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# Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

*Charles W. Eagles*

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**Charles W. Eagles : Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama:

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Outside Agitator tells the dramatic, largely forgotten story behind the 1965 killing of civil rights worker Jonathan Myrick "Jon" Daniels in Lowndes County, Alabama, detailing the lives of the killer and the victim. A white Episcopal seminary student from New Hampshire, Jon Daniels helped organize blacks in Selma during the events that led to the Selma-to-Montgomery march. In August 1965 he was fatally shot in neighboring Lowndes County by Tom Coleman, a highway department engineer and steadfast segregationist, who was later acquitted by an all-white jury. Lowndes County was a bastion of white minority dominance. For half a century, no black had voted or served on a jury there. Known for the violence used by whites to maintain their control, "bloody" Lowndes presented Daniels and other civil

rights workers with almost insurmountable obstacles. Tom Coleman, a Lowndes County native, represented the consensus among local whites that violent resistance to racial change was justified. To defend his community and to prevent change, he resorted to violence against "outside agitators." Following the deaths of a score of other civil rights workers, the killing of Jon Daniels was in many ways the last atrocity of the first, southern, nonviolent phase of the Civil Rights movement. This exploration of how Daniels and Coleman came to be at opposite ends of a shotgun outside a county store captures the mechanics and emotions of forces promoting and resisting change in southern race relations. Charles Eagles reminds us that however representative Daniels and Coleman may have been of larger forces, they were nevertheless real individuals with distinctive personalities caught up in specific circumstances.

From Publishers Weekly In this detailed but readable book, Eagles (who edited *The Civil Rights Movement in America*) fleshes out the 1965 killing in Alabama of white Episcopal seminarian Jon Daniels, which received little attention at the time because of the Watts riots and a subsequent New York newspaper strike. Eagles traces the New Hampshire background of the "intensely self-critical" Daniels, and his decision to join protests led by Martin Luther King in Selma. Daniels then became the first white civil rights volunteer in nearby Lowndes County. Eagles ably elaborates the white-supremacist history of isolated, backward Lowndes, as well as the growth of grass-roots civil rights activism there. Arrested for picketing local merchants and released, Daniels then led an interracial group to a store, where a local resident, Tom Coleman, shot him. Eagles speculates on why Coleman might have felt more threatened than others by the civil rights movement. An inept prosecution, coupled with defense lawyers playing to an all-white jury, assured Coleman's acquittal. This book, as well as the Episcopal Church's 1991 decision to cite Daniels as a martyr, serves as a measure of redress. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal More than four decades ago, political scientist V.O. Key Jr. observed in his classic *Southern Politics in State and Nation* that whites in Southern "Black Belt" counties were the most staunch supporters of racial segregation and white supremacy. Historian Eagles examines the events surrounding the shooting death of civil rights worker and Episcopalian seminary student Jon Daniels in one Black Belt county (Lowndes) of Alabama in 1965. Eagles's account of how Daniels came to be in Alabama and his work there is both well researched and emotionally moving. Readers seeking a broader overview of events in Alabama during this turbulent time may consult Carl Elliot Sr. with Michael D'Orso's *The Cost of Courage: The Journey of an American Congressman* (LJ 2/1/92). A valuable addition to public and academic collections on the civil rights movement.- Thomas H. Ferrell, Univ. of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A very good book. . . . The story of Jonathan Daniels and Tom Coleman is complex, ambiguous, and multi-layered. Eagles is attuned to its nuances and explores them sensitively." —Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Post Book World*