



An in-depth microhistory highlighting how African American farmers and religious institutions played crucial roles in the struggle for land, voting rights, and school desegregation

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Borrowed Land, Stolen Labor, and the Holy Spirit

The Struggle for Power and Equality in Holmes County, Mississippi

Diane T. Feldman

Borrowed Land, Stolen Labor, and the Holy Spirit: The Struggle for Power and Equality in Holmes County, Mississippi chronicles the profound history of a low-income county that became a pivotal site for Delta organizing during the civil rights movement. Landowning African American farmers, who enjoyed more economic independence than sharecroppers, emerged as the grassroots leaders of the movement.

The volume begins with the county's Native American heritage, moving through the periods of removal, land sales to speculators, the rapid increase of enslaved labor in the nineteenth century, and early African American political engagement during Reconstruction. Author Diane T. Feldman explores how African Americans fostered cooperative landownership efforts in the 1880s and 1920s, alongside the development of schools and churches, particularly the Church of God in Christ, a denomination founded in Holmes County. The fight for voting rights started with African American farmers in the 1950s and gained momentum with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. Their struggle to desegregate schools culminated in the landmark Supreme Court case *Alexander v. Holmes*, which abolished dual school systems in the South.

The final chapters cover the past sixty years and current initiatives to restore food production in the Mississippi Delta. Enriched with recent and historic photographs, this volume serves as a microhistory of a single county, illuminating broader themes prevalent throughout Mississippi and the rural South.

DIANE T. FELDMAN was born in Washington, DC, and grew up in New York City before returning to Washington. She was president of a research company there for thirty years until she retired to Mississippi in 2018.

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The Struggle for Power and Equality in Holmes County, Mississippi

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