

Reviewed by: Barbara Bamberger Scott

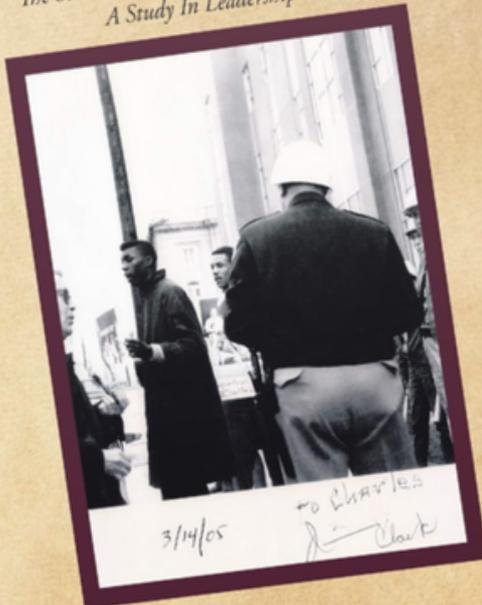
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TIP OF THE ARROW

*The Selma Student Nonviolent Movement
A Study In Leadership*



3/14/05

TO CHARLES
Charles

CHARLES A. BONNER



AUTHOR: CHARLES A. BONNER

**TIP OF THE ARROW: THE SELMA
STUDENT NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT,
A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP**

REVIEW

BOOK TITLE: **TIP OF THE ARROW: THE SELMA STUDENT NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT, A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP**

AUTHOR: **CHARLES A. BONNER**

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"The civil rights movement in Selma, Alabama, had a great effect throughout the world."

More than 50 years ago, a group of students organized to protest and ultimately end blatant discrimination against black citizens in Alabama. Author Bonner has constructed a remarkable overview of the place, time, culture, and occurrences. Personally involved in these memorable events, Bonner painstakingly collected autobiographical material from more than 400 fellow members of the Selma cohort, both black and white, for this wide-ranging survey. Raised on a farm, Bonner has vivid memories of the Selma region in the pre-civil rights era. He sweated in cotton fields with his family to earn a pittance while gazing in the distance at "the big white mansion up on the hill" belonging to former slave-owners who had become guardians of white privilege to the extreme detriment of their black fellow citizens.

When Bonner and his friends met Bernard Lafayette and his wife Colia, dedicated organizers for the then-burgeoning Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), things began to change. Through their connection with Lafayette, Bonner and other high school students came to understand that although their town was mostly black, whites ruled with an iron fist. Still, this inequity did not have to continue. Through SNCC, these young people were infused with a new vision for what life might be like without separate facilities from schools to water fountains, without the fear of the KKK and the power-wielding local white sheriff, and with a newfound determination to win back the right to vote that had been wrested from them. Their ensuing coalescence into a well-organized activist group facilitated more black votes, more open protests. There would be, in the coming years, many arrests, even deaths, of those who dared speak out. But in the end, a great battle was won. And more such battles, Bonner suggests, are still to be fought.

Bonner's eye-opening book consists largely of individual accounts. Readers of any age or ethnicity will find these stories compelling, especially the reminiscences of black childhoods in the pre-civil rights Deep South. Children had to work from the earliest age to sustain the family farm and income, had to hunt and forage for lunches to bring to schools that were little more than shacks, and accept education that stopped at grade 8. Meanwhile, white children rode buses to well-equipped schools with cafeteria meals, athletic programs, and the latest textbooks while anticipating college education and well-paid careers. Before meeting the Lafayettes, the author believed his only professional prospect was as a barber; instead, he became a master trial lawyer concerned with cases involving civil rights and related concentrations. His task in creating this book was clearly prodigious and includes such significant portions as an attempt at a reconciliatory interview with former Sheriff Jim Clark. Clark's law enforcement in Selma included the horrific events of "Bloody Sunday," the non-violent march for rights in March 1967 that resulted in brutal beatings, use of teargas, and multiple arrests. Clark seems to recall that Selma "was the greatest place in the world" and asserts that, though there was segregation, none of the white people of his acquaintance "thought anything about it."

Bonner has successfully garnered stories from both white and black protestors, detailing the rigorous training they received in strictly non-violent tactics, citing such inspirational progenitors of those techniques as Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus of Nazareth. He and many of his fellow activists believe that now is the time for young blacks and other oppressed groups to organize again, following careful guidelines as he and his friends did so successfully in the 1960s. This meticulously ordered compendium of recollections, along with Bonner's own sharp commentary, will doubtless attract and motivate a serious, empathic readership.