

On a gray winter day in February 1989, a UPS driver tossed a large box on my porch. I heard the *thump* from my upstairs study.

The box contained a 2,000-page manuscript, which represented my father's life's work: a comprehensive history of blacks and race relations in the state of Georgia, home to both the twentieth-century Ku Klux Klan and the civil rights movement. Such a work had never been completed before, and unfortunately that was still the case. In November 1988, after having spent fifteen years toiling on the book, Donald Grant, emeritus professor of history at Fort Valley State, died before he could find a publisher for his unfinished opus.

The idea that I was the right person to rescue Dad's history wasn't obvious to me. (*Somebody ought to do something about that book*, I thought when he died. But then I went on about my business.) It *was* obvious to Mom, however. Not long after Dad's death she called and asked me if I would consider finishing the book. A retired college reference librarian, Mildred Bricker Grant had put in a lot of work on Dad's book as both a researcher and proofreader. (Dad was a great teacher, but not a great speller.) And she wasn't about to see his life's work die with him.

I'm a writer myself, but I was no historian. So I didn't come right out and say I'd do it. I was working on my first novel at the time, and the thought occurred to me, *If I haven't even finished my own book, how can I make a commitment to finish someone else's—even if it's my father's?* Despite my misgivings, I told Mom I'd see what I could do.

When I read the first chapter—about Spanish explorations and colonial Georgia—I was *hooked*. This was not some dry, old, lifeless text; it was alive, even fascinating. I learned that slavery was originally banned in the colony of Georgia, and that white

Georgians worried more about holding onto their slaves than about winning the Revolutionary War. (Even so, during the Revolution, most of Georgia's slaves ran off to live with Indians or formed armed camps called maroons.)

This was not the history most of us had been taught, and Dad had done a good job presenting it. I called Mom to say I would take on the project. I wasn't doing it out of devotion to Dad; I was doing it because this book truly deserved to be published. If I didn't do it, no one would. Mom



*Donald Grant's interest in black history stemmed, in part, from the lynching of a black man in his hometown of Marion, Indiana, when the author was ten years old.*

agreed to underwrite the project. I would serve as editor and find a publisher. I estimated it would take me a year. After all, it was already written, I figured.

First, I had to finish my novel, a satire on Southern politics entitled *The Unindicted*. I finished it in November 1989, then turned my attention to Dad's book. When my wife, Judy, and I returned from visiting Mom for Thanksgiving, our van was loaded with Dad's background material—several hundred books, files, and noteboxes.

The fact that Dad's book survived long enough to become an orphan on my doorstep is a matter of some amazement to me even now. I call it my father's life's work, but in truth it is his *later* life's work, for he trod many paths before he became a historian. As a teenager during the Great Depression, he was a mountain climber and, for a short while, a gold prospector. Following careers as a logger and a chicken farmer, Dad entered graduate school at the University of Missouri in 1969, when he was nearly fifty.

Dad's outlook and the tenor of the times led him to specialize in African-American and Latin American history. As the youngest child of a Congregationalist minister in Indiana, he had been brought up to believe in racial equality and justice. A lynching in his home town of Marion when he was ten years old had driven home the fact that black Americans had neither. That impression was reinforced when he worked as a guard in a prisoner of war camp in Florida during World War II. Nazis captured by U.S. forces were sent to that camp, and Dad was struck by the fact that they were treated much better than black GIs, who cleaned the barracks while the Nazis played volleyball.

Utilizing the puritan work ethic instilled in him by his father and by the sixteen-hour-day regimen he was used to as a farmer, Dad obtained both his master's and doctoral degrees in three years. His dissertation was published as *The Anti-Lynching Movement: 1883-1932*.

Dad found his calling teaching at Fort Valley State, a small school in rural middle Georgia. Though some people might consider it odd that a white man taught African-American history at a predominantly black school, it made eminent sense to the people who knew him, and by all accounts, he was very good. Dad was deeply disappointed in the treatment most state histories gave to the black