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Explaining the Black Freedom Struggles in Memphis: Selected Reviews

Green, Laurie B. *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Dowdy, G. Wayne. *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.

Honey, Michael K. *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

Hoppe, Sherry L. and Bruce W. Speck. *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils: Lessons Learned in Memphis's Civil Rights Classroom.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007.

Lovett, Bobby L. *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.

By STEVEN A. KNOWLTON

Recent discussion of the history of the black freedom struggle and its subspecialty, history of the civil rights movement, has involved questioning the "consensus memory"[1] that (in the words of a grade-schooler), "The civil rights movement is when Martin Luther King came and gave African Americans their rights."[2] In particular, two historians have phrased the line of

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[1] Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.)

[2] Dennis Knowlton, interview with the author, Memphis, Tennessee, July 10, 2012.

inquiry most succinctly: J. Todd Moye asks historians to delve into the origins and structure of local movements, and Charles Eagles seeks to incorporate the civil rights movement into a larger story of the South during the 1950s and 1960s. Thomas Carlyle's insistence on the necessity of great leaders to shape history aligns with the consensus memory, and is worth adding to any investigation of an era of sweeping change.

Since the 1980 publication of William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights*,[3] historians have looked at local movements within the black freedom struggle to understand the sweep of events that brought down Jim Crow in the 1950's and 1960's. While a focus on local movements has become one of the most important tools in the civil rights historian's kit, all such studies are not equally effective. A simple narrative of events in a community does provide a factual framework, but deeper analysis is necessary to understand *why* and *how* the African-American community under discussion achieved what it did. Speaking of his own work, J. Todd Moye writes, "I wanted to ask more basic questions about *how* people became civil rights activists. ... [W]e know that most of the people in these circumstances did not and do not become activists. ... So why did some people 'get organized,' as the saying goes?"[4] Moye continues with an assertion that a community study must also explore how activists developed their ideas, strategies and vocabulary.

Charles Eagles, on the other hand, believes that historians who are openly sympathetic to civil rights activists are failing to paint a complete picture. . His critique is not an explicit rebuttal of the "history-with-a-purpose" school exemplified by C. Vann Woodward, whose writings "allowed modern-day Americans to

[3] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1980.)

[4] J. Todd Moye, "Focusing Our Eyes on the Prize: How Community Studies Are Reframing and Rewriting the History of the Civil Rights Movement." In *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*, ed. Emilye Crosby (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011): 151-52.

imagine alternatives to the segregated status quo and to envision a biracial coalition of working people capable of reclaiming the democratic promise of Populism."[5] However, in Eagles's view, most historians of the civil rights movement "have written about the movement essentially from the perspective of the movement without fully considering the larger history of the South during the entire era. As a result, important parts of the story remain untold."[6] Eagles believes that white resistance to the civil rights movement should be explored alongside the movement toward black freedom.

Alongside this debate, a persistent tension in historiography generally is that of the Great Man Theory versus sociologically-grounded analysis. Thomas Carlyle famously wrote that, "In all epochs of the world's history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable savior of his epoch; -- the lightning without which the fuel never would have burnt."[7] Community-based history will never find the Napoleons and Mahomets of Carlyle's narrative, but there should be some consideration of the impact of charismatic leaders even in the local context.

Not all community-based historians of the civil rights movement focus equally on all three concerns. Several recent books on the movement in Memphis can be analyzed in this three-fold framework. Those books which are most persuasive do take into account the process of organization, the nature of white resistance, and the role of prominent individuals.

The civil rights movement in Memphis followed the general contours of the movement across the country, but faced unique challenges. Memphis had both a history of machine politics and an urban industrial economy that made labor relations an important front for civil rights activists. One of the first blows against Jim Crow occurred in 1953 when the Tennessee state

[5] Robert C. McMath Jr., "C. Vann Woodward and the Burden of Southern Populism," *Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 4 (2001): 742.

[6] Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 4 (2000): 816.

