



Robert Parris Moses: A Life in Civil Rights and Leadership at the Grassroots

Laura Visser-Maessen

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One of the most influential leaders in the civil rights movement, Robert Parris Moses was essential in making Mississippi a central battleground state in the fight for voting rights. As a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Moses presented himself as a mere facilitator of grassroots activism rather than a charismatic figure like Martin Luther King Jr. His self-effacing demeanor and his success, especially in steering the events that led to the volatile 1964 Freedom Summer and the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, paradoxically gave him a reputation of nearly heroic proportions. Examining the dilemmas of a leader who worked to cultivate local leadership, historian Laura Visser-Maessen explores the intellectual underpinnings of Moses's strategy, its achievements, and its struggles.

This new biography recasts Moses as an effective, hands-on organizer, safeguarding his ideals while leading from behind the scenes. By returning Moses to his rightful place among the foremost leaders of the movement, Visser-Maessen testifies to Moses's revolutionary approach to grassroots leadership and the power of the individual in generating social change.

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