

*Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi.* By John Dittmer. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Pp. 530. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95.)

In this carefully crafted, engaging, and well-written book, John Dittmer demonstrates an enviable grasp of detail and nuance. This he uses to reveal important and often overlooked or understated aspects of the civil rights movement in Mississippi and the nation.

Parts of this story are familiar and appear in most civil rights narratives: Robert Moses moving alone into McComb, Mississippi, in 1961; the deaths of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman; and the emergence of Fannie Lou Hamer as a national spokesperson at the 1964 Democratic convention. Yet, from beginning to end, Dittmer consistently re-situates and provides context for these more familiar narratives through his focus on the work of local people and their allies, primarily the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). For example, Dittmer devotes only two of eighteen chapters to the 1964 Freedom Summer and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge in Atlantic City, topics that typically dominate discussions of the Mississippi movement. Here, the story of the Mississippi movement is far more than the several-month period when hundreds of white volunteers flooded the state.

Dittmer begins the story in July, 1946, with Medgar Evers leading fellow World War II veterans in an unsuccessful attempt to vote in the Democratic primary and ends roughly forty years later with the seating of a black-led delegation from Mississippi in the 1968 Democratic convention. With both its emphases and time frame dictated by the people and events within the state, *Local People* provides a wonderful alternative to the more common national orientation of civil rights historiography, which tends to center on leaders, organizations, and legislation. The result is more than a longer story or a more diverse focus.

In his examination of the widespread, grassroots effort in Mississippi, Dittmer exposes themes that are absent from other civil rights works. He describes the day-in and day-out organizing of SNCC and CORE activists who moved in for the long haul and made their homes with and found allies in local women and men. He explores the cooperation and common vision of a wide array of individuals and groups as well as intergroup tensions and rivalries (particularly between the national NAACP and the homegrown Council of Federated Organizations or COFO). Perhaps even more telling is his account of the promises and the pitfalls found in the interaction among the Mississippi movement, the federal government, and the liberal wing of the Democratic party.

After skillfully and sensitively portraying years of courage, hope, and hard work, along with disappointment, resistance, and betrayal, and yet more courage and hope, Dittmer closes with comments by activist Bob Moses. The movement, Moses said, "brought Mississippi, for better or worse, up to the level of the rest of the country" (pp. 429-30).

Dittmer's focus on local people and local priorities in this absorbing account brings the Mississippi movement to the rest of us. It should be read by anyone interested in the civil rights movement. Moreover, *Local People* will be one of the books that reshapes the way historians view the civil rights movement as the cumulative weight of local studies challenges the dominant national perspective on the movement's importance.

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*Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia.* By Virginia Rinaldo Seitz. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. Pp. vii, 288. Notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$57.50; paperbound, \$18.95.)

In southwestern Virginia's seven coal-mining counties, the War on Poverty lost its momentum during the oil crisis *cum* coal boom that began in 1973. But since the early 1980s and the return of stable oil imports, coal mining layoffs have snowballed and a new wave of grassroots organizing has been under way.

At first, that new wave was best symbolized by the Dunganon Development Commission (DDC), an organization based in Scott County, Virginia, and intent on promoting poor people's empowerment—especially poor women's empowerment—by combining GED programs and specially designed community college courses with income generating projects, particularly cooperatives. The DDC's greatest success was probably its Coal Employment Project, which fought both coal companies and male miners' traditional *machismo* to help women achieve high-paying underground jobs. In 1987, following much favorable publicity, the DDC received a large federal grant to create a sewing cooperative, but internal power struggles for control of that project lowered the morale of all concerned.

Later, a less dramatic and more communal effort achieved greater success: the Ivanhoe Civic League based in Wythe County, Virginia, and led by a charismatic local woman named Maxine Waller. But meanwhile the highly abrasive 1989–1990 strike by the United Mine Workers (UMW) against Pittston Coal Company temporarily propelled thousands of people into local activism.