

James Chaney



James Earl Chaney, the son of a plasterer, was born in Meridian, Mississippi, on 30th May 1943. An early supporter of the struggle for civil rights, Chaney was suspended from school for wearing a [NAACP](#) badge. After leaving Harris Junior College he worked with his father as an apprentice plasterer.

In October, 1963, Chaney began volunteer work at the Meridian office of the [Congress on Racial Equality](#) (CORE). He impressed [Michael Schwerner](#), the head of the office, and was recommended for a full-time post with the organisation.

Chaney was involved with the CORE's [Freedom Summer](#) campaign. On 21st June, 1964, Chaney, along with [Andrew Goodman](#) and [Michael Schwerner](#), went to Longdale to visit Mt. Zion Methodist Church, a building that had been fire-bombed by the [Ku Klux Klan](#) because it was going to be used as a [Freedom School](#).

On the way back to the [CORE](#) office in Meridian, the three men were arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Later that evening they were released from the Neshoba jail only to be stopped again on a rural road where a white mob shot them dead and buried them in a earthen dam.

When Attorney General [Robert Kennedy](#) heard that the men were missing, he arranged for Joseph Sullivan of the [Federal Bureau of Investigations](#) (FBI) to go to Mississippi to discover what has happened. On 4th August, 1964, FBI agents found the bodies in an earthen dam at Old Jolly Farm.



James Earl Chaney's mother, Fannie Chaney and brother Ben at his funeral.

On 13th October, [Ku Klux Klan](#) member, James Jordon, confessed to FBI agents that he witnessed the murders and agreed to co-operate with the investigation. Eventually nineteen men are arrested and charged with violating the civil rights of Chaney, [Michael Schwerner](#) and [Andrew Goodman](#). This included Sheriff Lawrence Rainey and Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price.

On 24th February, 1967, Judge William Cox dismissed seventeen of the nineteen indictments. However, the [Supreme Court](#) overruled him and the Mississippi Burning Trial started on 11th October, 1967. The main evidence against the defendants came from James Jordon, who had taken part in the killings. Another man, Horace Barnette had also confessed to the crime but refused to give evidence at the trial.

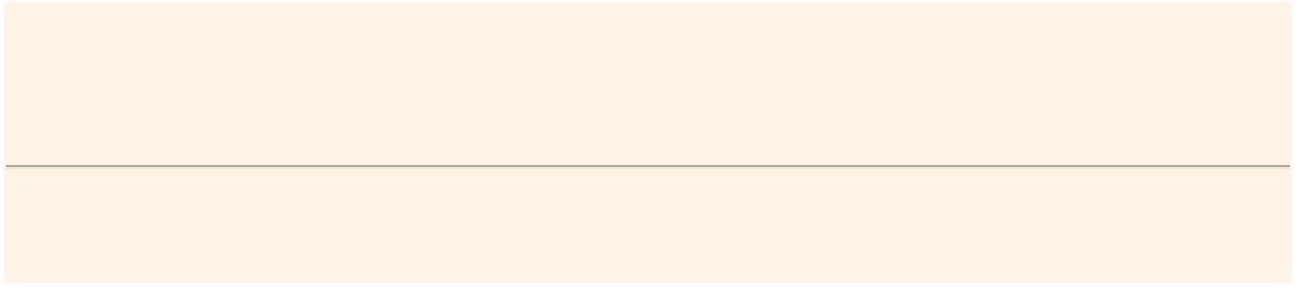
Jordan claimed that Price had released Chaney, [Andrew Goodman](#) and [Michael Schwerner](#) at 10.25. but re-arrested them before they were able to cross the border into Lauderdale County. Price then took them to the deserted Rock Cut Road where he handed them over to the [Ku Klux Klan](#).

On 21st October, 1967, seven of the men were found guilty of conspiring to deprive Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney of their civil rights and sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to ten years. This included James Jordon (4 years) and Cecil Price (6 years) but Sheriff Lawrence Rainey was acquitted.

[Civil Rights](#) activists led by Ruth Schwerner-Berner, the former wife of [Michael Schwerner](#) and Ben Chaney, the brother of James Chaney, continued to campaign for the men to be charged with murder. Eventually, it was decided to charge Edgar Ray Killen, a [Ku Klux Klan](#) member and part-time preacher, with more serious offences related to this case. On June 21, 2005, the forty-first anniversary of the crime, Killen was found guilty of the manslaughter of the three men.



Ruth Schwerner-Berner and Ben Chaney celebrate after Edgar Ray Killen was convicted.



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