

After Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney and Andy Goodman went missing in June of 1964—following their release from questioning at Sheriff Lawrence Rainey's jail—hundreds of people looked for them.

Their bodies were not located until August 4th, that year, after a paid informant (called "M") revealed the remains were hidden under an earthen dam in a remote part of Mississippi's Neshoba County.

A. L. Hopkins—an investigator for the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission—prepared a five-page report about the murders, burials and the likely identity of the paid informant.

This clip, from "Eyes on the Prize," describes some of the events which took place during "Freedom Summer," in 1964, including archival footage of the speech of Fannie Lou Hamer (of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party) who famously said she was "sick and tired of being sick and tired."

After several years went by, without anyone being successfully charged for the murders of the three civil rights workers, a trial began before Judge William Harold Cox in October of 1967.

Despite his past history, as a segregationist, the Judge let the parties know—early on during the trial—that he would not tolerate any legal shenanigans (including improper areas of questioning). He cautioned the defense counsel:

I'm not going to allow a farce to be made of this trial.

The prosecuting attorney, John Doar, realized that the Judge's approach to the trial actually gave him a chance to get convictions from the jury:

*If there had been any feeling in the courtroom that the defendants were invulnerable to conviction in Mississippi, this incident dispelled it completely. Cox made it clear he was taking the trial seriously. That made the jurors stop and think: "If Judge Cox is taking this stand, we'd better meet our responsibility as well." ***

Part of the trial record includes confessions which murder suspects gave in 1964. From those confessions, we learn what happened to the murdered civil-rights workers:

As the trial proceeded, the prosecution read the 1964 confessions of Horace Doyle Barnette and James Jordan, which described what happened on the night of June 21: After leaving Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman in the Philadelphia jail, Cecil Price [a law-enforcement officer] contacted Edgar Ray Killen, one of the leaders of the local Ku Klux Klan, who was also a Baptist minister.

Killen directed Klan members to gather in Philadelphia that evening.

When two cars filled with Klansmen headed for the outskirts of Philadelphia, Price released the Civil Rights workers from jail and ordered them to head back to Meridian. He then joined the pursuit of the CORE station wagon.

Catching up with the three Civil Rights workers on Highway 19, the Klansmen forced the men into their cars and drove all the vehicles to Rock Cut Road, a nearby side street. There, James Jordan shot Chaney, and Wayne Roberts shot Schwerner and Goodman. The killers loaded the bodies into the CORE station wagon and drove them to the Old Jolly Farm, where they used a bulldozer to bury the bodies in the earthen dam.

How did jurors react to this evidence?

The jury found seven of the defendants guilty: Price, Barnette, Roberts, James Arledge, Billy Wayne Posey, James Snowden, and Samuel Bowers, the Imperial Wizard of Mississippi's White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. (Bowers had a particular antipathy toward Schwerner, and had begun planning his murder in the spring of 1964.)

In three cases, the jury failed to reach a verdict; one juror refused to convict a minister, and Killen walked free.

How much time did the convicted men spend in jail?

After unsuccessful appeals, the convicted men entered prison early in 1970. Each had received a sentence of between three and 10 years, but ultimately none would serve more than six years behind bars.

Killen, the alleged mastermind of the plot, remained free for decades. Then, in 1998, things changed for him:

In 1998, Jerry Mitchell, an investigative reporter for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, published excerpts from a 1984 interview with Samuel Bowers [one of the convicted defendants] in which he spoke openly about the killings.

"I was quite delighted to be convicted and have the main instigator of the entire affair walk out of the courtroom a free man, which everybody - including the trial judge and the prosecutors and everybody else knows that that happened," Bowers said.

That interview was supposed to remain under seal until after Samuel Bowers died:

Mitchell's reporting established that Bowers was referring to Killen. (The interview, which is now available to the public, was part of an oral history project to be held by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and sealed until Bowers' death. Mitchell, whose work on unsolved cases of the Civil Rights era earned him a 2009 MacArthur fellowship, never revealed how he got access to the interview.)

The following year, Mississippi's Attorney General took action against Edgar Ray Killen:

In 1999, Mississippi Attorney General Michael Moore announced that the state would reopen the case. At his request, the FBI turned over more than 40,000 pages related to the initial investigation.

In January 2005, a grand jury charged Edgar Ray Killen with murder. Although several of the other conspirators were still alive at the time, the grand jury did not find sufficient evidence to indict anyone else.

Did Edgar Ray Killen actually stand trial? If so, was he convicted of murder?

The trial drew national news coverage; members of the victims' families were present at the trial, some as witnesses and some as observers.

Ultimately, the jury found insufficient evidence for a murder conviction, but did find Killen guilty of the lesser charge of manslaughter. He was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

For more on the story of the three civil rights workers—Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney and Andy Goodman—see American Experience's production of "Freedom Summer" (which you can [watch online](#), thanks to PBS).

** All quoted passages in this chapter are from "[Murder in Mississippi](#)," an "American Experience" production online via PBS.

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