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FREEDOM ON MY MIND

(NR)

(TARA RELEASING)

Color/1.85

105 Mins.

Featuring: Victoria Gray, Bob Moses, Endesha Ida Mae Holland, L.C. Dorsey, Cleveland Sellers, Pam Chude Allen, Marshall Ganz, Curtis Hayes, Heather Booth, Len Edwards.

Credits: Produced and directed by Connie Field, Marilyn Mulford. Written and edited by Michael Chandler. Created and developed by Field. Script by Field, Michael J. Moore, Mulford. Camera: Michael Chinn, Steve Devita, Vicente Franco. Associate producer: Hardy Frye. Sound: Don Thomas, Larry Loewinger, Curtis Choy. Narrated by Ronnie Washington. Music by Mary Watkins.

Compelling, moving documentary about Freedom Summer in 1964 Mississippi deserves wide exposure. 94-142

The 1994 Sundance Festival awarded its Grand Jury Prize for best documentary to a stunning account of the 1964 Freedom Summer. *Freedom on My Mind* offers an overview of a pivotal moment in the American civil-rights movement by combining news and archival footage of the time with contemporary interviews with many of the major players, black and white. It's a sobering, unforgettable and inspirational film which will deeply reward audiences everywhere.

Almost a century after the Civil War, racism controlled virtually every facet of life for blacks and whites in Mississippi. Disenfranchised blacks in the early 1960s turned to the ballot box to fight their oppression, but without help from the federal government, their attempts to register were grotesquely difficult—even deadly: The first black man who tried to register was shot to death by a white state legislator who had been his pal since childhood. Other would-be voters were foiled by impossible qualification tests (which were never posed to whites). Blacks would also find themselves out of a job after word had spread of what they'd tried to do.

In the summer of '64, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, under the leadership of the articulate, levelheaded Bob Moses, brought to Mississippi a thousand Northern college students to help register blacks. The enormity of that task became clear with the disappearance of civil-rights workers Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner. Yet by the time their bodies were discovered, some 80,000 new voters were registered and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was organized. The MFDP's representatives came to the Democratic Party's 1964 convention in Atlantic City to challenge the hegemony of the racist whites who comprised the state's official Party delegates. There, the MFDP was subjected to the sort of cynical, immoral treatment which today has come to symbolize government in the minds of many Americans. When their electrifying speaker Fannie Lou Hamer was testifying on television, President Lyndon Johnson immediately called a press conference, in order to push her off the air. Network news that night carried her words intact, but the die was already cast. Johnson sent Hubert Humphrey and his protege Walter Mondale to persuade the MFDP to accept a toothless compromise. They rejected it, and left Atlantic City with nothing but a sense of betrayal after having played by white America's rules. In 1965, federal voter-registration laws put an end to voting injustices such as those in Mississippi; nevertheless, the ensuing years saw major American cities ablaze with race riots, and the Democratic Party splintered into the disarray that continues to characterize it today.

Besides teaching some essential history, *Freedom on My Mind* also evokes the indomitability of the American spirit. Everyone today who struggles against racism, sexism, religious intolerance and homophobia will find in this film an inspirational document of how ordinary people—sharecroppers, laborers, homemakers, servants, prostitutes, students, the unemployed—reclaimed power over their lives. Seeing the vibrant Endesha Ida Mae Holland discussing the hopes and terrors of three decades ago, alongside news footage of her as a teenager, daring to talk back to a flummoxed white sheriff, you can perceive a fundamental truth: that all barriers erected on fear and hatred are doomed to collapse, no matter how monolithic they might appear to be. *Freedom on My Mind* makes real Martin Luther King's insistence that no lie can live forever.

—Cole Gagne

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