

Probe reopened in '64 murders of Black men

By Shelia Byrd
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(AP) - In 1964, FBI agents assigned to the biggest civil rights investigation of their time were searching for three missing voter-registration volunteers when the remains of two young Black men were pulled from the murky Mississippi River. Four decades later, a federal prosecutor in Mississippi is renewing the investigation into the two all-but-forgotten killings.

At the time, the FBI was more interested in finding the three civil rights workers. And this being Mississippi in the 1960s — when a White man could kill a Black man and get away with it — the investigation into the other deaths did not get far.

U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton said the time is right to pursue justice. The investigation is part of a larger effort by prosecutors in the Deep South to punish crimes committed long ago during the Civil Rights era.

Last month, a former Ku Klux Klansman was convicted in Mississippi in the slayings of the three civil rights workers. James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were ambushed by carloads of Klansmen, beaten, shot and buried in a red-clay dam in a crime that focused the nation's attention on the struggle for racial equality in the South.

Some of the old cases that were recently prosecuted "have heightened the awareness of what's gone on in the past. Maybe the climate is different today" compared with a few years ago, Lampton said.

Forty-one years ago, searchers were looking for Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney when a fisherman nearby found the lower part of a man's body near Tallulah, La., and notified the FBI. The remains of another man were found a day later.

Investigators checked the pockets of the first victim and identified him as Charles Eddie Moore, an Alcorn A&M College student. The other man was identified as Henry Hezekiah Dee, a saw-mill worker.

The two Black 19-year-olds had been tied to a tree near Meadville on May 2, 1964, and beaten mercilessly, authorities said. The bodies were then chained to a jeep engine block and thrown into the river, according to FBI



Thomas Moore sits with Mary Byrd on the front porch of her Natchez, Miss., home. Moore's younger brother, Charles, and Byrd's younger brother, Henry Dee, were murdered in Franklin County in 1964. U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton reopened the investigation into the Dee and Moore slayings. Mississippi was no stranger to racist violence in the 1960s.

documents.

In November 1964, two reputed Klansmen were arrested by the state of Mississippi — and one of them confessed to involvement, according to the FBI — but the murder charges were later dropped. Moore's brother, Thomas Moore of Colorado Springs, Colo., said he believes both of those men are still alive.

"They seemed to have had strong evidence linking these two Klansmen to these abductions, including the confession. The fact that they were not prosecuted at the time shows the lack of real interest in the part of the state," said Penny Weaver, who grew up in Mississippi during the 1960s and is now a spokeswoman for the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups.

"There was no commitment to justice for Black people by officials in Mississippi. We have the names of

dozens of other Black people who were killed by White people during that time and whose stories have never gotten any attention."

She added: "If they hadn't been searching for Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney, and two of those three were White, they wouldn't have found these bodies."

According to a 2000 story in the *Clarion-Ledger* of Jackson, an FBI informant told investigators in 1964 that the killings were prompted by a false rumor that Black Muslims were arming themselves for an insurrection.

But The *New York Times* reported in 1966 that one of the suspects told authorities the Black men were killed because one of them had peeped through a window at the White man's wife.

Lampton has also reopened the investigation into the 1967 car-bombing death of a Black man named

mas Moore was away in the military when his brother disappeared. He said his mother made him promise not to hunt down the men responsible for his younger brother's death.

"After Charles was brutalized, she asked me to stay in the Army because she wanted to know I would have safety. She was afraid I was going out and get involved and eventually get killed," he said. "I had to swallow my pride, but I made her that promise."

Moore said he decided to push harder for justice after he was approached for interviews by David Ridgen, a documentary filmmaker for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Thomas Moore and Ridgen traveled across Mississippi together for two weeks in early July, interviewing people, hoping to jog someone's memory.

"Every day has been a triumph. Thomas has been getting new information that he has delivered to Dunn Lampton," Ridgen said.

Thomas Moore said they were told that both men arrested in the case — James

Ford Seale of Roxie and Charles Marcus Edwards of Meadville — are still alive, but Lampton could not establish their whereabouts.

According to FBI documents and newspaper accounts, Edwards confessed involvement in 1964, saying the young men were beaten but left alive in the woods. In later years, he denied ever admitting to any involvement.

Calls by The Associated Press to a number listed for Charles M. Edwards in Meadville were not returned. There was no listing for James Ford Seale.

Lampton said he would meet with state and local prosecutors in the coming weeks to determine how much evidence still exists, given the possibility that some witnesses have died over the years. He said he may offer immunity to people who come forward with information.

Ollie Mae Allen, 62, of Chicago said a conviction in the slaying of her brother, Henry Dee, would bring some relief to the family.

"That was a murder they didn't have to do" she said.

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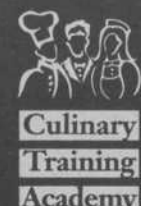
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