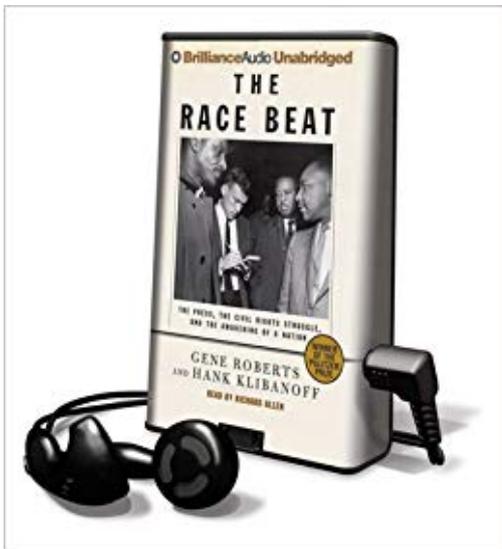


# **The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation (Playaway Adult Nonfiction) by Hank Klibanoff, Richard Allen PhD, Gene Roberts**



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This is the story of how America awakened to its race problem, of how a nation that longed for unity after World War II came instead to see, hear, and learn about the shocking indignities of racial segregation in the South and the brutality used to enforce it. It is the story of how the nation's press, after decades of ignoring the problem, came to recognize the importance of the civil rights struggle and turn it into the most significant domestic news event of the twentieth century. Drawing on private correspondence, notes from secret meetings, unpublished articles, and interviews, veteran journalists Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff go behind the headlines and datelines to show how a dedicated cadre of newsmen first black reporters, then liberal southern editors, then reporters and photographers from the national press and the broadcast media revealed to a nation its most shameful shortcomings and propelled its citizens to act. We watch the black press move bravely into the front row of the confrontation, only to be attacked and kept away from the action. Following the Supreme Court's 1954 decision striking down school segregation and the South's mobilization against it, we see a growing number of white reporters venture South to cover the Emmett Till murder trial, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the integration of the University of Alabama. We witness some southern editors joining the call for massive resistance and working with segregationist organizations to thwart compliance. But we also see a handful of other southern editors write forcefully and daringly for obedience to federal mandates, signaling to the nation that moderate forces were prepared to push the region into the mainstream. The pace quickens in Little Rock, where reporters test the boundaries of journalistic integrity, then gain momentum as they cover shutter



## Reviews of the **The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation (Playaway Adult Nonfiction)** by Hank Klibanoff, Richard Allen PhD, Gene Roberts

grand star

The Race Beat opens with a discussion of a prediction by a Swedish economics scholar, Gunnar Myrdal, who conducted research in the US regarding race relations. His book *An American Dilemma* published in 1944 anticipated that for any improvement of Black lives in the south would require involvement by the press.

The Race Beat covers the civil rights movement beginning with the Emmett Till murder in 1955 through Selma, Alabama in 1965. The authors took a different angle to presenting the civil rights struggle. Rather than exclusively focusing on leading figures and significant events the story is told from the perspective of news reporters and news organizations. The perspective is unique and allowed the authors to juxtapose reporting the civil rights movement with war correspondence. Without going into great detail they note how many reporters covered the horrors and struggle of war with many of their colleagues killed covering war stories. The surprising story is many reporters were injured and killed covering the civil rights movement. White reporters were no safer than peaceful Black demonstrators or Black news reporters. Segregationists and police resented news reporters and frequently attacked them, destroyed their equipment, and trashed their notes. They were not only observers but also the target of violence. Contemporary news and documentaries presented the dogs, bombings, murders, and other violence against protesters, but never presented the violence against themselves.

Television grew up as a medium during this period and how it effected the nation, and accordingly the authors also address this impact on news reporting. There was competition not only between newspapers, but also with television. One unexpected advantage television had was the new medium was able to televise into Black homes. Southern newspapers paid little attention to their Black communities, if they gave any attention at all.

National events covering the Emmett Till murder, Rosa Parks, Little Rock, James Meredith, Freedom Riders, Martin Luther King, the NAACP, and other numerous players and events are covered. In contrast White supremacists, the KKK, Citizen's Council, and many southern law officers are presented. Many adversarial groups and individuals are discussed in great detail providing background information leading to key events.

My only issue with the book are the occasions when the authors occasionally list news reporters and newspapers in connection to a particular event.. The names drag on and take away from the flow of the book. It would have been more effective to focus on several top reporters and focus on their personal stories. The name dropping was very distracting.

The Race Beat closes once events regarding integration becomes a nationwide story, and cities outside the south erupt into violent demonstrations starting with the Los Angeles Watts race riot. It is a very compelling book, and worth reading to gain a perspective the race issue and events from the early 50's through 1965.

BOND

I first heard about the book on NPR's Fresh Air, and I had it tucked away on my Amazon wishlist for several months before I decided to give it a try. To say that this book has changed how I feel about journalism and the news is a huge understatement. This story's vast importance is only equaled by its uncanny ability to take you through the strange and terrible world of the South during the Civil Rights era. I would recommend this to anyone who has the slightest interest in the Civil Rights or journalism.

Kanrad

This book must be read by everyone interested in what you think happen during the Consumer rights movement. I suggest every American have a copy near his or her bed and read it nightly and maybe you can understand why young black female and males are being murdered in plain sight and not one government official is speaking out.

Raelin

Because I grew up during Civil Rights era and find it interesting to find out how it was for the press who suffered almost as much as protesters themselves. Now I understand a bit better about Rep. John Lewis (?) from GA as on a couple of incidents regarding Freedom Riders, he was beaten within an inch of his life. I might have a bit of an attitude also. Also good info about Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth from Birmingham, in whose metro area, I live.

Freaky Hook

An important component of African-Americans attaining their civil rights was the press. Without the courageous reporters, editors and publishers, who risked financial ruin and social ostracism, the Reverend Martin Luther King and company's aspirations would have been dead in the water. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Klibanoff give a very evenhanded history of how not all newspapers were on the same philosophical page. Southern segregationist news outlets in newspapers, radio and television went to great lengths to dehumanize blacks and argue about their right to treat them as less than equals. The upper and middle-class whites as well as politicians and some Southern judges may not have been the ones busting blacks' heads, but they were certainly complicit in provoking the dimwitted rednecks into doing their violent dirty work. Most of the nation had no clue as to the horrible conditions in which Southern African-Americans lived. The newspapers and, especially television, changed the nation's perspective. Mr. Roberts and Klibanoff also take pains in describing how some segregationists' editorials, such as James Kilpatrick's hate-filled screeds, were sophistry at its worst. The authors have written a truly informative and highly readable aspect of the Civil Rights movement that many take for granted. A great book.

Styphe

There's a lot of information, but it's still an amazing book. My copy arrived extremely worn, but the content was still great.

Tto

Great read detailing the experiences of the journalists on the frontline of the Civil Rights Movement. The lengths they went to in order to ensure independent reporting during this time was a credit to their profession. A very readable text!

I studied History in college with a focus on Civil Rights, and the material still fascinates me. The Race Beat covers familiar stories, but from a new perspective. While the importance of the press to the movement is an obvious one, this is the first I've seen go into such depth on the matter and you really get a feel for everything the reporters went through. A staggering amount of research must have gone into this project. Extremely well written and a joy to read, I would recommend it to historians and everyday readers alike.

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