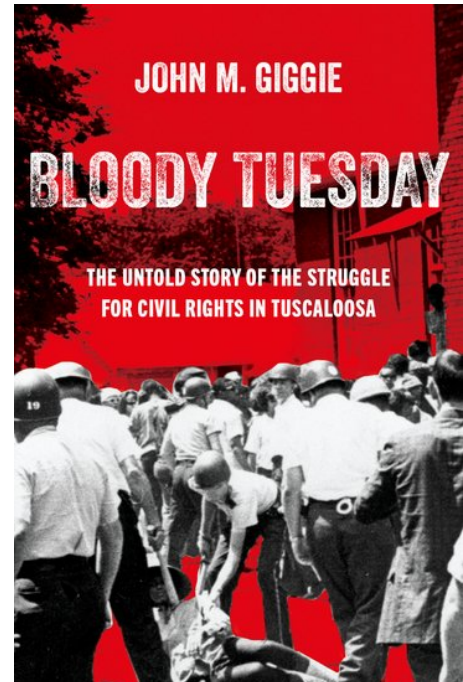


REMEMBERING BLOODY TUESDAY  
ON ITS 60TH ANNIVERSARY: JUNE 9, 1964

Preamble:

John M. Giggie, Associate Professor of History at the University of Alabama, is the author of *Bloody Tuesday: The Untold Story of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Tuscaloosa*, forthcoming in June 2024 from Oxford University Press. George F. Thompson, Publisher-in-Residence at the University of Alabama and a decorated publisher and author himself ([www.gftbooks.com](http://www.gftbooks.com)), helped Dr. Giggie in developing the book from its inception to bound book, and here are excerpts from Thompson's interview with Dr. Giggie (April 24, 2024).



GFT: Tell us about Bloody Tuesday and why Tuscaloosa was so important to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s strategy for where to oppose segregation?

JMG: Most Americans who know U.S. history are aware of important events associated with the Civil Rights Movement such as those at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church and encounters with police at adjacent Ingram Park in Birmingham, but few know about Bloody Tuesday in Tuscaloosa. Bloody Tuesday (June 9, 1964) was not only among the bloodiest of all civil rights confrontations during the movement, but also one of the most violent assaults by police on congregants at any church at any time or place in America's long history.

Six months after delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, on the Washington Mall, Rev. King prepared to end segregation once and for all in Alabama. In Birmingham in March 1964, he assembled Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) officers and ministers from across the state and announced plans to launch a massive attack on the color line starting in the summer, promising to stop only when "justice rolled like water."

Rev. King identified Tuscaloosa as an early target in the 1964 campaign, because it was the national headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan and home to its Imperial Wizard, Robert Shelton. Breaking segregation in Tuscaloosa would carry enormous significance for the Civil Rights Movement. The city was also by then familiar to Americans because of the recent battle to integrate the University of Alabama, the last all-White university in the South. On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard, forced Governor George C. Wallace to admit two Black

students (Vivian Malone and James Hood) to the university, and announced support for a new federal civil rights bill.

GFT: What happened on Bloody Tuesday?

JMG: In March 1964, Rev. King installed one of his closest disciples, Rev. T. Y. Rogers, as Pastor of First African Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa and told the 27-year-old to “desegregate the city.” On June 9, 1964, upwards of 70 law-enforcement officers, backed by hundreds of Klansmen and deputized White citizens, attacked 500 Black citizens gathered inside the church who planned to march downtown to protest White and Black water fountains in the new county courthouse. As they prayed, police smashed the stained-glass windows with water from a fire hose and filled the church with tear gas. When Blacks stumbled outside, police beat and arrested as many as they could. Nearly 100 went to jail, dozens were rushed to the hospital, and many more received care at a local barbershop owned by another local civil rights hero, Rev. T. W. Linton. Locals quickly dubbed the day “Bloody Tuesday.”

GFT: Some say that learning about the Civil Rights Movement without understanding Bloody Tuesday is akin to teaching the history of the Civil War without mentioning Gettysburg. Can you explain the sentiment?

JMG: We often tell the story of the movement by focusing on moments featuring Rev. King as recorded by newspapers and TV. We are drawn to events of extreme violence but hope they are exceptions. What we lose in this narrative is the reality that the Civil Rights Movement was a series of small, orchestrated, and interconnected battles in towns and cities like Tuscaloosa where the acts of police violence and White resistance were common.

The Black victory in Tuscaloosa was part of Rev. King’s large vision for desegregating the state and nation. It emboldened protesters and unnerved White politicians, leading the latter to sanction extreme measures like the attack by Alabama State Troopers on peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on March 7, 1965, now known as Bloody Sunday. The story of Bloody Tuesday in Tuscaloosa reminds us that TV cameras and reporters did not capture the struggles for justice existing beyond Rev. King’s reach nor did they accurately communicate the widespread and violent nature of White resistance to racial change.

Bloody Tuesday was one of the most violent days of the Civil Rights Movement. More people were injured and arrested on Bloody Tuesday than on Bloody Sunday a year and a month later, yet its story is unknown outside of the small circles of survivors. Why? The main reason is that Rev. King

decided to join the struggle for integration in St. Augustine, Florida, instead of coming to Tuscaloosa. He sent James Bevel, a mastermind of the Birmingham campaign, to Tuscaloosa, but he was not a magnet for the media. White newspapers carried the story but only for a day or two, and they frequently blamed Blacks for instigating the violence. Three Black newspapers reported on it but only briefly. Other events had grabbed the nation's attention: A few days after Bloody Tuesday, three civil rights workers—Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney—went “missing” in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and Freedom Summer had just begun.

