

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

1865-70: After the Civil War, **Reconstruction Amendments** (13th, 14th, and 15th) are ratified, outlawing slavery, granting equal protection under the law, and extending suffrage to African American men

1866: **Ku Klux Klan** is founded

1881: The first of many of the "**Jim Crow**" segregation laws is passed in Tennessee

1896: In **Plessy v. Ferguson**, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctions segregated, or "separate but equal," public facilities.

1954: In **Brown v. Board of Education** of Topeka, Kansas, the Supreme Court rules unanimously against school segregation

1955: **Emmett Till**, 14 years old, is lynched for allegedly flirting with a white woman; his murder is one of nearly 3,500 recorded lynchings of African Americans between 1882 and 1968

1961: The interracial Congress of Racial Equality (**CORE**) begins to organize Freedom Rides throughout the South to desegregate interstate bus travel

1963: Dr. King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech during the **March on Washington**

1963: KKK terrorists **bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham murdering four black girls and injuring 22 others

1964: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (**SNCC**), **CORE** and the **NAACP** organize "Freedom Summer"

1964: President Lyndon Johnson signs the **Civil Rights Act**

1965: **Voting Rights Act** is passed in wake of **Selma to Montgomery march**

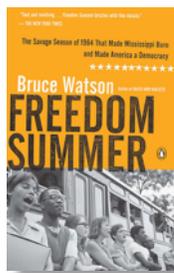
1968: Martin Luther King, Jr., is **assassinated**

1971: **26th Amendment** ratified, extending the vote to adults over 18 years old.

2008: **Barack Obama** elected as nation's first African American president

2013: Amidst rising concern about **voter suppression efforts**, the Supreme Court **strikes down Section 4** of the Voting Rights Act, removing an important safeguard to voter protections

2015: White supremacist **Dylann Roof** massacres nine African Americans at historic **Emanuel AME Church** in Charleston, SC



In *Freedom Summer*, Bruce Watson offers a vivid retelling of the charged summer of 1964—a “savage season,” as the subtitle declares, “that made Mississippi Burn and made America a Democracy.” That summer, a crucial turning point in the Civil Rights movement, hundreds of college-age volunteers risked not only their relationships with friends and family, but their very lives, as they travelled to Mississippi with the goal of bringing that state—and America as a whole—to the right side of history. Registering voters and setting up Freedom Schools, these volunteers committed themselves to a cause larger than themselves, and to an ideal worthy of America.

Identifying with *Freedom Summer*

- During “Freedom Summer,” college students from across the country recognized injustice and took action. What do you view as the most pressing issues of today that might demand such a response?
- Racial oppression can be driven driven both by personal animosities and also encoded in cultural and social institutions. How and where do you see the persistence of such oppression in society today?
- The students who participated in “Freedom Summer,” unless they were 21, could not vote, yet they were willing to commit to empowering others to vote. Does the vote remain a powerful political tool worth fighting for? How is it threatened today?
- The motives of many who chose to commit themselves to Freedom Summer were often questioned not only by those whose culture they sought to reform, but by those closest to them—parents and family. Has there been a time when your personal views and causes you support were questioned by those around you?
- *Freedom Summer* depicts a deep community engagement that is philosophically grounded and scrupulously organized. This makes the service experiences depicted distinct from the kind of check-the-box volunteerism that seems so familiar today. Have you experienced one or both of these varieties of community engagement? Which did you find more satisfying and why?

Engaging *Freedom Summer*

- Leadership comes in many forms. What are the most resonant models of leadership in *Freedom Summer*?
- Embedded within the two overarching narratives that Watson uses to ground *Freedom Summer*—the tragedy of the Neshoba County murders and the tempered triumph of the Freedom Democrats’ path to the Atlanta Convention—he offers many powerful vignettes of courage and care in the face of great adversity and violence. Which of these vignettes were most powerful to you and why?
- Amidst one particularly heated debate about the two-seat convention compromise that so discouraged Freedom Democrats and SNCC staffers, Bob Moses spoke up: “We’re not here to bring politics into our morality,” he said, “but to bring morality into our politics.” What did he mean in the context of the compromise debate, and how might we apply Moses’s message to the enduring tension between political expedience and human rights, between the practical and the ideal, between what is and what ought to be?

About the Author

Bruce Watson has worked in a variety of jobs: factory hand, office temp, elementary school teacher, writer. A frequent contributor to the *Smithsonian*, Watson has written more than 40 feature articles on subjects ranging from eels to Ferraris. His articles have also appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Best American Science and Nature Writing* 2003, and elsewhere. Watson’s *Bread and Roses* was named to the New York Public Library’s “25 Books to Remember in 2005” list, and more recently, *Freedom Summer* (2010) has been praised for its visceral storytelling and scrupulous research. [bio adapted from author website]

