

Guide to
the Microfilm Edition
of the

FBI File: MIBURN (Mississippi Burning)

*The Investigation of the Murders of Michael Henry
Scwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Earl Chaney
June 21, 1964*

A Microfilm Publication by

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Aknowledgment

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Introduction

On June 21, 1964, Michael Henry Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Earl Chaney left Meridian, Mississippi, in a 1963 Ford station wagon to view the Mount Zion Methodist Church, which had burned the week before. The three men were working for the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), which was sponsoring a voter-registration drive among black Mississippians in the summer of 1964. While driving through Neshoba County that afternoon, Chaney was arrested for speeding and put in jail, while Goodman and Schwerner were incarcerated with him "for investigation." They were assessed a fine of \$20 and set free at approximately 10:30 that night.

Upon their release from jail, the three men paid the fine and began the drive back to COFO headquarters in Meridian. They were followed by policemen from the jailhouse until they reached the Philadelphia city limits. Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Ray Price, in collaboration with local Ku Klux Klan members and others, then sprang the trap they had set while the men were in jail: they pursued the station wagon once again, but after pulling the civil rights workers over for the second time, Price handed them to the Klansmen, who took them to a gravel road off Highway 19 near Union, Mississippi, and shot them to death. The burned-out station wagon the men were driving was found on June 23. After an intensive search of the area, the bodies were discovered on August 4, buried deeply in a farm dam in Philadelphia.

The prosecution of this case came at a time when the Bureau was being criticized heavily for its investigations of felonies committed in the South, especially alleged racially motivated murders. Eighteen defendants were named in the federal trial for violations of Title 18, U.S. Code, Sections 241, 242, and 371. U.S. District Judge Harold J. Cox decided to dismiss the federal charges against all of the men except Neshoba County officials: Price, Sheriff Lawrence Andrew Rainey, and Patrolman Richard Andrew Willis.

The murders of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner were among the first to be tried under the new Civil Rights Act, using the argument that any conspiracy to deprive the men of the free exercise

of their civil rights (in this case, premeditated murder) was a felony. On another level, both President Lyndon B. Johnson and Bureau Director J. Edgar Hoover viewed the crime as a direct challenge to federal authority in the South; Johnson wanted to see the enforcement of the new law, and Hoover was interested in breaking the power grip the Klan had on the South and expanding the Bureau's presence in Mississippi.

This file contains Bureau letters, memorandums, teletypes, and prosecutive reports of investigation. The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released. Every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

ROLL NOTES

FBI File: MIBURN (Mississippi Burning)

Bureau File Number 44-25706

Section 39-40:

September 1964

Roll 1, 0001-0243

Teletype dated 9/15/64 regarding black voter-registration drives in Neshoba County, Mississippi

Memo regarding information that Michael Schwerner and James Earl Chaney were marked men

Laboratory report containing bullet analysis

Memo regarding subpoenas of Bureau personnel

Teletype regarding threatening call made to COFO headquarters in Philadelphia, Mississippi

Memo listing grand jury members at Biloxi

Memo regarding payment for the information leading to the discovery of the three bodies

Memo regarding "tainted" Bureau evidence, disclosure of sources, and review of the facts, which alleges a conspiracy among law enforcement officials

Report on Carlton Wallace Miller in connection with the murders and the Ku Klux Klan

Report regarding the racial conditions since the murders

Teletype regarding the developments in the grand jury investigation

Memos regarding instructions to subpoenaed agents

Teletype regarding the discovery of the bodies and voter-registration drives in the area

Report regarding Crime Records Division background check on suspects and victims

Memo regarding the testimony of Bureau agents

Section 44:

December 1964

Roll 1, 0244-0265

Memo regarding Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson

Teletype regarding negotiations over trial procedures

Memo regarding actions to be taken, and the decision to proceed

Section 49:

December 19, 1964

Roll 1, 0266-0504

Prosecutive Summary, pages 1-274; 213 released

Narrative of Offense

- I. Predication, Background Information Concerning Victims and Circumstances Pertaining to Civil Rights Workers' Presence in Neshoba County
- II. Pursuit of Victims by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Ray Price Prior to Arrest
- III. Arrest of Victims Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner on June 21, 1964, at Philadelphia, Mississippi
- IV. Victims' Incarceration at the Neshoba County Jail, Philadelphia, Mississippi, June 21, 1964
- V. Witnesses to the Abduction and Murder of Three Civil Rights Workers

Section 50:

December 19, 1964

Roll 1, 0505-0714

Prosecutive Summary, pages 275-554; 180 released

- VI. Recovery of the Victims' Bodies at Olen Burrage's Dam on August 4, 1964
- VII. Autopsies of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner at University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, on August 5, 1964
- VIII. Destruction of the Civil Rights Workers' 1963 Ford Station Wagon
- IX. Activities of Local Law Enforcement Authorities at Philadelphia, Mississippi

Section 51:

December 19, 1964

Roll 1, 0715-0827

Prosecutive Summary, pages 555-778; 64 released

- X. Compendium Regarding Subjects Who Are Involved in or Cognizant of the Abduction and Murder of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner

Section 52:

December 19, 1964

Roll 1, 0828-0991

Prosecutive Summary, pages 779-1000, plus index; 253 released

- XI. Information Concerning Subjects' Activities on June 21 and 22, 1964, and Alibi Interviews of Subjects
- XII. Abduction of _____ Subsequent to His Release from the Neshoba County Jail on _____
- XIII. Background Concerning Previous Incidents of Arrests for Traffic Violations in Neshoba County
- XIV. Preliminary Prosecutive Action
- XV. Names of Defendants
- XVI. Appendix
 - A. Characterization of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi
 - B. Characterization of the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Louisiana)
- XVII. Index

Section 58:

March 5, 1965

Roll 1, 0992-END

Supplemental Prosecutive Summary