listening to "We Shall Overcome," looking out of the window at the passing Mississippi landscape. Images of all that had happened kept crossing my mind: the Taplin burning, the Birmingham church bombing, Medgar Evers' murder, the blood gushing out of McKinley's head, and all the other murders." Chap. 30, p. 348

# Topics for Further Study

*Coming of Age in Mississippi* is divided into four sections. Which do you think is the most powerful section? Why?

Find out more about urban and rural southern society in the 1940s and 1950s, prior to the beginning of the civil rights movement. Compare and contrast these two environments.

Conduct research to find out more about a specific aspect or leader of the civil rights movement, such as desegregating Central High School in Little Rock or Martin Luther King, Jr. Write a report analyzing your selected topic or person in terms of the overall movement.

Find out more about the murder of Emmett Till, Louis Allen, or Medgar Evers. Write an article about this incident that might have appeared in a liberal northern newspaper at the time.

Watch a movie depicting the civil rights era, such as *Mississippi Burning*, which is about Freedom Summer, or *The Ghosts of Mississippi*, which is about bringing the killer of Medgar Evers to justice. Then conduct research on some of the events portrayed in the movie and write a critique of the film with regard to its historical accuracy.

Find out about the significant events of the civil rights movement that took place after spring of 1964. Write an epilogue to *Coming of Age in Mississippi* that summarizes these events and their effects on southern African Americans.

Find out how northern politicians in the 1950s and 1960s responded to the civil rights movement and African-American demands for equality. Write a report on their support, or lack of support, of the civil rights movement.

# Compare and Contrast

**1950s:**Before 1965, fewer than six percent of African Americans in Mississippi are registered to vote.

**1960s:**After the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, thousands of southern African Americans register to vote. By 1968, some fifty-nine percent of eligible African-American voters in Mississippi are registered.

**Today:**In the late 1990s, of the total 1,975,000 of Mississippi voters, 670,000 are African American. Overall in the United States, 23.5 million African Americans are registered to vote, but only 63.5 percent report having voted in the 1996 presidential election.

**1950s:**Prior to 1962, universities and colleges in the South are not open to African Americans. As they are forced to do at the lower educational levels, African Americans attend their own schools.

**1960s:**In 1962, a court order forces the University of Mississippi to admit African-American James Meredith. When he arrives on campus, a riot breaks out. Flanked by armed guards, Meredith attends classes for the rest of the year. He graduates in 1963.

**Today:**Affirmative action, a policy that seeks to redress past discrimination through active measures to ensure equal opportunity, is undergoing challenges in the U. S. court system. Opponents claim that affirmative action in school admission policy is illegal because race is being used as a factor in judging applicants. In the late 1990s and early 2000, the admissions policies of several graduate schools are found to be unconstitutional. However, polls reveal that the majority of Americans support affirmative action programs in school admissions policies.

**1940s and 1950s:**As they have long been doing, white state officials use unfair election rules, poll taxes, literacy tests, and threats of violence and loss of jobs to prevent many southern African Americans from voting or even registering to vote.

**1960s:**The Voting Rights Act of 1965 gives the federal government the power to inspect voter registration procedures and to protect all citizens' right to vote.

**Today:**The presidential election of 2000 brought about charges of voter disenfranchisement and civil rights abuses. In the aftermath of the election, the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights approves an investigative report that finds the 2000 presidential race in Florida has been marred by injustice. The report states that African-American voters were nine times more likely than white voters to have their ballots discarded as invalid.

**1940s and 1950s:**Throughout the 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) focuses on abolishing segregation in public schools in the

United States. Civil rights leaders also work to desegregate public transportation systems in the South.

**1960s:**African-American civil rights leaders continue their hard work to desegregate all aspects of society, to ensure equal access to jobs and educational opportunities, and to register African-American voters. Their efforts bring about the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

**Today:**Despite the progress made in desegregating and equalizing American society, many minorities still feel they lack equal opportunities. A survey conducted in 2001 shows that 87 percent of all African Americans polled said that they still lack full civil rights and that more work needs to be done.

# What Do I Read Next?

*Mr. Death: Four Stories* (1975) is Moody's only other published work.

Richard Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* (1945) uses fictional and novelistic techniques to describe Wright's youth in Mississippi and Tennessee. It is widely considered to be one of his finest works.

Albert French's novel *Billy* (1995) takes place in rural Mississippi in the 1930s. When ten-year-old Billy accidentally kills a white teenager, he is placed on trial in a courtroom that shows the degree of racism and injustice prevalent in the South at that time.

*Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights* (1985) is James Farmer's award-winning contribution to literature of the civil rights movement. Farmer, who founded CORE in 1942, conveys the struggle that he and other civil rights leaders went through to achieve their important goals.

*I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (1996), by Charles M. Payne, emphasizes the grassroots organization and the individuals involved in the civil rights struggle in Mississippi.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1961), by Harper Lee, tells the story of a small-town southern lawyer who defends an African-American man accused of raping a white woman.

*A Way Out of No Way: Writings about Growing Up Black in America* (1996), edited by Jacqueline Wilson, collects works by African-American writers, including Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Jamaica Kincaid. The pieces deal with such issues as family, race, and coming of age.

# Further Study

Branch, Taylor, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years*, 1954-63, Touchstone Books, 1989.

The first book of a two-volume series, this formidable social history profiles Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the other key players and events that helped shape the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Dittmer, John, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, University of Illinois Press, 1995.

This history covers the fight for racial equality in Mississippi from the post-World War II years through 1968.

Hampton, Henry, ed., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*, Bantam Books, 1991.

Creating a fascinating narrative, the creator and executive producer of the PBS series *The Eyes on the Prize* draws on nearly one thousand interviews with activists, politicians, officials, and ordinary people who took part in the civil rights movement.

Hine, Darlene Clark, ed., *The Eyes on the Prize: Civil Rights Reader*, Penguin, 1991

One of several companion pieces to the PBS *Eyes on the Prize* television series, this book collects over 100 court decisions, speeches, interviews, and other documents on the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1990.

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Degler, C. N., Review, in *Nation*, January 11, 1969, p. 83.

Ellmann, Mary, Review, in *Nation*, January 6, 1969, p. 26

Kennedy, Edward M., Review, in *New York Times Book Review*, January 6, 1969, p. 5.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, Penguin, 1964, pp. 79-82.

Stevens, Shane, Review, in *Book World*, December 1, 1968, p. 28.

Wright, Richard, *Black Boy*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1998

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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