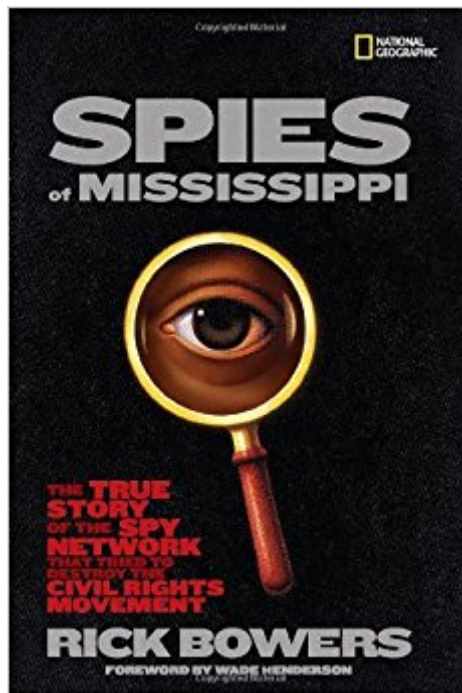




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# Spies Of Mississippi: The True Story Of The Spy Network That Tried To Destroy The Civil Rights Movement



## Synopsis

The Spies of Mississippi is a compelling story of how state spies tried to block voting rights for African Americans during the Civil Rights era. This book sheds new light on one of the most momentous periods in American history. Author Rick Bowers has combed through primary-source materials and interviewed surviving activists named in once-secret files, as well as the writings and oral histories of Mississippi civil rights leaders. Readers get first-hand accounts of how neighbors spied on neighbors, teachers spied on students, ministers spied on church-goers, and spies even spied on spies. The Spies of Mississippi will inspire readers with the stories of the brave citizens who overcame the forces of white supremacy to usher in a new era of hope and freedom—a new age that has recently culminated in the election of Barack Obama. National Geographic supports K-12 educators with ELA Common Core Resources. Visit [www.natgeoed.org/commoncore](http://www.natgeoed.org/commoncore) for more information.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** With all the books on the civil rights movement for young people, it's hard to believe there's a topic that hasn't yet been touched. But Bowers, through impeccable research and personal investigation, seems to have come up with something chillingly new. In 1956,

the state of Mississippi conceived a Sovereignty Commission that began as a propaganda outlet and morphed into a spy network, with a goal of stopping integration and crushing the civil rights movement in the state. Written with clarity and understated power, the book methodically shows how white politicians organized the network and willing blacks accepted payment to infiltrate groups like the NAACP, or in some cases rail against civil rights organizations in churches and African American newspapers. After the election of Governor Ross Barnett, the commission's tactics grew bolder, and violence became a part of the mix. Those with knowledge of the era will find this a vivid depiction of those turbulent days, but for them as well as students new to the history the extremes will be an eye-opener. The inset of photographs might have worked better spread throughout the text, but the story is so powerful it hardly needs visuals. Sources, an extensive bibliography, and copies of some of the commission documents (all were unsealed in 1998) are appended. Grades 7-10. --Ilene Cooper

Rick Bowers is a journalist, songwriter, and head of creative projects for the AARP. He lives in Washington D.C. Wade Henderson is the executive director of the Leadership Commission on Civil Rights.

Fear and hate, two of the most dangerous weapons on the planet. And boy did the segregationists use them to manipulate the public. Segregationists in Mississippi were so determined to undermine the civil rights movement and the legal decisions that were increasingly turning against them that they set up the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to combat it. They recruited spies to check on civil rights workers and anyone they considered a threat. Generally they tried to use more subtle methods to stop the movement, things such as manipulating jobs, white supremacist organizations, etc. All to undermine and stop integration. Bowers shares the stories of men who worked for both sides, those who worked against integration and those who worked for it. Some of these stories were encouraging and some of them were sad. It just bothered me what these men were willing to do to preserve their way of life, no matter how distorted. A powerful example of how much some people hate change and yet how impossible to avoid. This is an important book about the dangers of too much power in the hands of a few and how easily it can be misused. It's also an important book about the courage of individuals in making a difference despite the sacrifices that are sometimes required.

The expose' by Rick Bowers provides the frightening details of how these state government funded

and sanctioned organizations controlled the state of Mississippi in the 1960's. They were authorized by the state legislature and given broad powers by the segregationist Governor Ross Barnett. They were provided with unlimited resources to spy on the black citizens and any white sympathizers in their own state. The Sovereignty Commission was the authorizing body at the state level and the White Citizen's Councils, usually partially made up of local Ku Klux Klan members, controlled the local communities. State's rights was the law and no federal government was going to tell the people of Mississippi what to do. The first time that I ever heard of the Sovereignty Commission was in the John Grisham novel, *The Chamber*, this book fills in the details behind one of the more insidious organizations in Mississippi in the 1960's.

I chose this rating because the book contained information that was new to me and very interesting. Being an African American and 72 years of age, I can say I lived through this period of history and I remember much of what happened during that time, but I've never heard of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, its spy network, and the so-called African American leaders" who were part of this network. I don't think this information is common knowledge; therefore, I would recommend it to everyone who has an interest in the history of the Civil Rights struggle.

My 6th grade son and I read this book together. As an educator I learned information about the civil rights movement I had never learned in class. This book was well written and kept an 11 boy completely engaged. The historical facts presented were interesting and the stories of the characters' lives were intriguing.

My book was missing a page, but still a good story. Writing is very disjointed feeling, but a good and important history.

Good read for those who wish to know history

This is a must read for those interested in filling in the gaps about the history of civil rights in the south...

My son and I both thought this story was sooo interesting. There is also a documentary out about this story

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