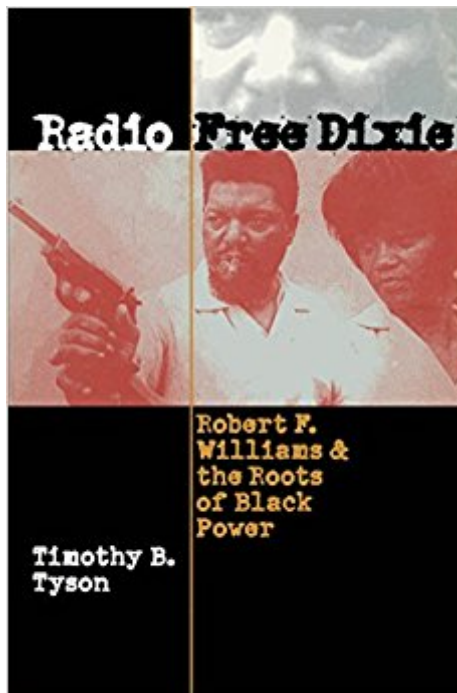




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# Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams And The Roots Of Black Power



## Synopsis

This book tells the remarkable story of Robert F. Williams--one of the most influential black activists of the generation that toppled Jim Crow and forever altered the arc of American history. In the late 1950s, as president of the Monroe, North Carolina, branch of the NAACP, Williams and his followers used machine guns, dynamite, and Molotov cocktails to confront Klan terrorists. Advocating "armed self-reliance" by blacks, Williams challenged not only white supremacists but also Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights establishment. Forced to flee during the 1960s to Cuba--where he broadcast "Radio Free Dixie," a program of black politics and music that could be heard as far away as Los Angeles and New York City--and then China, Williams remained a controversial figure for the rest of his life. Historians have customarily portrayed the civil rights movement as a nonviolent call on America's conscience--and the subsequent rise of Black Power as a violent repudiation of the civil rights dream. But Radio Free Dixie reveals that both movements grew out of the same soil, confronted the same predicaments, and reflected the same quest for African American freedom. As Robert Williams's story demonstrates, independent black political action, black cultural pride, and armed self-reliance operated in the South in tension and in tandem with legal efforts and nonviolent protest.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

To some, the civil rights radical Robert Williams's philosophy of armed self-defense was the very antithesis of Martin Luther King's nonviolent resistance. However, each man represented a wing of

the growing civil rights movement, and both grasped and skillfully wielded the political leverage that the dynamics of the Cold War afforded the civil rights cause. After a stint in the army during WWII, Williams returned to his hometown in Monroe, N.C., where he built a uniquely militant NAACP chapter and attracted international attention to racist hypocrisy. When eventually forced by Ku Klux Klan vigilantes and an FBI dragnet to abandon his activities and flee the U.S. with his family in 1961, he found safe harbor in revolutionary Cuba, where he produced Radio Free Dixie, a program of politics and music broadcast to America. Written with the cooperation of Williams and his family, Tyson's firecracker text crackles with brilliant and lasting images of black life in the Carolinas and across the South in the '40s, '50s and '60s. Liberally peppered with quotes from Williams, many taken from his unpublished autobiography, *While God Lay Sleeping*, as well as from interviews and radio tapes, the book is imbued with the man's voice and his indefatigable spirit. An assistant professor of Afro-American studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the co-editor of *Democracy Betrayed*, Tyson successfully portrays Williams as a troubled visionary, a strong, stubborn and imperfect man, one who greatly influenced what became the Black Power Movement and its young leaders. Photos. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tyson (Afro-American studies, Univ. of Wisconsin) has transformed his graduate research into an important study of a forgotten Civil Rights leader. After helping to organize one of 1950s America's most militant NAACP chapters (in Monroe, NC), Robert F. Williams found himself at odds with the national Civil Rights leadership. Rejecting King's nonviolent approach, he began calling for black self-determination and armed self-reliance. In 1962, when his radical ideas got him into trouble with the KKK and the FBI, Williams took his family to Cuba, where he began beaming his influential "Radio Free Dixie" over Radio Havana's wires. Using a wide variety of primary sources—especially oral-history interviews—Tyson resuscitates Williams as an important forefather of Black Power. Moreover, Tyson concludes that Williams's life shows how Black Power "emerged from the same soil, confronted the same predicaments, and reflected the same quest for African American freedom" as the nonviolent Civil Rights movement. This groundbreaking, skillfully written revisionist monograph (the first full-length study of Williams ever published) is intended primarily for an academic audience. A Charles C. Hay, Eastern Kentucky Univ. Lib., Richmond Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If the title "Radio Free Dixie" sounds strange for the name of a history book about a freedom

