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Stokely: A Life

By Peniel E. Joseph



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Stokely Carmichael, the charismatic and controversial black activist, stepped onto the pages of history when he called for “Black Power” during a speech one Mississippi night in 1966. A firebrand who straddled both the American civil rights and Black Power movements, Carmichael would stand for the rest of his life at the center of the storm he had unleashed that night. In *Stokely*, preeminent civil rights scholar Peniel E. Joseph presents a groundbreaking biography of Carmichael, using his life as a prism through which to view the transformative African American freedom struggles of the twentieth century.

During the heroic early years of the civil rights movement, Carmichael and other civil rights activists advocated nonviolent measures, leading sit-ins, demonstrations, and voter registration efforts in the South that culminated with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Still, Carmichael chafed at the slow progress of the civil rights movement and responded with Black Power, a movement that urged blacks to turn the rhetoric of freedom into a reality through whatever means necessary. Marked by the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., a wave of urban race riots, and the rise of the anti-war movement, the late 1960s heralded a dramatic shift in the tone of civil rights. Carmichael became the revolutionary icon for this new racial and political landscape, helping to organize the original Black Panther Party in Alabama and joining the iconic Black Panther Party for Self Defense that would galvanize frustrated African Americans and ignite a backlash among white Americans and the mainstream media. Yet at the age of twenty-seven, Carmichael made the abrupt decision to leave the United States, embracing a pan-African ideology and adopting the name of Kwame Ture, a move that baffled his supporters and made him something of an enigma until his death in 1998.

A nuanced and authoritative portrait, *Stokely* captures the life of the man whose uncompromising vision defined political radicalism and provoked a national reckoning on race and democracy.



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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Stokely Carmichael achieved iconic status during the turbulent 1960s with his call for black power. He was widely perceived as a strident counterpoint to the more diplomatic Martin Luther King Jr., the icon of the civil rights movement. But historian Joseph offers a more nuanced portrait of this activist, who started as a community organizer fighting for and with the underclass and who jolted the racist core of the American consciousness. He broadened the scope of his humanitarian concerns beyond the U.S. to develop a Pan-African perspective. He married South African singer Miriam Makeba and developed close friendships with African leaders Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, further provoking the suspicions of an already suspicious U.S. intelligence force. Like King, Carmichael became a critic of the Vietnam War, and following King's assassination the civil rights establishment distanced itself even more from Carmichael. Despite Carmichael's highly racialized rhetoric, his personal humanistic values suggested a closer link to American core values than many may have thought. --Vernon Ford

Review

"A thorough and engaging account of one of the most important figures of the civil rights movement. *Stokely* achieves its primary goal of restoring Carmichael to his rightful place in the pantheon of influential Americans.... Offers delicious details, thoughtful analysis and a good amount of drama concerning this enigmatic figure.... Joseph's landmark book is the best portrait yet of this important, complicated man and the America he so wanted to love but could not."

Daily Beast

"An unflinching look at an unflinching man."

Counter-Punch

2014 winner of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change National Book Award

***Daily Beast* Best Books About the Volatile 60s**

New York Times Book Review

"An insightful, highly engaging and fluently written biography"

Washington Post

"Joseph's account of Carmichael's life is well-written and well-researched, providing persuasive explanations for his appeal.... Joseph's biography fills a huge void and is a welcome addition to the scholarly literature on the civil rights movement."

Boston Globe

“This is at its heart a book of ideas — ideas about power, freedom, and identity — and of a life, the author writes, that ‘took shape against the backdrop of a domestic war for America's very soul.’”

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“Mr. Joseph's detail rich biography delves into the life of a political activist turned icon while not forgetting to show us his human side.”

Post & Courier

“Peniel E. Joseph's newly published biography of Black liberation activist Stokely Carmichael not only takes its rightful place next to Taylor Branch's epic trilogy *The King Years*, but also to one of the most powerful autobiographies by any American: Stokely Carmichael's own *Ready For Revolution*.... *Stokely: A Life* is a quality read. By highlighting the life of one of the US civil rights/black liberation most important organizers and thinkers, Peniel E. Joseph has done a great service to history and to the people Stokely fought for. Furthermore, Peniel's text has lifted Carmichael out of an obscurity he not only didn't deserve, but which also prevented a more complete understanding of a man who, with Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr., deserves to be recognized as one of the great leaders of one of the greatest grassroots movements for liberation in history: the Black freedom struggle in the United States.”

Afro-American

“Meticulously-researched and painstakingly-detailed, *Stokely: A Life* is a fast-flowing, informative read which intimately follows its subject from the cradle to the grave in absorbing fashion. In the process, this powerful portrait effectively re-positions him as an uncompromising prophet who played a pivotal role in the struggle for black equality.”

Amsterdam News

About the Author

Peniel E. Joseph is a professor of history and the director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Tufts University. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nancy Fisher:

The guide with title *Stokely: A Life* includes a lot of information that you can understand it. You can get a lot of advantage after read this book. That book exist new knowledge the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world at this point. That is important to yo7u to learn how the

improvement of the world. This book will bring you inside new era of the globalization. You can read the e-book with your smart phone, so you can read the idea anywhere you want.

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