

Path to Grace: Reimagining the Civil Rights Movement

Ethel Morgan Smith

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Ethel Morgan Smith's memoir *Path to Grace* covers the civil rights movement from the days following Reconstruction to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It also acknowledges that the quest for civil rights remains a living challenge.

Gleaning insights from eleven interviews with everyday and unsung civil rights heroes, including writers and poets, this story is reported from on the ground. Its profiles show that the civil rights movement operated on behalf of all people of color, who together dreamed of a better world. Its focal figures include Dr. Sandra Ford and her husband Henry Ford, whose ministry focused on Alabama's "black belt," an area of the country facing incredible need in which the evils of slavery remain an oppressive reality. And all of the interviews are open and honest, making room for their subjects to recount their experiences as they wish.

This reportage is bracketed by brief passages in a memoir style. Smith recalls church on Sunday and winning a spelling bee in her childhood alongside reflections of the profound, heartbreaking effects of systemic racism in her life. Here and elsewhere, the prose is warm and inviting, drawing engaging pictures of life in Black America—and of its loving and powerful women. The result is a text that proves that understanding the civil rights movement requires going beyond the headlines and finding the people who fought on the front lines of social change.

Moving, insightful, and personalized, *Path to Grace* highlights the civil rights efforts of Black Americans who worked to find acceptance and freedom in a society that preferred to hold them down. This inspirational book is a testament to the power of people to change their lives—and the lives of those around them—for the better.

JEREMIAH ROOD (September / October 2023)

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