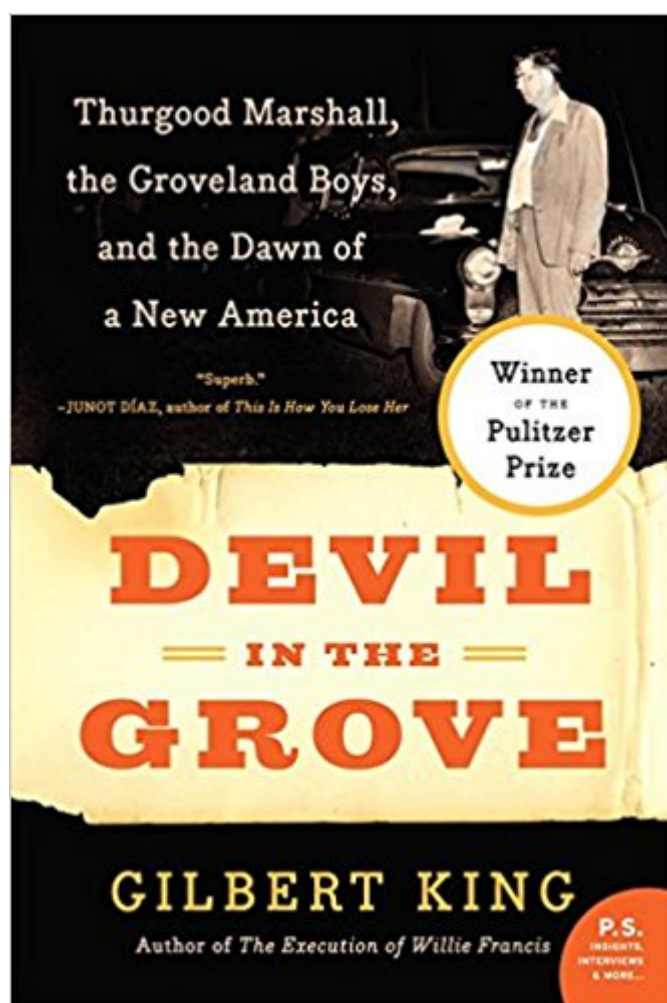


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# Devil In The Grove: Thurgood Marshall, The Groveland Boys, And The Dawn Of A New America





## Synopsis

\* Winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction\* Nominated for a 2013 Edgar Award  
Book of the Year (Non-fiction, 2012) The Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor  
In 1949, Florida's orange industry was booming, and citrus barons got rich on the backs of cheap Jim Crow labor. To maintain order and profits, they turned to Willis V. McCall, a violent sheriff who ruled Lake County with murderous resolve. When a white seventeen-year-old Groveland girl cried rape, McCall was fast on the trail of four young blacks who dared to envision a future for themselves beyond the citrus groves. By day's end, the Ku Klux Klan had rolled into town, burning the homes of blacks to the ground and chasing hundreds into the swamps, hell-bent on lynching the young men who came to be known as "the Groveland Boys." And so began the chain of events that would bring Thurgood Marshall, the man known as "Mr. Civil Rights," and the most important American lawyer of the twentieth century, into the deadly fray. Associates thought it was suicidal for him to wade into the "Florida Terror" at a time when he was irreplaceable to the burgeoning civil rights movement, but the lawyer would not shrink from the fight--not after the Klan had murdered one of Marshall's NAACP associates involved with the case and Marshall had endured continual threats that he would be next. Drawing on a wealth of never-before-published material, including the FBI's unredacted Groveland case files, as well as unprecedented access to the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund files, King shines new light on this remarkable civil rights crusader, setting his rich and driving narrative against the heroic backdrop of a case that U.S. Supreme Court justice Robert Jackson decried as "one of the best examples of one of the worst menaces to American justice."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Must-read, cannot-put-down history." (New York Times) "Superb." (Juno Diaz, author of *This Is How You Lose Her*) "A powerful and well-told drama of Southern injustice." (The Chicago Tribune) "Devil in the Grove is a compelling look at the case that forged Thurgood Marshall's perception of himself as a crusader for civil rights. . . . King's style [is] at once suspenseful and historically meticulous." (Christian Science Monitor) "Recreates an important yet overlooked moment in American history with a chilling, atmospheric narrative that reads more like a Southern Gothic novel than a work of history." (Salon) "A taut, intensely readable narrative." (Boston Globe) "The story's drama and pathos make it a page-turner, but King's attention to detail, fresh material, and evenhanded treatment of the villains make it a worthy contribution to the history of the period, while offering valuable insight into Marshall's work and life." (Publishers Weekly) "A thoroughgoing study of one of the most important civil-rights cases argued by Thurgood Marshall in dismantling Jim Crow strictures. . . . Deeply researched and superbly composed." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) "A compelling chronicle." (Booklist) "Gripping. . . . Lively and multidimensional." (Dallas Morning News) "The tragic Groveland saga -- with its Faulknerian echoes of racial injustice spinning around an accusation of rape -- comes astonishingly alive in Gilbert King's narrative. It is both heartbreaking and unforgettable." (Wil Haygood, author of *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell Jr.*) "In the terrifying story of the Groveland boys Gilbert King recreates an extraordinary moment in America's long, hard struggle for racial justice. Devil in the Grove is a harrowing, haunting, utterly mesmerizing book." (Kevin Boyle, author of *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*) "Gilbert King's gut-wrenching, and captivating, narrative is civil rights literature at its best--meticulously researched, brilliantly written, and singularly focused on equal justice for all." (Michael G. Long, author of *Marshalling Justice: The Early Civil Rights Letters of Thurgood Marshall*) "This is a haunting and compelling story, one of many in the campaign for racial justice. . . . This book is important because it is disturbing. And in that regard we cannot walk away from the story it tells." (Phyllis Vine, author of *One Man's Castle*) "Gilbert King has done a remarkable job of weaving together history, sociology, law and detective work of his own, to reveal facts that even I, one of the defense counsel in the case, had not been aware of until now." (Jack Greenberg, Alphonse Fletcher Professor of Law, Columbia University, former Director-Counsel, NAACP Legal Defense Fund.) "[An] excellent



