

Into the Bright Sunshine: Young Hubert Humphrey and the Fight for Civil Rights

Samuel G. Freedman

Oxford University Press (Jul 14, 2023)

Hardcover \$29.95 (336pp)

978-0-19-753519-6

Into the Bright Sunshine is an incisive biography of Hubert Humphrey, the rural Midwesterner who grew into a prominent, persuasive politician in the vanguard of civil rights.

Humphrey's Great Depression-era childhood in South Dakota was isolated and challenging. It also shaped him into an unlikely hero. Fragile in health, long-winded, ever strapped for cash, he nonetheless ascended to become a popular, progressive Democrat whose support for the Vietnam War clouded his legacy.

Humphrey attended graduate school in the South. Later, as Minneapolis's mayor, he was further exposed to gross examples of racial and religious bigotry. Vivid profiles of Humphrey's political allies and adversaries flesh out the social context of his time: he formed longtime friendships with a Black newspaperman, Cecil Newman, and with Jewish activist Sam Scheiner. These personal experiences and relationships had a powerful influence on his promotions of social justice.

The book's dramatic crescendo is Humphrey's speech at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, an event of "underappreciated importance in civil rights history." The sweaty, nerve-racking tension of the speech, which could have been political suicide, is imparted. Instead, Humphrey achieved a triumph of tactical and oratory skill, calling for the country to "walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights." He was prescient in his vision of a successful long-term Democratic coalition that included Black voters.

The behind-the-scenes details of turning points throughout Humphrey's career are captivating. Policy wonks will revel in absorbing glimpses of Sam Rayburn's parliamentary wizardry, Dixiecrats' machinations, and Harry Truman's back-and-forth support for desegregation. The workings of journalism and politics in the pre-television, pre-internet age, when national conventions were a hotbed of political action, with millions of people captivated by their radio broadcasts, are also conveyed.

Into the Bright Sunshine is astute in capturing pivotal moments in American political history.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July / August 2023)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.