

Good Books: History Month Reading



BOOK REVIEWS

by Kam Williams

'To the Mountaintop: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement,'

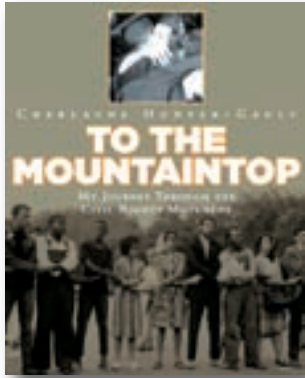
by Charlayne Hunter-Gault

Charlayne Hunter-Gault is an accomplished reporter who, over the course of an enviable career, has won a couple of Emmys, a Peabody Award and been named the Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists. While many might recognize her

as a veteran television news correspondent from her stints at CNN, PBS and NPR or as a writer whose pieces have been published by the New Yorker and the New York Times, most folks are probably unaware of her critical contribution to the dismantling of the Jim Crow system of segregation during the Civil Rights Era.

In 1961, one of the bloodiest years in the integration movement, she and a classmate, the late Hamilton Holmes, became the first African-Americans admitted to the University of Georgia when the NAACP won a lawsuit filed on their behalf. A few days later, accompanied by their parents and attorney Vernon Jordan, the pair negotiated their way to the school's registrar's office through a menacing gauntlet of raucous whites shouting racial epithets.

Although the two new students had good reason for

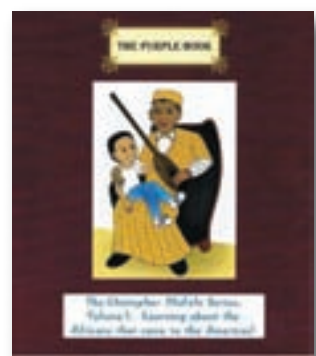


fear and trepidation about being left alone on a hostile campus in the heart of Klu Klux Klan country, they never let the intimidation get the better of them and went on to graduate from the college. To the Mountaintop: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement is a moving memoir which eloquently recounts their historic achievement in glowing detail.

This fascinating autobiography covers a half-dozen pivotal years in Charlayne's life, the period from 1959 to

1965. Besides intimately recounting her personal experiences during that difficult period, the author also covers what other activists were simultaneously doing elsewhere around the country in the quest for equality, whether participating in sit-ins, freedom rides or attending the March on Washington.

The book is written in a user-friendly style designed to engage readers 12 and over, and arrives illustrated by a cornucopia of iconic black-and-white photos and newspaper reprints. Kudos to Ms. Hunter-Gault for



crafting such a poignant, very personal reminder of just how hard-fought was the struggle which ultimately led to the triumphant election of our first African-American president.

Learning about the Africans That Came to the Americas!

by L.E. Chavous

After Lee Chavous became a father a few years ago, he soon found himself worrying about his son's prospective education. He knew that the formative years are critical, and that the history books tend to marginalize, overlook, or inaccurately recount the contributions of African-Americans.

Wanting his little boy to grow up fully aware not only of his ancestors' centuries-long struggle for equality but of how they also helped shape the country in myriad ways, Lee decided to write his own illustrated texts. Aimed at kids aged 8-11, the first in his very informative series, Learning about the Africans That Came to the Americas, offers an impressive overview of slavery from the black perspective.

For black youth, one of the unfortunate aspects of learning is having to unlearn misinformation, like the fact that John Brown was actually a hero who freed slaves, not an insurrectionist hung for stealing plantation owners' property. That's why it was refreshing to see that this book describes Brown as an "abolitionist."

That distinction is important, because it rightfully recasts him as a hero to anyone who takes to heart the words of The Declaration of Independence which states that "All men are created equal," and further stipulates that it is your right and your duty to revolt against any government denying your unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But I digress. As to layout, Learning about the Africans That Came to the Americas was cleverly constructed as a history lesson being narrated by a doting father to his young son named Christopher OluFela. The engaging story winds its way from a slave castle on the coast of West Africa through the Middle Passage to the shores of the Americas.

It addresses the brutality of slavery before recalling

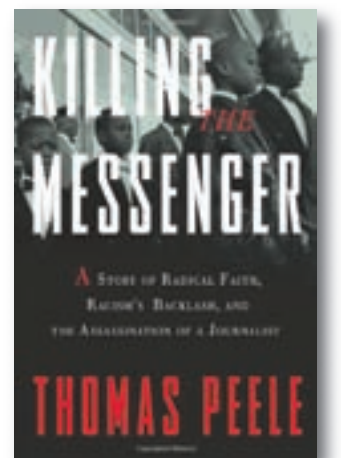
the amazing exploits of legendary freedom fighters like Harriet Tubman, conductor of the Underground Railroad, and Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution. And to show just how far we've come, the postscript features a tip of the cap to Barack Obama as the first African-American President of the United States.

Congrats to concerned papa Lee Chavous for publishing the first in what is likely to prove to be a priceless series of sensible supplements to the traditional American History textbooks.

'Killing the Messenger: A Story of Radical Faith, Racism's Backlash, and the Assassination of a Journalist,'

by Thomas Peele

Any Western journalist who's honest will admit that they're scared to write anything critical about Islam, since it doesn't take much to make a mullah put a price on your head. Consider the recent history. Everyone from novelist Salman Rushdie to Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard



have had to go into hiding because of all the death threats they received after publishing material Muslims deemed offensive. And Dutch director Theo van Gogh was stabbed to death by a disgruntled fundamentalist because he made a movie about honor killings and other forms of violence still being perpetrated against innocent females in the name of Allah.

Much closer to home, Chauncey Bailey, editor-in-chief of the Oakland Post, was shot dead on the morning of August 2, 2007. He was about to expose a store called Your Black Muslim Bakery as a front for a criminal operation dealing in drugs, sex slaves and murder.

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