book on a little known and horrifying incident in which four young black men were rounded up and accused of raping a white woman, readers cannot help but be awed by the bravery of those who took a stand in the late 1940s and early 1950s. (San Francisco Chronicle) "Its rich case history captures the beginning of the end of the most extreme forms of racism. . . . Very few books combine this depth of research and narrative power about a subject of such pivotal significance." (Ira Katznelson, author of *When Affirmative Action Was White* and a former president of the American Political Science Association )

*Devil in the Grove* is the winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction. Arguably the most important American lawyer of the twentieth century, Thurgood Marshall was on the verge of bringing the landmark suit *Brown v. Board of Education* before the U.S. Supreme Court when he became embroiled in a case that threatened to change the course of the civil rights movement and cost him his life. In 1949, Florida's orange industry was booming, and citrus barons got rich on the backs of cheap Jim Crow labor with the help of Sheriff Willis V. McCall, who ruled Lake County with murderous resolve. When a white seventeen-year-old girl cried rape, McCall pursued four young blacks who dared envision a future for themselves beyond the groves. The Ku Klux Klan joined the hunt, hell-bent on lynching the men who came to be known as "the Groveland Boys." Associates thought it was suicidal for Marshall to wade into the "Florida Terror," but the young lawyer would not shrink from the fight despite continuous death threats against him. Drawing on a wealth of never-before-published material, including the FBI's unredacted Groveland case files, as well as unprecedented access to the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund files, Gilbert King shines new light on this remarkable civil rights crusader.

Could not get enough of the details in this crime. That Sheriff got away with murder, for years. Written with history that only a dedicated writer and researcher could convey, you will be transported back in time, a horrid time of callous disregard for human life. Despite how tragic this story is, it needs to be told, again and again, so the world will know what Florida was like for the black men who worked in the groves, abused by the white grove owners. Horrifying story, brilliantly told.

This was an enlightening read about a very brave and great American civil rights leader who became the first African-American justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. A very well written page turner that illustrates how brave the early civil rights leaders were in America who risked and often



lost their lives in their struggle to overcome the ugly legacy of slavery and racial bigotry in America. An excellent companion book would be "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson (see my review) which illustrates how the poor and people of color to this day seldom receive equal justice under the law in the United States. The struggle for racial equality in America continues. The struggle continues, but "Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, We shall overcome someday." Do yourself a favor. Read this book.

While at times the book's exhaustive detail of the players in the case of the framed Groveland Boys can be a tad repetitive-- yes, we understand, Sheriff McCall is a true demon-- there is more than enough here to educate and hold the reader in rapt attention. Thurgood Marshall is a true American hero, that is not up for debate. That said, the supporting cast at the NAACP, the ancillary team members defending the Groveland Boys (many of whom were white and Jewish), host of heroic journalists who also risked life and limb to see the truth come to light, and even the few Floridians who were brave enough to change their minds are the real story here. I recommend this book.

