



The social activism and courage of MacArthur Cotton and others of his era

Mississippi's Black Cotton

MACARTHUR COTTON WITH JOHN OBEE
FOREWORD BY NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES

NEWSOUTH BOOKS

"Cotton's life, captured so powerfully in this moving memoir, shows us the 'everydayness' of racial apartheid, and therefore the need, every day, to withstand it, to fight back, to refuse to back down, especially when it's hard. He's given us a blueprint, a model for us as ordinary people, who can, like he did and so many largely unknown others, become extraordinary in fighting for human dignity and freedom. This book is a gift for the ages."—**Eddie S. Glaude Jr.**, author of *We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For*

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MACARTHUR COTTON was a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi from 1961 through 1966. He later served as chairman of the Attala County NAACP and the Attala County Democratic Party. He lives in Kosciusko, Mississippi.

Focal Point



JOHN OBEE served in the civil rights movement in Mississippi in the 1960s and later worked at the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

The literature of the civil rights movement is replete with stories about the major actors in the movement, including, for example, Martin Luther King, but there is little focus on the MacArthur Cottons of the era: the young Black men and women who at great risk to their physical and mental health chose to become involved in the movement when so many others chose not to. Without these young Black people there would have been no movement, and what was accomplished with the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s would never have happened.

This was particularly true in Mississippi, the most repressive of all fifty states, one that had sponsored state terrorism to ensure that white supremacy reigned supreme. Despite having no real reason to believe that change could happen, MacArthur Cotton and those like him believed that they had to act. In MacArthur's case, his actions were in the tradition of his activist family, and he relates his involvement with many of the important figures in the Mississippi movement, such as Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer.

Importantly, he also honors others like him, who are largely unknown to history, such as the Greenes and McGees in Greenwood, who were waging their own war against their oppressive state. While having been imprisoned many times and having lived in a constant state of terror, Cotton persisted as a foot soldier in a war and, as with all veterans of wars, was left with emotional and psychological scars. Despite the toll that it took on him as a person, however, he remains a committed activist to this day.

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