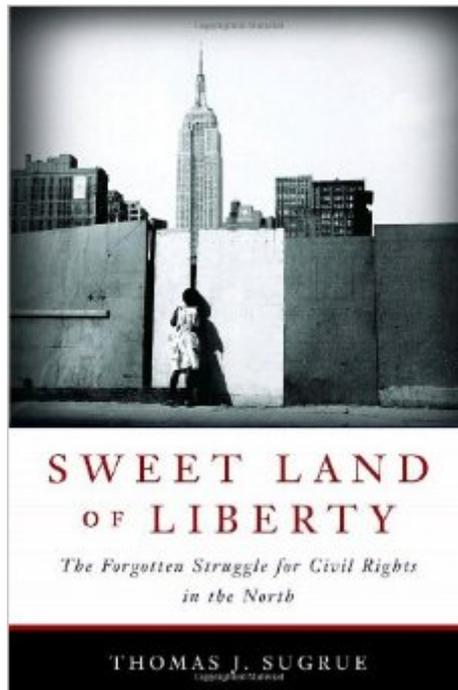


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# Sweet Land Of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle For Civil Rights In The North



## Synopsis

The struggle for racial equality in the North has been a footnote in most books about civil rights in America. Now this monumental new work from one of the most brilliant historians of his generation sets the record straight. *Sweet Land of Liberty* is an epic, revelatory account of the abiding quest for justice in states from Illinois to New York, and of how the intense northern struggle differed from and was inspired by the fight down South. Thomas Sugrue's panoramic view sweeps from the 1920s to the present—more than eighty of the most decisive years in American history. He uncovers the forgotten stories of battles to open up lunch counters, beaches, and movie theaters in the North; the untold history of struggles against Jim Crow schools in northern towns; the dramatic story of racial conflict in northern cities and suburbs; and the long and tangled histories of integration and black power. Appearing throughout these tumultuous tales of bigotry and resistance are the people who propelled progress, such as Anna Arnold Hedgeman, a dedicated churchwoman who in the 1930s became both a member of New York's black elite and an increasingly radical activist; A. Philip Randolph, who as America teetered on the brink of World War II dared to threaten FDR with a march on Washington to protest discrimination—and got the Fair Employment Practices Committee (the second Emancipation Proclamation) as a result; Morris Milgram, a white activist who built the Concord Park housing development, the interracial answer to white Levittown; and Herman Ferguson, a mild-mannered New York teacher whose protest of a Queens construction site led him to become a key player in the militant Malcolm X's movement. Filled with unforgettable characters and riveting incidents, and making use of information and accounts both public and private, such as the writings of obscure African American journalists and the records of civil rights and black power groups, *Sweet Land of Liberty* creates an indelible history. Thomas Sugrue has written a narrative bound to become the standard source on this essential subject.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Slavery was a Southern phenomenon, and the civil rights movement, in its most public aspect, focused on the South, a myopic viewpoint that ignored the very real battles that were being fought in the North. There is also a common myth that civil rights as a whole ceased to be a movement of any consequence after the 1960s. SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY addresses both misconceptions. The author of this extensively researched history is Thomas J. Sugrue, whose first book, THE ORIGINS OF THE URBAN CRISIS, won the prestigious Bancroft Prize in History, the President's Book Award of the Social Science History Association, the Philip Taft Prize in Labor History, the Urban History Association Prize for Best Book in North American Labor History, and was selected as a Choice Outstanding Book. In 2005, Princeton University Press selected THE ORIGINS OF THE URBAN CRISIS as one of its 100 most influential books of the preceding century. Sugrue's academic career has been punctuated with activism, the combination making him well qualified to deal even-handedly with this subject matter. What he has written here is a history of political reality. It is true that organization and activism came earlier to the North, where during the Great Depression and on through the aftermath of World War II, "devout churchwomen, lawyers, laborers, Democrats, Republicans, Socialists and Communists marched together on picket lines, lobbied public officials and joined in lawsuits against segregated housing and schools." The toil of Northern change agents fostered and informed the tactics used in the South, and the Southern initiatives and successes enheartened Northern activists. In the North, people of color were more likely to be able to attend public events and shop in the same stores with whites, but infamous unwritten "Jim Crow laws" prevented all blacks in the U.S. from, for example, being able to stay overnight while traveling in any but a few locations known through the elaborate cultural grapevine. Among these venues were the YMCAs in Northern cities where Christian principle had won out over racial bias, though not without the push of concerned citizens, including many strong, dedicated churchwomen of both races. These small victories were an inspiration to Southern blacks who either migrated North hoping for a brighter future or joined the battle at home in the 1960s. But the right to watch a movie was hardly a satisfaction to masses of people living in poverty and losing out on the great dream of all Americans --- the right to an equal and excellent education. That right, it seemed, could not be made a reality

