History 271
Devine

Study Questions for Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

READING ASSIGNMENT: Chapters 1-4, 10-12, 18-end

1. How did Anne Moody's most important early childhood experiences shape her understanding of racial differences and racism?

2. Describe Anne's (Essie Mae's) early contacts with whites. Were they all negative or did some whites seem supportive and sympathetic? How does she learn that whites and African Americans are different?

3. How does Anne learn that "race" is a social construct – that society dictates who is "white" and who is "black?"

4. How did poverty affect Anne's childhood years? Why was her family poor and why was it so difficult for them to escape poverty?

5. How would you describe relations between blacks and whites in Mississippi when Anne was a young girl? How did whites in rural Mississippi exercise power over blacks?

6. Who was Emmett Till and why was he murdered? What effect does his death have on Anne? How does she react to it?

7. What are the differences between Anne and her mother? Why does one gravitate toward the Movement while the other fears it?

8. Why did the Talpin family's house burn down? How did relations between blacks and whites in Centreville lead to the burning?

9. Does Anne hate white people? Does she act differently toward whites than did most blacks in rural Mississippi? Does her attitude toward whites change throughout the book?

10. Does Anne hate black people? Is she justified in her hostility or is it misplaced?

11. Did Anne's activities in the NAACP and SNCC provide fulfillment, frustration, a sense of accomplishment? Why did she join these organizations? Why do many other blacks refuse to join them?

12. Why did the Movement put such emphasis on the voter registration campaign? By securing blacks the vote, what were activists hoping to achieve? Why was it so hard for them to achieve their goals?

13. What was the atmosphere of Mississippi like for a civil rights worker? In what kind of an environment did they work? How did this atmosphere take an emotional toll on Anne?

14. In Anne’s view, what factors – economic, political, social – have caused the terrible conditions for blacks in rural Mississippi?

15. What is Anne's attitude toward organized religion? Does it change as her life progresses? How does she feel about the black ministers? Do you agree with her views?

16. Why is Anne critical of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

17. Why is Anne skeptical of MLK's commitment to non-violent resistance? Does she offer a viable alternative to King's strategy?

18. How does Anne’s gender – the fact that she is a woman – affect how she relates to other people and how other people relate to her? To what extent does her being a woman shape her experiences in the Movement?

19. Do Anne's efforts in the Movement accomplish anything? Why does she often fear that all her work is in vain?

20. Why does Anne leave the Movement? How did her brief stays in Baton Rouge and New Orleans affect her? Why does she return to Mississippi?

21. Why are young people a key component of the Movement?

22. One commentator has remarked about *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, “The relationship between <u>fear</u> and <u>power</u> is at the center of this book. Only by overcoming the former does one achieve the latter.” What does he mean by this?

23. Would you say this book ends on a note of hope or despair?