

## Program Summary (16 February 2012)

At 8:00 p.m., Vice-President Adams alerted the membership that the evening's presentation would begin shortly. Visitors were introduced.

At 8:10 p.m., Wade introduced the evening's speaker **Dr. David Oshinsky**. Professor Oshinsky holds the Jack S. Blanton Chair in History at the University of Texas, Austin. Dr. Oshinsky has written and reported frequently for the New York Times. He is author of numerous books, including one on the history of polio that won a Pulitzer Prize.

The title of his talk is **Infamous 'Mississippi Burning' Murders That Changed the Civil Rights Movement in America. Delayed Justice: Tracking**. The membership warmly welcomed Professor Oshinsky.



The lecture was a quite personal account of how he came to be involved with the bringing to justice of the perpetrators of the killing of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1964. The buried bodies were discovered six weeks later through efforts of the FBI. Dr. Oshinsky was sent years later by the New York Times to read the so-called Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Papers that were about to be unsealed. In those files was information on the name of the informant who took the FBI agents

to the bodies (in exchange for \$35,000), as well as fairly definitive evidence of the role of a Baptist minister who was thought to be the leader of the 1964 killings. (Those arrested at the time of the events were not convicted.)

After reading the files, Dr. Oshinsky and his nineteen-year-old son spent an evening with the minister (under somewhat dubious circumstances) and wrote an article about the events. The article ended with a suggestion that prosecution would still be appropriate, even decades after the events. In June, 2005, an eighty-year-old Edgar Ray Killen began serving a sixty-year sentence for manslaughter, a jury having rejected counts of murder. The deaths of the three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, led directly to the 1964 Voting Rights Act and the 1965 Civil Rights Act, signature legislation of President Johnson.

Dr. Oshinsky suggested a modest view of his role in these events, and that he was not cut out to be an ideal reporter. He was rather much more at home as a history professor and author on many topics. He rather proudly suggested that he had in fact bonded with his son during his Mississippi investigation, and noted that his son, Matthew, is now editor of the New York Section of the Wall Street Journal. So the journalism training at the University of Wisconsin and on the ground in Mississippi had taken hold.

During a rapid fire question-and-answer session, Dr. Oshinsky opined that Mississippi had changed dramatically in a few decades. He noted that there have been a number of similar prosecutions during the last decade, including the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama the same year. A final question directed about our current governor was deftly ducked, and an appreciative audience gave Dr. Oshinsky a warm round of applause.

The program concluded at 8:55 p.m.

David W. Scott  
Recording Secretary