[7] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship.* (1841; repr. with *Sartor Resartus*, New York: Dutton, 1908): 250-251.

constitution was amended to repeal its poll tax.[8] The next two came in 1954 with the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawing segregation in schools and with the death of E.H. Crump, the "Boss" of the Democratic machine that controlled Memphis city government.[9] A series of lawsuits against segregation in city facilities such as libraries, parks and buses were delayed for years by a federal judge, Marion Boyd. When the sit-in movement spread from Greensboro, N.C., and Nashville in 1960, students from historically black LeMoyne College[10] in Memphis began sit-ins that led to desegregation of most public places in Memphis by 1965. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was the dominant civil rights organization in Memphis; the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Council did not even have branches in Memphis in the 1960's. The NAACP led boycotts of white merchants who refused service to blacks or discriminated in employment, and pushed against the *de facto* segregation of schools that persisted even after token desegregation occurred in 1961. A series of weekly boycotts of schools by black students ("Black Mondays") in 1969 forced some concessions in hiring practices by the all-white school board, and in 1971 Maxine Smith became the first African American elected to the school board. A 1973 federal court ruling implemented busing to integrate the schools, and had the result of prompting many white families to enroll students in private schools or to move to the suburbs.[11]

[8] Lewis L. Laska, *The Tennessee State Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

[9] William D. Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 351.

[10] Now called LeMoyne-Owen College

[11] An overview of these events may be found in Sharon D. Wright, *Race, Power, & Political Emergence* (New York: Garland, 2000) and Roger Biles, "A Bittersweet Victory: Public School Desegregation in Memphis," *Journal of Negro Education* 55, no. 4 (1986): 470-83.

Memphis is best known in civil rights history, however, for the 1968 strike by sanitation workers. This industrial action was also racial in character, because the ill-treatment of the workers by the city government was rooted in discriminatory hiring and employment practices. The strike galvanized the African-American community of Memphis and polarized the races as Mayor Henry Loeb and his allies in the press demonized the workers. The assassination of national civil rights leader Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, is considered by many Memphians to be the starting point for decades of open racial hostility, which was an ironic end to the slow thaw in race relations that had begun in the late 1950s.

Laurie B. Green's *Battling the Plantation Mentality* is, as its title suggests, a chronicle of the efforts of African-American Memphians to overcome the social structures that relegated them to low-paid jobs and low-status social roles.[12] Green draws upon a close study of Memphis newspapers, both those published for white audiences and those aimed at African American. But she also analyzes the papers of local organizations such as the NAACP and, especially, numerous oral histories. Her emphasis throughout is two-fold; she studies not only the means but also the motives behind African-American Memphians organizing for power.

Moye pointed out that, "Life tends to get in the way of social protest organizing."[13] Yet, the period of the "classical" civil rights movement (1955-1965) saw hundreds of thousands of protesters in the streets. Green uses Memphis as a case study to explore that phenomenon in a single city and provide some explanations for the intense activity of that period. Green sees the events in Memphis as part of the "long" civil rights movement, starting her analysis around 1940 and concluding with the 1968

[12] Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.)

[13] Moye, "Focusing Our Eyes," 152.

sanitation strike.[14] Her approach is thematic rather than narrative, which is a necessity if one is to follow the thread of any single topic over the nearly three decades she covers.

Green sees the community-based protest movement arising out of political circumstances and changing attitudes within the African-American community. Although many African Americans in Memphis had the vote, their actual voting options were tightly proscribed by the Crump machine's hold on public services. "Boss" E.H. Crump controlled Democratic politics in Memphis (and therefore, city government, because Memphis was solidly Democratic throughout that period) from around 1909 to his death in 1954. He proved his willingness to strike at those who crossed him in 1940 when J.B. Martin, a prominent merchant on Beale Street ("the cultural center and the local headquarters for civil rights, politics, and religion for African Americans"[15]), publicly supported Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie, an outspoken critic of machine politics. The "reign of terror" that followed at Crump's direction resulted in hundreds of African Americans being beaten and arrested at the hands of the all-white police force. So the death of Crump in 1954 sowed

[14] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall calls for historians to tell "a more robust, more progressive, and truer story – the story of a 'long civil rights movement' that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s, was intimately tied to the 'rise and fall of the New Deal Order,' accelerated during World War II, stretched far beyond the South, was continuously and ferociously contested, and in the 1960s and 1970s inspired a 'movement of movements' that 'def[ies] any narrative of collapse'" (Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 [2005]: 1235.) On the other hand, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang "question the adequacy of the Long Movement thesis because it collapses periodization schemas, erases conceptual differences between waves of the Black Liberation Movement, and blurs regional distinctions in the African American experience." (Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 [2007]: 265.)