despite all the legislation designed to guarantee it. The key to securing equality in public education lay in securing equality in housing. This was a drama that is still being played out in America. Gerrymandering had its nefarious role in underpinning de facto school segregation. Black neighborhoods could be written off the map, a racist tactic practiced on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. School busing was one of many strategies to circumvent the phenomena of gerrymandering, ghetto-ization and "white flight," all of which left African American families in the dust and their children in schools as inferior as those of the years of legal segregation. The book sings the unsung, people like Roxanne Jones, a southern migrant to Philadelphia, who, abandoned by her alcoholic husband, was challenged by the issues facing African American women in the projects. "Public housing never lived up to its promise. Cheap construction caused all sorts of problems...the corridors were dimly lit and dangerous. The lawns surrounding the towers were muddy and trash strewn." Unmarried mothers were under constant surveillance by welfare workers and increasingly marginalized by lack of employment, unfair credit practices and lack of representation within the systems that regulated their economic existence. Jones organized others and spearheaded initiatives to raise welfare rates (in the early 1970s, "a family of four barely survived on the average annual payment of \$3,600). As Sugrue puts it, "Jones did not see litigation and community organizing as antithetical" and had no hesitation to lead protests, once getting arrested for throwing a shoe through a window of the Pennsylvania state capitol. As Sugrue is careful to point out, whites in general have had more resources of social capital to bring to bear than their black fellow citizens. Withdrawal from mixed or marginal neighborhoods, or gentrification of historic areas forcing poor inhabitants out, has become new factors affecting the quality of schools and the livability of cities and towns. True integration in America is still a rarity. SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY comes to us at a telling time in our nation's history when many of the struggles highlighted in its pages are still being fought in subtle ways as we face the hopeful future. It will be read by thoughtful students of our racial history. Perhaps by remembering the past, we will not be condemned to repeat it.--- Reviewed by Barbara Bamberger Scott

Far too often the history of the Civil Rights movement in the United States focuses on the south and ends with the passage of the Civil Rights acts under the Johnson Administration. This book does a great job of showing that the North was in many cases as much of a battle ground for the civil rights movement than the south was. While many of the discriminatory laws were not codified like they were in the south, racism was as much of an institution in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York as anywhere else. Also, the north had the growing suburbs which always were opposed to any minority

moving into their presence. If you are interested in an eye opening examination of how the war to defeat racism was really an American fight, then I strongly recommend you read Sweet Land of Liberty. It is certainly about the forgotten fight for civil rights.

Few Americans, especially Northern whites, know the story of African Americans seeking equality and justice in the North. Most believe civil rights was a Southern phenomenon. But from the 1920s onward, African Americans in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and other cities struggled for access to restaurant dining, hotels, schools, housing and jobs against a white-dominated system that for years blocked every effort. Thomas Sugre tells their stories with insight and understanding, in a very readable manner. I found Sweet Land of Liberty to be one of the better books on American race relations that I have read, and I have read many as a former professor of American history.

It isn't enough to know that Southern democrats were racist and oppressed blacks through Jim Crow laws and unjust conditions. Northern democrats were all too eager to keep blacks in their place, too, and they used the violent labor movement to lock blacks out of factory jobs in the north for most of the 20th century. You can read W.E.B. DuBois's W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader complaining about this lack of brotherhood and solidarity all through his career -- socialists should stand together, was what he believed.

Sweet Land of Liberty worked out very well with my sons Truthquest history curriculum! My son enjoyed this book :)

A very interesting book, very clear. Perfect to learn more about this subject as it is rightly entitled "the forgotten struggle for Civil Rights in the North", the case of the North being too often overlooked. I highly recommend this book.

This book came in very handy for my Civil Rights paper in college. Found out a lot about the Civil Rights Movement through this book.

Good read but the text is a bit redundant. Makes for a good refresher.

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