



# Devil's Sanctuary: An Eyewitness History of Mississippi Hate Crimes

*James L. Dickerson, Alex A. Alston Jr.*

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Lynchings, beatings, arson, denial of rights, false imprisonment--the civil rights era brought attention to these heinous offenses that were the status quo for African Americans in many areas of the country. And no state was more notorious as a sanctuary for the murderers and perpetrators of hate crimes than Mississippi. In 1956 state lawmakers installed the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to preserve segregation and "Mississippi Values" by declaring the state outside the jurisdiction of the federal government. Under the auspices of the governor and lieutenant governor, the commission joined forces with groups such as the White Citizens' Councils, which would stop at nothing in their quest for white supremacy.

In *Devil's Sanctuary*, Alex A. Alston Jr. and James L. Dickerson, both of whom grew up in small-town Mississippi, recount the state's shameful racist history and explore how Mississippi was able to get away with its role as a safe haven for the most virulent and violent racists, allowing them immunity from prosecution. The breakdown of institutions, with everyone from judges and elected officials to clergy and the media looking the other way, not only permitted but even encouraged acts so horrendous that many citizens cannot believe they happened--and still could happen--in the United States.

Analysis of the major crimes, the institutional collusion, delayed and never-delivered justice, and the state's attempts at atonement is interspersed with the authors' accounts of what they saw, heard, and experienced as whites--thus "insiders"--from that troubled time to the present day. *Devil's Sanctuary* is part shocking history and part moving memoir, an eyewitness account of judicial, media, and economic terrorism directed against African Americans.

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