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Book Review: In Peace and Freedom: My Journey in Selma

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power over white people “ (p. 38). Dunning’s students’ writings affirm they enthusiastically invested great energy in engaging research to prove those beliefs and expand the prejudice and intolerance of those who questioned what reconstruction meant or what it was to offer and ensure to black individuals.

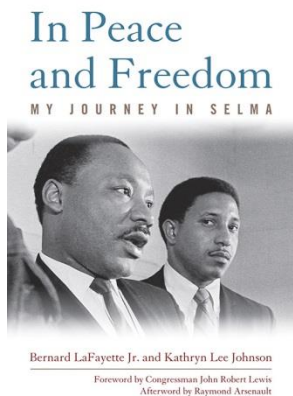
Over the ten essays included in this book, all graduate student authors held highly respected academic credentials but the tolerance and openness to discussion and debate over long held biases emerged rarely. Professor Dunning and his followers in the higher levels of academia shock and alarm us today. We see the highest goal of education as tolerance for others rights and beliefs. The greatest success of a debate is to bring a black and white issue to gray.

Any students or faculty of history of America after the period of the Civil War and throughout the era of Reconstruction will find this collection of essays of great interest. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery have provided an intellectually rigorous text for students and faculty who study reconstruction and the influence of academia on historical events.

Yes, history is written by the winners but sometimes it is rarely won without time being the ultimate deciding factor.

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In Peace and Freedom: My Journey in Selma.
LaFayette, Jr., Bernard and Kathryn Lee Johnson.
Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2013.
ISBN: 978-0-8131-4386-6 240 p. \$35.00.



As the civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s recedes into the past it becomes more important than ever to hear the stories of those who directly participated in the struggle while there still is a chance. Bernard LaFayette, Jr. is not a name as immediately recognizable as some in the pantheon of civil rights heroes but his behind-the-scenes work (by design) was crucial in setting the stage for

one of the civil rights era’s greatest triumphs. His story is remarkable and inspiring.

LaFayette (born 1940) became interested in civil rights starting with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. and then by his study of Mohandas Gandhi’s ideas concerning nonviolence and social change, LaFayette quickly became active in the movement shortly after starting college. He participated in the Nashville lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rider campaigns of 1961, and the Mississippi Nonviolent Movement before joining the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) Southern Regional Council’s Voter Education Project. Promised a directorship in the Project, LaFayette was initially disappointed when he was informed there were no vacancies but leapt at the chance to take on the Selma, Alabama Voter Registration Campaign. Others had deemed it a hopeless endeavor thanks to the longtime brutal regime of white supremacy and the resulting hopelessness and “complacency” of Selma’s black population.

LaFayette provides a fascinating account of his courageous organizing work as, slowly and carefully, he organized the few local black activists willing to participate in a campaign to register black voters. Crucial to his ultimate success was LaFayette’s ability to get local people to start taking control of the movement. His preference was to work behind the scenes once he had established his credibility with local activists. In the process he had to contend with the fearsome brutality of such arch-segregationists as the infamous Dallas County Sheriff, Jim Clark: “his posse was tantamount to a legalized state-sponsored lynch mob” (28). LaFayette took courageous risks and at times encountered physical violence and was thrown in jail as well. Carrying him through the struggle was his strong belief in using nonviolence. For LaFayette, nonviolence included the capacity to recognize the humanity of one’s oppressor.

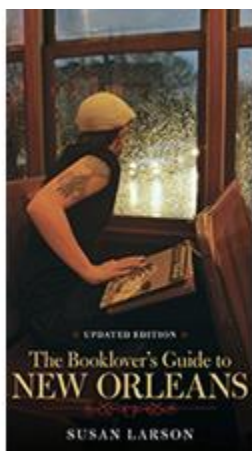
LaFayette’s other main insight was to use a strategy of legal point of challenge. The Voter Registration campaign had two main goals: to implement nonviolent direct action and to build a case for the federal government to prove that Dallas County was discriminating against black people’s right to register to vote. Getting federal power behind the cause was crucial to its success. In fulfilling both goals LaFayette and those he encouraged to work as advocates and organizers, were successful. The event now known as “Bloody Sunday” in March 1965 as peaceful, nonviolent marchers were brutally attacked while they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge going out of Selma, received national television exposure. The actual Selma to Montgomery march which took place after a cooling off period drew in thousands of participants including celebrities such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Harry Belafonte, and the resulting publicity that dramatized the sheer injustice of denying African Americans the vote, helped ensure that President Lyndon B. Johnson would sign the Voting Rights Act, thus guaranteeing federal enforcement.

Bernard LaFayette's explication of his nonviolent organizing tactics is both fascinating and illuminating. Far from being a spontaneous action, the Alabama Voter Registration Campaign was a carefully planned operation that entailed significant risk of life and limb. At the same time, it addressed a longstanding wrong during a time of national turmoil as the broader civil rights movement proceeded to break down racial barriers on many fronts at long last. Although Bernard LaFayette saw himself more as a catalyst who preferred to mobilize the population at large than as a charismatic leader such as Martin Luther King, his wise and brave actions in Selma, Alabama, based on an unwavering foundation of nonviolent action, were absolutely crucial to securing the right to vote for all citizens.

The history of the civil rights movement may be history but it is very relevant to the present day. On October 2, 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County, Ala. v. Holder* weakened enforcement of the preclearance provision required of states having a history of obstructing voter registration in Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act and is a reminder that liberty requires vigilance. LaFayette's book should be required reading for anyone who takes the right to vote for granted. LaFayette's book is recommended reading for those interested in the history of the civil rights movement, the history of Alabama and the South more generally, and African American history.

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The Booklover's Guide to New Orleans. 2nd edition. Larson, Susan. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8071-5307-9 pbk. 312 p. \$24.95



Originally published in 1999, this updated edition of a well-loved guide book offers much more than a directory of tourist destinations for the literarily inclined. The book begins with a detailed historical overview divided into distinct time periods, which covers the writers, editors, publishers, booksellers, and other important figures who helped create and sustain the literary culture for which New Orleans has become famous. Well-written and full of

fascinating anecdotes throughout its pages, the updated introduction also includes an entirely new section covering the time period during and immediately following Hurricane Katrina, which details the history of how writers and publishers, both nationally and locally, responded to the disaster and the rebuilding that continues to this day.

The middle section of the book provides multiple directories to assist travelers planning to visit New Orleans, including a "Literary Address Book" describing essential landmarks and their significance, a "Literary Date Book" which provides a calendar of the many annual festivals and events the city offers, and a descriptive directory of New Orleans' numerous independent, specialty, and antiquarian bookstores. This is followed by a section of "New Orleans Reading Lists" compiled by the author, which recommend New Orleans literature in many different categories, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's books, and books specifically dealing with Hurricane Katrina as well. These lists may be just as useful to librarians who want to build their libraries' Southern Literature collections as they will be to travelers who enjoy reading about places they are visiting. The book concludes with a unique section where New Orleans authors offer their own lists of favorite things about the city.

Though it is easy for travel guides to become outdated and because of this, librarians may hesitate to purchase them for their collections, the historical and cultural focus of this book will make it a worthwhile read even after the functional directory of addresses, phone numbers, and web site addresses listed for each location changes or becomes obsolete. It offers a snapshot of literary New Orleans which will continue to be of interest.

Allison Faix
Coastal Carolina University

Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South. Hutton, T.R.C. Lexington, KY : University Press of Kentucky, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8131-3646-2. 444 p. \$50.