[15] Bobby L. Lovett, "Beale Street," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998): 53.

disunity among the white establishment and created opportunities for African Americans to organize as a voting bloc.[16]

Other means of organization were black-oriented radio, labor unions and the NAACP. Radio stations whose programming targeted African-American audiences, such as WLOK and the storied WDIA, provided "a new public sphere" that allowed aspiring organizers opportunities to reach much larger audiences than otherwise available.[17] They also encouraged a flowering of race pride by trumpeting black culture and accomplishments, and featuring on-air talent that was African-American. Unions such as the United Furniture Workers of America provided African-American workers training in techniques of organizing and experience staying united in the face of resistance. The NAACP, while moribund under the Crump machine, became the single most active African-American organization in Memphis from the 1950's through the 1980's; virtually all activism for black freedom in Memphis eventually found itself under the aegis of the NAACP, regardless of whether it was initiated within that organization. The NAACP's Memphis branch provided vital legal aid and the weight of numbers to those movements which showed promise.[18]

As to the motives, Green traces the rise of the movement to a confluence of events during the 1940s. During the Second World War, employment in the war industries subject to the oversight of the Fair Employment Practices Commission provided African-American workers an expectation of just treatment, which proved illusory. Later, some high-profile police brutality cases electrified African-American opinion, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ruling segregated school unconstitutional electrified activists with renewed determination. Throughout the book, Green brings out the importance of activism not only to achieve changes in the material conditions of

[16] Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 41-46.
[17] Ibid., 164.
[18] Ibid., 185-210.

Memphis's African Americans, but also to raise consciousness in rejecting subjugation by word and image in white media.[19]

Green's analysis is understandably focused on the activities of organization. But those activities are accounted for within a magisterial work that manages to delve deeply into all aspects of African-American life in Memphis over three decades, from popular music to political campaigns. Because of its focus on the efforts of African Americans to organize themselves, it only glances at the efforts of whites to organize resistance to the freedom movement. In particular, the fall of the Crump machine made it necessary for whites to reorganize their politics to keep down newly registered black voters. The administrators of Memphis City Schools who resisted desegregation for so long are barely mentioned. Similarly, Green's focus on the "little person" limits her discussion of some of the well-known figures in Memphis's civil rights movement; Maxine Smith, A.W. Willis and Benjamin L. Hooks are each mentioned mostly in regard to their quasi-institutional roles in support of mass movements (e.g., bailing out sit-in demonstrators.) *Battling the Plantation Mentality* is a book very much in line with Moye's observed trends in civil rights movement history: one reviewer wrote, "It both adds to the growing body of literature and demonstrates how good local studies can inform larger movements."[20]

Although Green includes brief coverage of electoral politics into her narrative, she leaves much of that story untold. Presumably, the lack of success of African-American electoral efforts was not as empowering as the other efforts she does focus on. G. Wayne Dowdy compensates in *Crusades for Freedom*, which is almost completely focused on the political and judicial

[19] Ibid., 47-111.

[20] Gwen Moore, review of *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle,* by Laurie B. Green. *Oral History Review* 35, no. 2 (2008): 223.

life of Memphis from 1948 to 1968.[21] He takes as his starting point the 1948 election, in which the first cracks appeared in the Crump machine's bulwark, and traces through until 1971 the various strands of electoral and legal maneuvering used by factions in Memphis to seek power in post-Crump Memphis. Tangled within the strands of local politics, of course, are state-wide and national campaigns and court rulings.

Unlike Green, Dowdy relies almost entirely on the printed record – he seems to have read every issue of the Memphis newspapers *Commercial-Appeal, Press-Scimitar, World* and *Tri-State Defender* published during the period, as well as city council minutes, mayors' correspondence, copious amounts of ephemera, and theses and dissertations from the University of Memphis. His emphasis, naturally, falls upon those who organized and led publicly visible political organizations, or initiated legal actions. The work is not, strictly speaking, a history of the civil rights movement; rather, it covers the gamut of political activity in Memphis, which includes aspects of the black freedom struggle but also the tug-of-war between white Democratic factions (one wing sought reform of the city charter, while another hoped to revive the Crump machine), and the wild card of an emerging Republican party. His narrative omits discussion of some of the most blatantly segregationist candidates who, while never successfully elected, certainly contributed to the debate over race relations during this period.

