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**New Book Maps the Integration of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South**  
*LSU Press to publish *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow in April**

**Baton Rouge**—In *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, Wayne A. and Shirley A. Wiegand tell the comprehensive story of the integration of southern public libraries. As in other efforts to integrate civic institutions in the 1950s and 1960s, the determination of local activists won the battle against segregation in libraries. In particular, the willingness of young black community members to take part in organized protests and direct actions ensured that local libraries would become genuinely free to all citizens.

The Wiegands trace the struggle for equal access to the years before the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, when black activists in the South focused their efforts on equalizing accommodations, rather than on their more daunting—and dangerous—task of undoing segregation. After the ruling, momentum for vigorously pursuing equality grew, and black organizations shifted to more direct challenges to the system, including public library sit-ins and lawsuits against library systems. Although local groups often took direction from larger civil rights organizations, it was the energy, courage, and determination of younger black community members that ensured the eventual desegregation of Jim Crow public libraries. The Wiegands examine the library desegregation movement in several southern cities and states, revealing the ways that individual communities negotiated—mostly peacefully, sometimes violently—the integration of local public libraries.

This study adds a new chapter to the history of civil rights activism in the mid-twentieth century and celebrates the resolve of community activists as it weaves the account of racial discrimination in public libraries through the national narrative of the civil rights movement.

**Wayne A. Wiegand** is F. William Summers Professor of Library and Information Studies Emeritus and professor of American Studies at Florida State University. **Shirley A. Wiegand** is professor emerita of law at Marquette University. The Wiegands are the authors or coauthors of numerous books, including *Books on Trial: Red Scare in the Heartland*.

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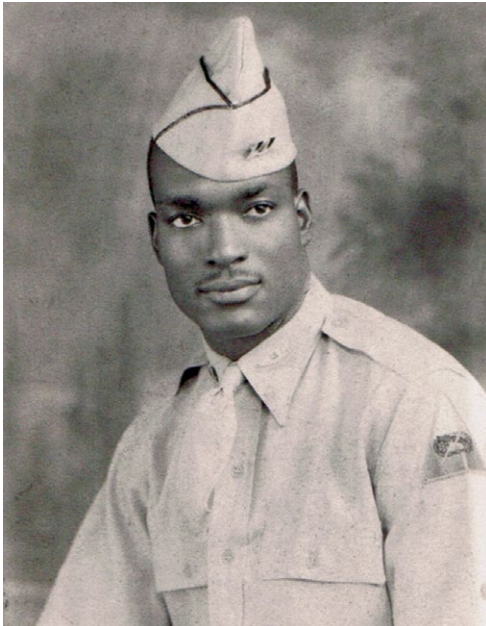
Cloth \$38.00, ebook available

Civil Rights / Southern History / Library Studies

To request a review copy or set up an interview with the author,  
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## An Interview with Wayne A. Wiegand and Shirley A. Wiegand, co authors of *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South: Civil Rights and Local Activism*



Jesse H. Turner, instrumental in desegregating Memphis public libraries (Photo courtesy of Turner Estate)

Discourse about desegregation in the South often focuses on public education or the workforce. How does the history of desegregation within the public library system add to the broader conversation?

Unlike schools and places of employment, no one is forced to use a library. And yet, it represented such an important place to African Americans that they risked their lives and liberty to desegregate it. Note that it was the young kids, not the civil rights leaders, who conducted the protests, and that is likely why the media failed to focus on that aspect of the movement. These “hidden figures” have been overlooked.

What role did librarians play in maintaining or challenging the status quo as students protested their lack of access?

But for a remarkable few, the vast majority remained silent. The profession itself did little.

What were some of the protest tactics used by civil rights advocates?

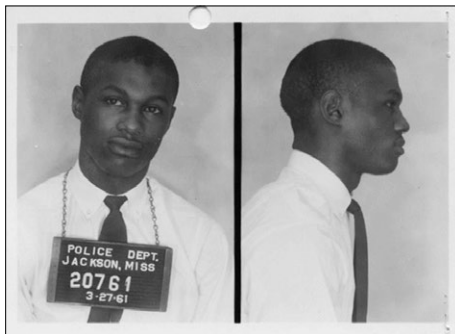
They were all nonviolent and followed pretty much the same pattern: walk quietly into a library, sit down, and begin reading.

Your book covers a number of specific integration attempts in cities across the South. Did any of these events stand out as particularly effective or emblematic of the overall struggle?

Jackson, Mississippi, comes to mind: it followed a characteristic pattern, well-planned, conducted by youth, who were then arrested and carted off to jail. According to Medgar Evers, it became the catalyst for the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Shortly thereafter, Jackson police descended upon supporters of the library protesters with billy clubs and dogs, leading to one of many lawsuits.

Given that racial discrimination continues to be an issue in America, how can understanding the nature of desegregation of public libraries in the South inform a more equitable society?

Because of the power of the public library as “place,” public libraries across the South have become sites of racial reconciliation. The accomplishments of African Americans are put on public display there. Blacks and whites sit next to each other and gather for public events without thinking twice.



Mug shots of James Bradford and Janice Jackson, two of the “Tougaloo Nine” (Mississippi Department of Archives and History)