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Freedom Summer

Doug McAdam

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Doug McAdam : Freedom Summer before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Freedom Summer:

In June 1964, over 1,000 volunteers--most of them white, northern college students--arrived in Mississippi to register black voters and staff "freedom schools" as part of the Freedom Summer campaign organized by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Within 10 days, three of them were murdered; by the summer's end, another had died and hundreds more had endured bombings, beatings, and arrests. Less dramatically, but no less significantly, the volunteers encountered a "liberating" exposure to new lifestyles, new political ideologies, and a radically new perspective on America and on themselves. The summer transformed them, and, as this riveting book shows, forged a crucial link between the Civil Rights Movement and the other social movements that would soon sweep the nation. Here is the first book to gauge the impact of Freedom Summer on the project volunteers and the period we now call "the turbulent '60s." Who were the volunteers? What were their experiences? And what happened to them after the project ended? To answer these questions, Doug McAdam tracked down hundreds of the original project applicants, and combining hard data with a wealth of personal recollections, he has produced a fascinating portrait of the people, the events, and the era. As they embarked on the campaign, McAdam found, the volunteers were mostly liberal reformers--not radicals. As such, they typified the idealism of the early '60s. During Freedom Summer, however, their

encounters with white supremacist violence and their experiences with interracial relationships, communal living, and a more open sexuality led many of the volunteers to "climb aboard a political and cultural wave just as it was forming and beginning to wash forward." Many became activists in subsequent protests--the antiwar movement, the feminist movement--and helped set their tone. Most significantly, McAdam found, many of the participants have remained activists to this day; for them, the "big chill" never occurred. Brimming with the reminiscences of the Freedom Summer veterans, the book captures the varied motives that compelled them to make the journey south, the terror that came with the explosions of violence, the camaraderie and conflicts they experienced among themselves, and their assorted feelings about the lessons they learned. This book is an engrossing re-creation of some remarkable lives caught up in a remarkable series of events as well as a penetrating analysis of why those events were significant. It is must reading for anyone seeking to understand the legacy of the '60s.