



Speak Truth to Power: The Story of Charles Patrick, a Civil Rights Pioneer (Alabama Fire Ant)

Mignette Y. Patrick Dorsey

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On December 11, 1954, Charles Patrick drove to downtown Birmingham to buy a Boy Scout uniform for his son. Christmas traffic around the downtown department stores was heavy, and Patrick circled unsuccessfully until at last a streetside spot opened up and he began to pull in. As he did so, he was cut off by a woman who ordered him out of the way, as she was the wife of a city police officer. Patrick pulled away, remarking, "Ma'am, he doesn't own the streets of Birmingham."

Normal low-level urban hassle? Not in 1954 Birmingham, when the woman was white and Patrick black. The woman reported to her husband that a black man had sassed her, and Patrick was summarily arrested, charged with disorderly conduct, and placed in a cell where he was beaten by the husband and another police officer.

Usually that would have been the end of it, but Patrick was not the sort of man to meekly endure an injustice. He found an attorney, went to court to fight the charges, and brought his assailants to justice--as whites, blacks, politicians and the press offered public support.

This book tells the story of Patrick's quest for justice in segregated Alabama on the eve of the civil rights movement and represents a telling instance of the growing determination of African Americans to be treated fairly, part of the broadening and deepening stream of resolve that led to the widespread activism of the civil rights movement.

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