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In 1966 Peter Jan Honigsberg--a young, idealistic law student--arrived in the South to help provide legal representation for civil rights workers. Although based in New Orleans, most of his work was in the city of Bogalusa and in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. Bogalusa was the heart of the Louisiana movement and the home of one of the most formidable but little-known black organizations in the country--the Deacons for Defense and Justice, the first modern-day African American organization to carry weapons and to respond with force against the Ku Klux Klan. This riveting memoir, one of only a handful of first-person full-length accounts of the civil rights movement, is both a stirring coming-of-age story and a thrilling chronicle of a remarkable era in United States history.

Honigsberg's engaging narrative conveys the emotions and personal dangers activists faced. He describes how the Deacons worked with the Bogalusa Voters League to boycott the white-owned businesses in the downtown area and to integrate the local schools, restaurants, parks, and paper mill.

Unlike many law students, Honigsberg not only worked on legal issues; he participated directly in marches and demonstrations. His narrative includes lively firsthand accounts of his attempt--with a group of black and white demonstrators--to integrate a beach on Lake Pontchartrain, his experience marching through hostile Ku Klux Klan territory under the eye of the National Guard, and his witnessing a prominent civil rights leader lift his car's trunk to display a cache of carbines and grenades to a station attendant who refused to fill the tank with gas. This memoir provides a unique glimpse into the civil rights movement and the people who were forever changed by its struggle for human dignity and its vision of racial justice and equality.