GFT: Can you share the huge leadership roles of ministers such as Rev. T. Y. Rogers and Rev. T. W. Linton and so many others (especially women) in desegregating Tuscaloosa and how they are remembered today?

JMG: Rev. T. Y. Rogers, whom Rev. King ordained while he pastored Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, came to Tuscaloosa with dreams of becoming a national civil rights leader. Integrating the city was his chance. Rogers was joined by Rev. T. W. Linton, whose barbershop served as a de facto emergency room during Bloody Tuesday, and by countless Black women who filled mass meetings, raised money, marched, and went to jail. No woman served in a formal leadership position, but their presence was critical for the success of the campaign. Today, none of these civil rights protestors are remembered outside of the small circle of Bloody Tuesday survivors and their families. Hopefully, my book will change that.

It is worth remembering that, almost immediately after the police attacked First African Baptist Church on Bloody Tuesday, Blacks formed armed self-defense groups to keep their West End neighborhood safe and fight the Klan. Rev. Rogers filed lawsuits against the city, and Rev. King sent help from the SCLC. Their efforts paid off when, shortly following the passage of the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, Tuscaloosa disbanded many of its discriminatory policies. It would, however, keep public schools and the City Commission segregated for another 20 years.

GFT: What lessons can Americans learn from Bloody Tuesday from both an historical perspective and as an inspiration for striving for a better world?

JMG: It took me more than a decade of listening to those in the movement in order to tell the complete story. Nothing in my professional training as a historian taught me to slow down and allow people to share memories on their own terms and according to their own timeline. Most scholars are in a rush to publish their next book or article and grab the most accessible sources.

In the case of documenting Bloody Tuesday, I couldn't rush the research. This was more than simply taking the time to earn the trust of survivors. They wanted me to bring their story to life. Both as a book and in other ways—by working to erect public markers to their history that are now part of the Civil Rights Trail in Tuscaloosa, by preserving their oral histories and personal artifacts for future generations in an archive at the University of Alabama, and by teaching the story of Bloody Tuesday in local public schools. I soon saw my job as more than writing a book; it was to record a broad public understanding of a truth too long denied.

GFT: You are often asked to speak about Bloody Tuesday, including recently at the FBI field office in Birmingham in honor of Black History Month. How and why is the F.B.I. still learning about the police response on Bloody Tuesday?

JMG: The FBI is eager to learn how it could have prevented White violence during the Civil Rights Movement and how it can improve community relationships today. Studying Bloody Tuesday and celebrating its heroes are part of that effort.

The FBI, like many public agencies during the Civil Rights Movement, too often ignored calls for justice coming from Black citizens living outside of major cities. And, despite the overwhelming violence of Bloody Tuesday, it had little reason to pay attention: No formal commission was ever convened to investigate it, and no law enforcement officer or White citizen was ever held accountable for their behavior. More importantly, the history of that day has existed only in stories and memories shared by survivors—and the FBI and others have never taken the time to listen to them. Until recently, when the events of the Summer of 2020 and the Black Lives Matter Movement warranted a look back to how police reacted to peaceful protests during the Civil Rights Movement. The parallels are all too familiar.

GFT: At the end of your book, following passage by the U.S. Congress of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and Voting Rights Act in 1965, you share an encounter that Rev. Linton had with a prominent White businessman in Tuscaloosa who, in discussing segregation, declared, “Just give us fifty years.” In 1970, when the principal public high school in Tuscaloosa was desegregated, the student body was 100 percent African American; today, it is 98 percent African American. In essence, Central High School in Tuscaloosa is again separate and unequal. How is this possible?

JMG: The sad truth is that civil rights gains are not etched in stone. They need to be championed lest they fall victim to the political whims of a new generation. Central to this effort is to discover and testify to the truth of the past, however painful, ugly, and frightening it may be, and to trust that such understanding

will lead to personal enlightenment and universal protections for civil rights that are guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. As is written in Proverbs 4: 7: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom. And with all thy getting, get understanding.”

GFT: Although many challenges remain, what positive changes have you seen in reconciling the past, especially in Tuscaloosa, and in making the world a better place for all? And how does memory—the recollections and stories of those women and men who were part of Bloody Tuesday and the Civil Rights Movement—impact our understanding of the past and present?

JMG: It is not hard to see positive change in Tuscaloosa, especially following the Black Lives Matter Movement in the Summer of 2020. The city has purchased Rev. Linton’s barbershop, with the intention of creating a memorial to Bloody Tuesday survivors and civil rights foot soldiers, and renamed streets in honor of civil rights leaders. Tuscaloosa City Schools has implemented a new initiative at high schools to teach the history of local Black life, from slavery through the present day. A Civil Rights Trail, researched and built by citizens in 2020, commemorates key events and people in local Black history with markers spread across the city. The University of Alabama has boosted enrollment of minority students, renamed buildings in honor of civil rights heroes, and removed memorials to the Confederacy. It has also built bridges with Stillman College (the local HBCU) and created pathways for its students to enroll in classes at UA for no extra cost and to attend graduate school.

Yet pushback to progress is often a part of the American story, and storm clouds have formed that threaten these and other programs. Recent laws constraining or eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that arose following the Summer of 2020—in Alabama and, currently, 14 other states—make it difficult to see them continuing with the same level of public funding and support. And, more troubling, they can muffle the enduring lesson of Bloody Tuesday—namely, that democracy is an ideal whose fullest expression must be defended and whose history has regularly excluded the stories and achievements of Blacks and other minority Americans. Bloody Tuesday is a testament to the power of memory to challenge and rewrite sanitized versions of our past and to enhance our understanding of history and the promise of America.