In Dowdy's telling, the Memphis branch of the NAACP looms much larger than in Green's. Their voter registration drives, along with the elimination of Tennessee's poll tax in 1953, made elections an important focus of community organization within the African-American neighborhoods of Memphis. There was not a unified African-American political organization in the period; rather, there was a series of efforts to support various

[21] G. Wayne Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.)

candidates including A.W. Willis, Russell Sugarmon, and Benjamin Hooks.[22] Various organizations aimed at electing African American candidates were purely *ad hoc*, aimed at pulling voters together for a single visit to the polls, but the NAACP was strenuous in its efforts to register voters and monitor the balloting. The commission form of government, with all leaders elected on a city-wide basis, thwarted African-American efforts to elect one of their own.[23] Only a reform of the city charter that led to ward-based representation in the 1967 election allowed for black voters to elect some of their own to the city council. Dowdy also covers the legal efforts to overturn Jim Crow, and makes the plaintiffs, including bus passenger O.Z. Evers and library patron Jesse Turner, into important figures in his narrative.[24]

The main flaw in Dowdy's work is his lack of discussion of the context of the events he narrates. Dowdy was previously faulted by this author for cramming his narrative into just a few pages,[25] and comparison to the other works examined here confirms that judgment. Dowdy devotes very little of his research to the motives of African Americans organizing for change, and prepares his narrative strictly as a tale of competing political factions as opposed to part of a larger struggle for justice. The personalities and non-political significance of historical figures discussed in the book are rarely mentioned; for example, Russell Sugarmon is introduced in the text as a candidate with no mention of his importance as a civil rights litigator.

Another contrast to Green is in the treatment of white political activity. While Green documents the daily oppression that African-American Memphians endured, Dowdy explores the pro-active efforts of segregationists to maintain their positions in the face of growing African-American political strength. The tale

[22] Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom*, 111-12.
[23] Ibid., 108-17.
[24] Ibid., 59-63.
[25] Steven A. Knowlton, review of *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South,* by G. Wayne Dowdy. *Tennessee Libraries* 61, no. 3 (2011).

is long and tortuous, but Dowdy manages to capture it in detail, although "[a]t times it is confusing, as the book jumps from one platform to another, and there are a myriad of players."[26]

Dowdy's political/judicial focus means that prominent figures take a larger share of the narrative as well. Evers, Turner, Willis, and Hooks all play their parts, as do governors Frank Clement and Buford Ellington, and all the mayors who served in this period. Most of all, Dowdy brings out the destructiveness that a single individual can produce in his chronicle of the administrations of Henry Loeb. Other mayors and commissioners were as segregationist as Loeb in their convictions. However, their sense of the politics of the city compelled them to manage inevitable desegregation by underpublicizing the changes and providing police protection to African-American pioneers. Loeb felt personally frustrated during his first term as mayor (1960-1963) when schools, libraries and businesses not under his jurisdiction were desegregated in at least token fashion.[27] During his second term (1968-1971) he took advantage of uncertainty about the locus of power in the new charter to stymie every effort to settle the sanitation strike of 1968; capitulation by the union was his goal.[28] The presence of Martin Luther King in Memphis on April 4, 1968 was due entirely to Loeb's intransigence; had the strike been settled earlier, the subsequent course of Memphis race relations might have taken a different tack.

Loeb plays an even larger role in Michael K. Honey's *Going Down Jericho Road*, an in-depth treatment of the 1968 sanitation strike.[29] Although other cities experienced strikes by sanitation workers at the same time (notably St. Petersburg, Florida, and New York City), the Memphis strike stands out not

[26] Faye Lind Jensen, review of *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South,* by G. Wayne Dowdy. *Journal of Southern History* 77, no. 3 (2011): 777.
[27] Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom*, 84-85.
[28] Ibid., 125.
[29] Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).

only in the history of the city but also in the history of the civil rights movement.[30] Honey uses the same combination as Green of printed history, primary source documents and his own interviews with Memphians to develop an authoritative chronicle that adumbrates those characteristics that make the Memphis strike unlike most others.