fighter--it does have meaning. Radio Free Dixie was the name of a one hour radio program that Robert Williams broadcast from Cuba while in exile. Robert Williams was a freedom fighter from North Carolina. He participated in WW2 and used that training to help protect himself back home in Monroe, N.C. If you've never heard of Robert Williams then nor had I until recently. After reading this book I can see why Robert Williams never became a household name: 1.) He's considered the father of the Black Nationalist and Black Power movements. 2.) He was at odds with the NAACP and MLK. Robert Williams odds with the NAACP were for three reasons: 1.) the NAACP was a "bourgeois organization. It did not want to deal with the underclass and such. 2.) The NAACP was a bureaucracy with its main office based in NY and they moved too slow for the likes of the local offices throughout the South and 3.) the NAACP was fundamentally nonviolent; and this was their biggest point of contention. Williams condoned armed resistance, or as he said: "meet violence with violence. He had a quote that summed up his feelings on the issue of nonviolence: "Williams denounced the 'emasculated men' who preached nonviolence while white men beat their wives and daughters. "When we passively submit to these barbaric injustices, he raged, 'we most surely can be called the 'sissy race' of all mankind. This ideology made Williams and opponent to the NAACP, MLK, and of course White people. The SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), NAACP and even the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) were all philosophically and fundamentally nonviolent. The nonviolence in dispute was in three areas; two they agreed upon and one was a little gray. The areas of nonviolence (or more appropriately, whether or not violence should be used) were 1.) When attacked at home or otherwise minding your business. 2.) In retaliation for an attack (i.e. pursuing and punishing attackers) 3.) retaliating against attackers during protests. Williams and the others agreed on the first two issues. Yes, one had the right to defend himself and his family. No, Black people shouldn't take up arms and seek justice by punishing Whites that victimized Blacks. But, should I be able to defend myself during a picket or a sit-in when there are Whites spitting on me and beating me? I think they disagreed to some degree here. In any case, this book didn't paint the NAACP or MLK in a favorable light. Another enlightening item from the book was that Williams was at the core of the "Monroe Kissing Case". This is another obscure event in a long line of obscure injustices to Black people. A little White girl, playing a game, kissed two Black boys, aged 8 and 10. Once she told her mother about the game the mother called the police and those two boys were summarily arrested

and locked up. Had those boys been older, like Emmitt Till, they would've been killed. The case gained international traction because of Robert Williams. At that time, 1959, the U.S. was still in the Cold War and hated to have her dirty laundry be aired when she was proclaiming "liberty and justice for all". So, it was a strategic measure for Williams to make the case very public. As the author, Timothy B. Tyson, said, "In the Cold War world, however, overt white supremacy became an increasingly unaffordable embarrassment for the federal government." Essentially, this book covers North Carolina in the Jim Crow era and more specifically Robert Williams, an important character in the Civil Rights era. The book was done in a scholarly way as it was a university project. I'd say 1/4th of the book was references, bibliography and an index. It may read dryly in places because it's not a narrative, it is a history lesson with some quotes from some of the participants in the events. I appreciate the book for just introducing me to Robert Williams.

This is a first-hand view of the Other Side of the early Civil Rights movement - the armed self-defense movement of southern blacks which preceded (and inspired) the later Black Nationalist and Black Panther movements.

Essential reading for anyone that wants to understand the post-slavery "free" society racism and oppression suffered by African-Americans in the south and in America. Robt. F. Williams stood by his principles and dedicated himself to the day to day struggles of the common man, which put him in opposition with the KKK, The United States Government and the NAACP. In response to his actions in saving a white couple from harm in a black neighborhood in a time of racial upheaval, he ended up labeled as a dangerous and violent schizophrenic and on the FBI's 10 most wanted list. He successfully escaped the U.S. and soon found himself living in Cuba as an esteemed guest of Fidel Castro where his radio show "Radio Free Dixie" was broadcast at a signal that carried it to the Canadian border. Later, he went to Vietnam, as an esteemed guest of Ho Chi Minh (who credited Robt. F. Williams newsletter as being influential in the North Vietnamese urban warfare strategy) and later, lived in China as an esteemed guest of Mao Zedong... only to return to the U.S. on a chartered flight as an high level consultant to the CIA, FBI and the Nixon Administration. Williams' insights into the politics, personality of it's leaders and culture served as the most primary and highly valued information for the Nixon administrations centerpiece legacy, Foreign Policy, with emphasis on China. The Value of Williams resulted in his being pardoned for all prior actions and all charges dropped. Amazingly, this man died of more or less natural causes. All of the above, makes Robt. F.

Williams one of the greatest freedom fighters and American's and human beings who ever lived. Timothy Tyson, the author, strikes the perfect chord in his story telling, which is factual, well-researched and devoid of abrasive opinions. Much like a holocaust narrative, he aims not for hyperbole or dramatization rather, a re-telling of the facts, all of which serve to make this a book that is written at a perfect pitch for the life and times of Robt. F. Williams. Although this review touches on the major aspects of the case, it barely scratches the surface of the information contained therein. I found that it was difficult to read more than 3 pages without the urge to jot something down, reflect in contemplation, or call someone to relate something that seemed beyond belief and yet, unknown in popular culture.

One of the most POWERFUL books I've EVER read. It's a MUST read for anyone trying to understand the sickness of racism in the USA.

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