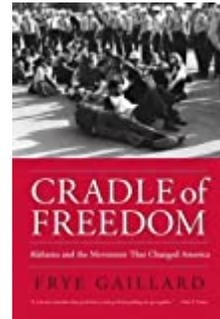




Frye Gaillard. *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. xvi + 419 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1388-3.



Reviewed by Karen Utz (University of Alabama Birmingham)

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Alabama's Struggle for Justice

Some of the key events of the civil rights movement took place in Alabama. Frye Gaillard's *Cradle of Freedom* focuses on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, George Wallace's infamous stand in the doorway at the University of Alabama, the Freedom Rides, the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and Bloody Sunday. This fine book speaks to the bravery and wisdom of the leaders and legends of the movement—Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Fred Shuttlesworth, who claimed that for him the cause took “divine insanity” (p.106).

The strength of this extraordinary story is Gaillard's compelling portrayal of the early civil rights leaders, as well as all the ordinary “apostles of decency,” both black and white, who believed it was possible to build a better world (p.xvi). Gaillard recognizes such overlooked individuals as Charles Gomillion, a professor at Tuskegee Institute who spent over thirty years crusading for black voting rights, and Vernon Johns, King's eloquent predecessor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, who continually spoke out against the “indignities of segregation” (p.xvi). Twenty years earlier, Alabamian Aubrey William, Roo-

sevelt's director of the National Youth Administration, championed the concept of work relief and provided jobs to young black and white males during the Great Depression. In his later years he returned to Birmingham and started the *Southern Farmer*, a publication that spoke to numerous issues, including segregation.

While these exceptional leaders have carved their indelible places in history, Gaillard stresses that the brunt of the work was done by “foot soldiers as well as the generals” (p.xvi). It came out of the will of ordinary people determined to challenge an unfair system and fight what King referred to as “a degenerating sense of nobodiness” (p.146). This grassroots energy became the pattern throughout Alabama in the mid-1960s. It was fueled by colleges and churches, and by county organizations, like the Freedom Quilting Bee, in Wilcox County, which sold hand-crafted quilts and used the funds to send black kids to college. This energy sustained Lemon Johnson, an early supporter of the Share Croppers Union who had battled for living wages since the 1930s. And it burned in Jonathan Daniels, a young Episcopalian priest brutally gunned down as he attempted to protect Ruby Sales, a

young black woman from Lowndes County.

In the acknowledgment section of *Cradle of Freedom*, Gaillard notes that the civil rights movement became the “primary political and moral reference point” for many Alabamians of his generation (p.349). Perhaps this is the reason Gaillard, an Alabama native, has succeeded in providing an incredibly moving and well-researched history

of his state’s role in the civil rights movement.

This thoughtful, in-depth, and highly readable (thank goodness!) account of what occurred during the civil rights movement in a state once deemed the Cradle of the Confederacy will definitely be required reading in my America in the Sixties class.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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