



Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear

Aram Goudsouzian

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In 1962, James Meredith became a civil rights hero when he enrolled as the first African American student at the University of Mississippi. Four years later, he would make the news again when he reentered Mississippi, on foot. His plan was to walk from Memphis to Jackson, leading a "March Against Fear" that would promote black voter registration and defy the entrenched racism of the region. But on the march's second day, he was shot by a mysterious gunman, a moment captured in a harrowing and now iconic photograph.

What followed was one of the central dramas of the civil rights era. With Meredith in the hospital, the leading figures of the civil rights movement flew to Mississippi to carry on his effort. They quickly found themselves confronting southern law enforcement officials, local activists, and one another. In the span of only three weeks, Martin Luther King, Jr., narrowly escaped a vicious mob attack; protesters were teargassed by state police; Lyndon Johnson refused to intervene; and the charismatic young activist Stokely Carmichael first led the chant that would define a new kind of civil rights movement: Black Power.

Aram Goudsouzian's *Down to the Crossroads* is the story of the last great march of the King era, and the first great showdown of the turbulent years that followed. Depicting rural demonstrators' courage and the impassioned debates among movement leaders, Goudsouzian reveals the legacy of an event that would both integrate African Americans into the political system and inspire even bolder protests against it. Full of drama and contemporary resonances, this book is civil rights history at its best.

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