The sanitation workers' union in Memphis, Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), owes its origins largely to a single man, T.O. Jones. He worked relentlessly throughout the first half of the 1960's to organize his colleagues in the face of strong opposition from the city government which employed them. Honey is thorough in his exploration of the converging forces that motivated Jones and his fellows to unionize. He notes that the working conditions of the sanitation workers were atrocious. He calls it a plantation approach to their labor, in which they were expected to use outdated equipment; denied breaks, overtime pay, and facilities to clean themselves; given poverty-level wages; and denied advancement. Not coincidentally, the sanitation workers were almost exclusively black and their supervisors white. As well, public employees were enjoying a wave of unionization in this period. And finally, the burgeoning civil rights movement gave the black workers a sense of empowerment to change their situation through direct action.[31] The latter sentiment suffered some damage when the Memphis NAACP failed to support Local 1733 in an abortive strike in 1966.[32]

The 1968 strike was a spontaneous occurrence in reaction to the deaths of a couple workers using obsolete equipment that malfunctioned. How it changed from a straightforward labor stoppage to a city-wide civil rights action is the heart of Honey's

[30] Darryl Paulson and Janet Stiff, "An Empty Victory: The St. Petersburg Sanitation Strike, 1968," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1979): 421-33; Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 196-204.
[31] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 11-75.
[32] Ibid., 74.

story. Honey masterfully weaves all the threads necessary for effective civil rights history. He clearly shows how the influence of a single white mayor, Henry Loeb, thwarted the efforts of other city commissioners to settle the strike.[33] Honey goes on to detail reactions of the white community, largely dictated through a white press dismissive of the strikers' concerns.[34] The equally outsized personality of African-American Methodist pastor James Lawson – who was a pioneer of the non-violent resistance technique that powered sit-ins and other direct actions in the early 1960's – roused the African-American community of Memphis to rally behind the strikers.[35] Honey notes that the civil rights movement in Memphis had become listless in 1967, but that the repressive approach of the known-segregationist Loeb administration galvanized the black community to support direct action in support of the strikers, including marches, boycotts, and sit-ins at the city council offices.[36] National AFSCME leaders came to Memphis to work the wildcat strike, while the Memphis-based Community on the Move for Equality (COME) organization sprang up around Lawson's efforts to support the strikers.[37] The entwined stories of the local union, AFSCME, and COME are potentially confusing (and would be in Dowdy's hands), but Honey provides enough novelistic characterization of the main players to allow the reader to keep them straight.

It may be noted that the name of civil rights paragon Martin Luther King, Jr., has been scarce in this paper. King rarely visited Memphis and his effect on the movement there was largely through publicity about his non-violent techniques that were adopted by activists. As the strike dragged on with little nationwide publicity, however, Lawson invited King to Memphis to draw some attention to the workers' plight, and King's presence dominates the second half of Honey's book (and supplies its

[33] Ibid., 151-69.
[34] Ibid., 128-50.
[35] Ibid., 76-88.
[36] Ibid., 105-27, 219-20.
[37] Ibid., 199-200.

subtitle, *The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign.*)[38] Honey ties together the strike with King's 1967-1968 shift in emphasis from civil rights to human rights. He also shows the limits of King's influence in this period as proponents of black power were gaining credibility within the African-American community. Tensions between COME and a black power group called the Invaders made it difficult to ensure that the ever-larger marches that occurred after King's arrival remained as well-organized as those primarily organized by the union.[39] The Invaders threatened to lead disruptive activities and it is not clear whether they were responsible for some of the violence that occurred during a disastrous march-turned-police riot on March 28. It is clear that some of the violence resulted from a deadly ferment of white hatred, stirred by Loeb and the newspapers, and some was the result of indiscipline among the marchers, due to multiple leaders failing to organize the protesters effectively.[40] It was this debacle that forced King to return to Memphis in early April, when he gave his "Mountaintop" sermon and was murdered. Incredibly, Loeb continued to refuse a settlement until President Lyndon B. Johnson pressured him to resolve the strike. The mayor did so, but largely on his own terms; a small raise was provided by private philanthropists and the union gained no recognized right to strike in the future.[41]

Honey's work is an example for any historian of the civil rights movement. He carefully traces not only the motivations and the means by which activists organized and mobilized their communities, but also accounts for the influence of outstanding individuals and the resistance they encountered within the white community. His work, along with Green's, has been honored by the Organization of American Historians with the Liberty Legacy

[38] Ibid., 266.
[39] Ibid., 235-373.
[40] Ibid., 335-89.
[41] Ibid., 483-96.

