

Public Abstract

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Title:MISSISSIPPI MAU MAU: MEDGAR EVERS AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE, 1952-1963

Mississippi Mau Mau expands upon existing historical analysis of the ideological connections between African liberation struggles and the Black Freedom Movement in the United States by concentrating on the ways in which American civil rights activists absorbed and utilized knowledge from anti-colonial movements. This dissertation focuses on the career of NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers and connects the growth and development of his approach to fighting white supremacy in Mississippi to his interpretation of the Mau Mau movement in British colonial Kenya. While Mississippi may have felt as though it was worlds apart from Kenya, Evers was profoundly influenced by the Mau Mau use of force and mass participation to compel political and social change. Mississippi Mau Mau explores how, after being introduced to the story of the Kenyan uprising in both the mainstream and African-American press, Evers examined the racial climate in Mississippi through a transnational lens and transformed his analysis into grassroots strategies for change through his work with the NAACP. In realizing the significance of grassroots mass participation, unremitting dedication to action in the face of massive retaliation, an emphasis on class unity, and the use of a publicity campaign to highlight select cases of discrimination for broadcast on the national and international stage, Evers sought to permanently cripple Mississippi's white power structure. His determination to achieve his and the NAACP's objectives sometimes led to his frustration with the reactions of the National Office to the movement's failures in Mississippi, as well as with the numbers of black Mississippians who did not participate due to pressure from state authorities and private organizations resolute in their mission to maintain white supremacy. Nevertheless, Evers' strategic efforts not only helped lay the foundations for a mass movement in Mississippi, but also positioned it at the heart of the global struggle for black liberation.