Summer Reading Assignment for all sophomores (those taking Honors U.S. History & AP U.S. History)

- Grab any copy of Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Any version of the book will do, including an ebook or audio edition. You can go pick up a paperback copy at Novel or Burke's, or check out the book from our library or from the Memphis Public Library. If you're interested in an audiobook, an SMS librarian can help you.
- The assignment: read it and annotate it for the two questions below; bring your marked-up, annotated book to class starting the **second day of school, Tuesday, August 11**, for credit. If you are reading the ebook edition or listening to an audiobook, please show me your handwritten annotations on Aug. 11. We will discuss the autobiography in the first week of school, and it will provide a useful framework for our visit to the National Civil Rights Museum.
- Please email me if you have any questions: dlyon@stmarysschool.org

As you read it, annotate for the following:

1. What are the ways in which Moody came to recognize racial boundaries and expectations as she proceeded through childhood, high school, college, and the movement? What were the key instances and moments in which Moody became more aware of her place in society, and what did she take away from those experiences?
2. What is the relevance of this book in 2026?

About the Author and the Book



This is an autobiography by Anne Moody, published in 1968. As the title suggests, it is a first-person account of her life from childhood through her involvement in the civil rights movement as a college student in the early 1960s. Please recognize that this is not a novel or a work of fiction; this is nonfiction, and Moody is recounting her true-life experience.

Reading *Coming of Age in Mississippi* will give us a good framework for understanding American history for the rest of the school year. If history is the study of change over time, then one of the key questions we must ask ourselves is, why does history change? Does it change because of the natural order of things? Does it change because leaders force change on others? Or does it change because regular people band together to force their leaders or others to change?

One of the major changes in American history was when segregation and disfranchisement -- legalized acts of discrimination common throughout the country, though particular to the South -- suddenly became illegal in the mid-1960s. The key question, then, is how did this happen? What caused this change? Anne Moody's memoir will help answer this question.

The book will hopefully help answer a related question that students of history often encounter: what motivates people? If humans do have a role in historical change, what motivates people to act? Most of us can single out certain figures in the civil rights movement, especially one who was tragically murdered in our city, yet how many of us have the confidence to talk about what motivated that individual to get involved in the movement in the first place? As Moody will explain, leadership was important, but the real story of the civil rights movement concerns the motivations of the foot soldiers, particularly the young women and men -- folks your age -- who joined Moody in fighting for racial equality.

There is one more thing to think about as you read. Moody provides a detailed account of her childhood and young adulthood, blemishes and all. She was a young person who had to deal with very adult types of circumstances -- murders and the possibility of violence -- and she was often surrounded by adults or older children who used language that today is considered antiquated and, in many cases, offensive. Please appreciate that Moody wrote this book in the mid-1960s, and this autobiography was published in 1968.

Finally, as you read, you will find this excellent website a helpful resource for further context and historical documentation regarding Moody (including a fascinating radio interview with her soon after the book came out).