



## Waveland

### Simone Zelitch

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*Thoroughly researched, this novel invites further understanding of the civil rights movement and the challenges of idealism.*

Simone Zelitch's novel *Waveland* chronicles the social upheavals of the Freedom Summer of 1964 while also telling the little-known story of American Jews who participated in the civil rights movement.

Limiting herself to one tale a night, narrator Beth Fine recounts the summer she spent registering voters in Mississippi to her daughter, Tamara. As a precocious and idealistic Swarthmore dropout who studied French Literature, Beth volunteers for Freedom Summer and travels from Pennsylvania to the Mississippi Delta, where she is determined to make a difference by participating in sit-ins and other nonviolent acts of protest. Committed and idealistic to a fault, Beth soon discovers the limits of her influence and that despite the best of intentions, change is hard to effect.

Ostensibly, the book is about Beth, who calls herself "the girl who did everything wrong," but it's also about the larger forces that were at work during the Freedom Summer, told through Beth's story of love and loss. A running conceit throughout the novel is that Beth jumps into situations that may be too challenging for her—from her participation in a "wade-in" at a pool in her hometown of Chester, Pennsylvania, to the seemingly insurmountable difficulties she faces in Mississippi.

*Waveland* illuminates a group of Jews who were heavily invested in desegregating America, and Beth's story is just one of many. She meets Southern Jews, like shopkeeper Cy Cohen, and their encounters make for an intriguing dynamic.

Structurally, the story jumps frequently through time. While the effect is to illustrate Beth's state of mind—her confusion, her attempts to reconcile reality and intent—at times it is difficult to keep track of which decade it is. Sometimes Zelitch alternates time frames in the same chapter.

Overall, *Waveland* is a well-written, thoroughly researched novel about the civil rights movement and of the people who played a part in bringing about change in America.

BARBARA NICKLES (Summer 2015)

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