



# Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986

*J. Todd Moye*

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In the middle of the Mississippi Delta lies rural, black-majority Sunflower County. J. Todd Moye examines the social histories of civil rights and white resistance movements in Sunflower, tracing the development of organizing strategies in separate racial communities over four decades.

Sunflower County was home to both James Eastland, one of the most powerful reactionaries in the U.S. Senate in the twentieth century, and Fannie Lou Hamer, the freedom-fighting sharecropper who rose to national prominence as head of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Sunflower was the birthplace of the Citizens' Council, the white South's pre-eminent anti-civil rights organization, but it was also a hotbed of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) organizing and a fountainhead of freedom culture.

Using extensive oral history interviews and archival research, Moye situates the struggle for democracy in Sunflower County within the context of national developments in the civil rights movement. Arguing that the civil rights movement cannot be understood as a national monolith, Moye reframes it as the accumulation of thousands of local movements, each with specific goals and strategies. By continuing the analysis into the 1980s, *Let the People Decide* pushes the boundaries of conventional periodization, recognizing the full extent of the civil rights movement.

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