Foundation Award for the "best book by a historian on the civil rights struggle from the beginnings of the nation to the present."[42]

Sherry L. Hoppe and Bruce W. Speck would have been well-advised to take taken Honey as an example, for their *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils* suffers a number of defects in historical writing.[43] As a biography, it naturally tends to support the "Great Man" (or Woman, in this case) thesis, but well-done biographies are otherwise detached from the subjects' perspectives and clearly written. Hoppe and Speck's work, by contrast, suffers from hero-worship of Smith, the executive secretary of the Memphis branch of the NAACP from 1962 to 1995, the first black member of the Memphis Board of Education, and a member of the Tennessee Board of Regents, which governs many of the state's universities, from 1994 to 2002. (They write, "Ubiquitous. Tireless. No other words quite capture Maxine's superhuman efforts to insist that the law of the land be obeyed in Memphis. Except one: heroic.")[44]

Hoppe and Speck often conflate Smith's point of view with their own narrative voice. For instance, they write, "Maxine was accustomed to conflict; in fact, she thrived on it. But conflict within the ranks was bad when it became public."[45] They also refer to their subject as "Maxine" throughout the book, suggesting they may be too close to her for objectivity. Another sign of this is the authors' unwillingness to explore certain topics, as when they discuss Smith's conflicts with a certain NAACP national leader, but fail to locate the events chronologically or name the national leader.

The book is organized thematically, which can work to organize the narrative. However, the author's kaleidoscopic sense

[42] Liberty Legacy Foundation Award, The Organization of American Historians, last modified August 4, 2012, http://www.oah.org/awards/awards.liberty.index.html
[43] Sherry L. Hoppe and Bruce W. Speck, *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils: Lessons Learned in Memphis's Civil Rights Classroom*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007.
[44] Hoppe and Speck, *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils,* 91.
[45] Ibid., 52.

of chronology misleads the reader. In their discussion of school desegregation, they imply that the federal court order imposing busing was followed closely by the hiring of the first black superintendent, W.W. Herenton.[46] In fact, those events occurred six years apart.[47] Readers may also quibble with the authors' style, as sentence fragments abound, clichés are used instead of analysis ("It was time to get creative, time to shake up the whites")[48], and the vocabulary feels stuck at the young adult level. One is surprised to learn this was published by a university press.

Questions of style aside, the concerns over this book's role in the historiography of civil rights in Memphis relate to its perspective. Smith is, naturally, the star of the movie in her head, but historians have a duty beyond transcribing that screenplay and framing it with research in the archives. The work of Hoppe and Speck is perhaps most susceptible to the criticism of the Great Man theory that Herbert Spencer articulated: "Before he can re-make his society, his society must make him."[49] The authors fail to provide explanation for white resistance to the civil rights movement, brushing it aside with, "Whites in Memphis did not want change, whatever their reason of the day."[50] They also tend to dispense with recognizing the means of community organization used by Smith and her colleagues. Smith was surely a leader, but aside from her husband, few of her collaborators in the Memphis civil rights movement receive any coverage. The others in the movement are presented as mere minions: Smith issues a list of demands, but then handbills are printed according to some system the book does not explore. In order for the Memphis African-American community to have achieved mass mobilization for efforts such as boycotts of downtown businesses and the "Black

[46] Ibid., 147-49.
[47] Biles, "A Bittersweet Victory": 482
[48] Hoppe and Speck, *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils*, 197.
[49] Herbert Spencer, "Sociology Against History." In *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution: Selected Writings*, ed. J.D.Y. Peel. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972): 86.
[50] Hoppe and Speck, *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils,* 27.

Monday" school walkouts of 1969, there must have been hundreds of activists involved; few of them earn a mention in this book.

