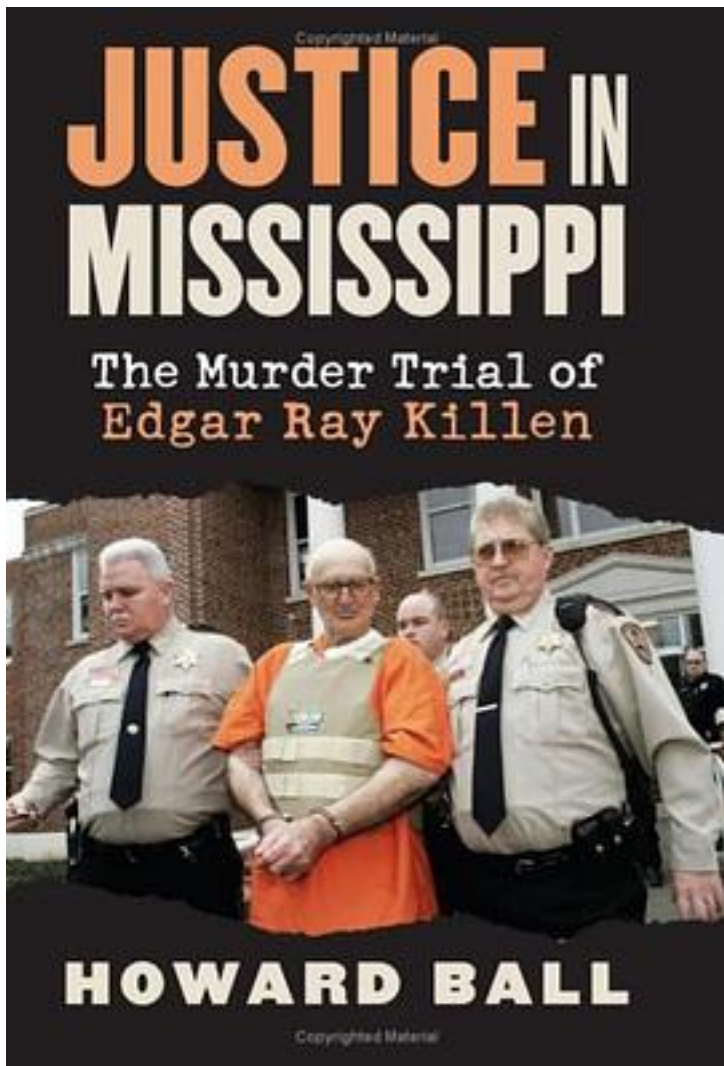


# Justice in Mississippi



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The slaying of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1964 was a notorious event documented in Howard Ball's 2004 *Murder in Mississippi*. Now Ball revisits that grisly crime to tell how, four decades later, justice finally came to Philadelphia. Originally tried in 1967, Baptist minister and Klansman Edgar Ray Killen was set free because one juror couldn't bring herself to convict a preacher. Now Ball tells how progressive-minded state officials finally re-opened the case and, forty years after the fact, enabled Mississippians to reconcile with their tragic past. The second trial of 80-year-old "Preacher" Killen, who was convicted by a unanimous jury, took place in June 2005, with the verdict delivered on the forty-first anniversary of the crime. Ball, himself a former civil rights activist, attended the trial and interviewed most of the participants, as well as local citizens and journalists covering the proceedings. Ball retraces the cycle of events that led to the resurrection of this "cold case," from the attention generated by the film *Mississippi Burning* to a new state attorney general's quest for closure. He reviews the strategies of the prosecution and defense and examines the evidence introduced at the trial--as well as evidence that could not be presented--and also relates firsthand accounts of the proceedings, including his unnerving staring contest with Killen himself from only ten feet away. Ball explores the legal, social, political, and pseudo-religious roots of the crime, including the culture of impunity that shielded from prosecution whites who killed blacks or "outside agitators." He also assesses the transformation in Mississippi's life and politics that allowed such a case to be tried after so long. Indeed, the trial itself was a major catalytic force for change in Mississippi, enabling Mississippians to convey a much more positive national image for their state. Ball's gripping account illuminates all of this and shows that, despite racism's long stranglehold on the Deep South, redemption is not beyond the grasp of those who envision a more just society.

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