Fantastic, one of the best books I have ever read. First, it gives tremendous insight to the man, Thurgood Marshall, and his values and genius. Secondly, as a native Floridian who has lived and practiced law in central Florida for over 45 years, I was aware of the events which and characters who are the subjects of this book. Willis McCall was still sheriff and Troy Hall was still a judge when I began practicing in this area. Segregation was still alive and well in Lake County. The water fountains and restrooms were still labeled for blacks and whites. This was NOT for purposes of "historical preservation", THEY MEANT IT. Amazingly, another of the Circuit Judges had a photo of a public lynching hanging on the wall in his chambers for all to see. This remained present for years after the time covered in this novel. This novel covers central Florida from the 40's through the 70's. On the surface was blatant racism, segregation, bigotry, and injustice. Beneath the surface were very powerful individual and corporate interests, especially those related to the citrus industry. Were we seeing simply ugly racism or was there something more sinister going on that in a different form continues to this very day? Were segregation, public lynchings, bombings, and beatings being used to control a supply of cheap labor for grove barons or was it simply racism? And what about the brutal and infamous racist Sheriff Willis McCall? The summer of 1949 - 4 young black men were accused of raping a young white woman in Groveland, Florida. Most likely no rape ever occurred. McCall turned a mob loose on one of the accused who they killed. The remaining three after being severely beaten were convicted in a sham trial. One of the accused was sentenced to life in prison.



His conviction was not appealed for tactical reasons. The remaining two had their convictions reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court. As Sheriff McCall was transporting them back to face a new trial, both handcuffed prisoners were shot by Sheriff McCall. Was he the Devil in the Woods or was the Devil more abstract such as prejudice, racism, poverty, ignorance, etc? As one reads the book it is easy to be caught up in the horrific and unbelievable events being described, but one should try to think beneath the surface of what else is occurring and why. This novel includes bigger than life individuals: Thurgood Marshall, J. Edgar Hoover, Florida politicians and governors, Presidents, Sheriff McCall, etc. It also includes a family most have never heard of, Harry T. and Harriette Moore. Harry Moore and his wife, Harriette, were activist and civil rights pioneer members of the NAACP in Florida. He and his family resided in Mims, Florida which is east of Orlando near what is now the Kennedy Space Center. On their 25th wedding anniversary, Christmas eve, December 25, 1951, he and his wife became the first civil rights leaders in America to be assassinated when 4 members of the KKK bombed their home. Harry Moore had days earlier called for an indictment against Sheriff McCall and asked Governor Fuller Warren [a KKK member] to suspend him from office. Was there any rape, what happened to each of the Groveland 4, was anyone ever held accountable for the torture of the accused, was Sheriff McCall ever held accountable for shooting two handcuffed prisoners, was anyone convicted of killing the Moores? To learn the answers just start the book you won't be able to put down. Significant material is present in this book even after the novel is ended. Of note is a letter from the daughter of a very prominent and ethical Ocala attorney, Pat Pattillo. One of the citrus barons referred to in the novel was her great grandfather. She gives a vivid first hand account of the change in values of some within a region as well as her perceptions from childhood to womanhood.

This is an interesting story about one of Thurgood Marshall's early case's as a NAACP lawyer. I grew up know him as the first Black Supreme Court justice and as the lawyer that argued the Brown v. Board of education case before the Supreme Court. This book highlights a part of his career that I was not as familiar with. As it turns out, while all of his better known cases were winding their way through the courts, Marshall and the lawyers that worked with him were involved in a variety of cases such as the one that is highlighted in this book. In Devil in the Grove Marshall must deal with southern justice in its rawest form. 3 young black men are accused of rape of a white woman with a racist sheriff that runs the county like it is his own personal fiefdom. The story is fast paced and the author puts the story in the account of wider events taking place in the country. The author also does a good job of mentioning some of the rivalries that took place among the lawyer of the NAACP



as well as the strains Marshall's career put on his marriage. This is a very well written book that gives the reader a greater appreciation of Marshall and his career.

You might think you know what it was like for African Americans in this country in the 40's & 50's, but the author of this book paints an excruciatingly depressing picture of rural Florida at that time. Luckily Thurgood Marshall was around to see that all was not lost, and other people of good will chipped in. A very ugly story of racial hatred, but a story well told by the author.

Superb, infuriating book about just how morally mad the South used to be, and still sometimes is, as the church murders in Charleston recently reminded us. Profoundly researched, and beautifully written. The whole saga and nightmare of Southern racism and blood lust in the century after the Civil War in a nutshell. A terrific, if nauseating, descent into hell in the collective human heart in a world as dark as Nazi Germany any day, just on a smaller scale.

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