



To Stand and Fight

Martha BIONDI

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The story of the civil rights movement typically begins with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and culminates with the 1965 voting rights struggle in Selma. But as Martha Biondi shows, a grassroots struggle for racial equality in the urban North began a full ten years before the rise of the movement in the South. This story is an essential first chapter, not only to the southern movement that followed, but to the riots that erupted in northern and western cities just as the civil rights movement was achieving major victories.

Biondi tells the story of African Americans who mobilized to make the war against fascism a launching pad for a postwar struggle against white supremacy at home. Rather than seeking integration in the abstract, black New Yorkers demanded first-class citizenship--jobs for all, affordable housing, protection from police violence, access to higher education, and political representation. This powerful local push for economic and political equality met broad resistance, yet managed to win several landmark laws barring discrimination and segregation.

To Stand and Fight demonstrates how black New Yorkers launched the modern civil rights struggle and left a rich legacy.

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Reviews of this book:

Historians have thoroughly documented the experiences of those African Americans who lived in the South and worked to repeal Jim Crow laws. However, in this work, Biondi explores what she calls 'the struggle for Negro rights' in New York City, an exploration resulting in a stark reminder of the daily challenges facing blacks who lived in northern cities...With its detailed discussions of the American Labor Party, the Communist Party, Black Nationalism, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., W. E. B. Dubois, Roy Wilkins, and, especially, Paul Robeson, this work should be required reading for all historians interested in the post-WW II experience of African Americans in the urban North.

--T. D. Beal, Choice

Reviews of this book:

In this meticulously researched monograph, Biondi reminds the reader that the struggle for black civil rights was waged in the North before it was joined in the South. She documents the fight against racial discrimination in hiring, police brutality, housing segregation, lack of political representation, and inadequate schools in New York City between 1946 and 1954...Biondi's writing is crisp and direct. She introduces the reader to a host of activists whose efforts deserve to be remembered. Unfortunately, most of the causes they championed remain with us today.

--Paul T. Murray, MultiCultural Review

With stunning research and powerful arguments, Martha Biondi charts a new direction in civil rights history - the northern side of the black freedom struggle. Biondi presents postwar New York as a battleground, no less than the Jim Crow South, for the fight against police brutality and discrimination in employment, housing, retail stores, and places of amusement. Men and women, trade unionists and religious leaders, integrationists and separatists, liberals and the Left come together in this pathbreaking study of America's largest and most cosmopolitan city.

--Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham,, editor-in-chief of The Harvard Guide to African-American...

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Gigi Brown:

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