The work is valuable, however, for an outline of the main events of the civil rights struggle in Memphis, and it extends its narrative into the 1980's. The reader will learn of the 1959 desegregation of Memphis State University, the 1961 token desegregation of Memphis elementary schools, and the struggles over busing in the 1970's, along with various boycotts of white merchants who discriminated in their hiring practices. There is even some reflection from Smith on the relative merits and costs of the strategies her organization pursued.[51] However, one cannot be confident that there is a true representation of the context of the events.[52]

Readers will find a more balanced narrative in Bobby L. Lovett's *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee.*[53] Lovett shares Dowdy's approach of relying on newspaper accounts and official records, to the exclusion of oral histories. It seems almost nothing is left out, down to the name of the airline that Eleanor Roosevelt flew on. This causes "an overabundance of listings of names and minor events throughout the book that can be tedious and frustrating to the reader."[54] However, this bug also serves as a feature, because many names appear alongside iconic events, expanding the traditional narrative to include a larger number of people than are known in the "consensus narrative."

Lovett's chronicle ranges from 1779 to 2003, with the majority of attention paid to events after 1954. In addition to famous events like the Nashville sit-ins of 1960 and the Memphis

[51] Ibid., 185-87.
[52] A more reliable chronicle is found in the other books mentioned in this essay, along with Biles, "A Bittersweet Victory," and John Branston, "Battering Ram: The Tragedy of Busing Revisited," *Memphis* 35, no. 12 (2011): 37-46, 86.
[53] Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.)
[54] Will Sarvis, review of *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee* by Bobby Lovett. *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (2007): 136.

sanitation strike, he also covers the civil rights movements in small towns like Clinton in the Appalachian Mountains and in rural areas such as Haywood County in West Tennessee.[55] The narrative is organized thematically, not geographically, so students of the Memphis movement will find its coverage scattered throughout the pages; in the index, the entry for Memphis reads *passim*. Large sections are devoted to state politics and higher education policies, which affected all Tennesseans but were mostly played out in Nashville.

More than any other book discussed here, Lovett chronicles the role of the courts in the civil rights movement. Boyd, the federal judge whose district included Memphis in the 1950's, allowed desegregation cases to sit on his docket for years before ruling on them; the delay in cases regarding the library and buses was one of the factors that led students from LeMoyne College to initiate sit-ins in 1960.[56] The twists and turns of the federal case to desegregate Memphis schools are discussed in detail. Each proposal for token desegregation and then gradual integration proposed by the all-white school board was countered by further direct action from the NAACP, culminating in the 1973 ruling that busing was necessary to achieve compliance with the law. Lovett also discusses the tragic denouement which resulted in Memphis schools being as segregated in 2000 as they were in 1970.[57]

Because of the sweep of his narrative, Lovett cannot delve into the details of community organizing the way Green and Honey do, but he makes it clear that none of the individuals discussed worked without support from their communities. He also clearly addresses the political imperatives that compelled "moderate" white politicians such as Frank Clement (who served as governor from 1953-1959 and 1963-1967) to drag their feet on civil rights.[58] The social and cultural dialogue among segregationists that served

[55] Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee*, 31-50, 265-72.
[56] Ibid., 114-15.
[57] Ibid., 61-94.
[58] Ibid., 56-57.

to reinforce their resistance efforts is addressed as well. Although it is lacking in the voices of those who weren't quoted in the newspaper, Lovett's work will serve well to acquaint readers with the events of the civil rights movement in Tennessee; its failure to contextualize the Tennessee movement within the broader national movement is a drawback, but one that is shared by all of the works except for Honey's.

It has been said that, "When it comes to the historical literature on the civil rights movement, Memphis remains one of the more under-researched major cities in the South."[59] However, the diligent reader, by piecing together the oral histories of Green and Honey with the chronicles of Lovett and Dowdy, may gain an understanding of the struggles of African-Americans to find greater freedom in a city that was once "segregated from the cradle to the grave."[60]

[59] Charles W. McKinney Jr., review of *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils* by Sherry L. Hoppe and Bruce W. Speck. *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 1 (2009): 205.
[60] Samuel "Billy" Kyles, quoted in *The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306* (2009; Memphis, TN: Rock Paper Scissors, distributed by National Civil Rights Museum), DVD.