
Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam”



Singer-songwriter Nina Simone’s career crossed many musical boundaries, encompassing elements of Jazz, Blues, Folk, Rhythm and Blues, and Gospel. As did many artists in the 1960s, Simone used her music to protest the treatment of African Americans, nowhere more forcefully than in the 1964 release “Mississippi Goddam.”

“Mississippi Goddam” reflects directly on two pivotal events in Mississippi: the assassination of Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers and the killing of four girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. The title of the song led it to be banned in several states, and Simone later told an interviewer that though the song became closely associated with the Civil Rights movement, it hurt her career.

Excerpt from Lyrics

Don't tell me
I tell you
Me and my people just about due
I've been there so I know
They keep on saying "Go slow!"...

You don't have to live next to me
Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi
Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the overall mood of the song?
2. Why do you think Simone chose such a strong title for the song? Do you think the title is justified? Why or why not?
3. How effective do you think this song is in expressing the frustrations of African Americans during the Civil Rights movement?