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## Local

A must-read for every high school student

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### BALTIMORE -

Here's a suggestion for every high school civics teacher in the state of [Maryland](#): Put in an order for [C. Fraser Smith](#)'s new book, and hand it to your students the moment they walk in the door next fall. And make sure their parents read it, too. It's a road map of [America](#)'s long political struggle from slavery to a black man running for president. It'll tell them what they never knew. Also, it'll stir their souls.

The book's called "Here Lies Jim Crow: Civil Rights in Maryland." Smith, a longtime newspaper and radio political reporter around here, brings in a great cast of characters, and he connects yesterday with today.

And what a roster of names: From [Roger Taney](#), of [Frederick](#), writing the Supreme Court decision declaring black people were not U.S. citizens, to [Thurgood Marshall](#) of [West Baltimore](#) saying, yes, we are, and winning the high court decision to integrate the so-called "public" schools.

From the Fells Point slave named [Freddy Bailey](#) who secretly learned how to read, and learned the biblical words, "Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?" to the same man — now calling himself [Frederick Douglass](#) — who became [Abraham Lincoln](#)'s confidant, and whose guiding philosophy of nonviolence became [Martin Luther King](#)'s.

And from a Princess Anne lynching in 1933, witnessed by a young newspaper reporter named [Clarence Mitchell Jr.](#), out of West Baltimore, whose "lifetime of impassioned service to the nation was forged by the mob." He became the NAACP's legendary chief [Capitol Hill](#) lobbyist and the so-called 101st senator.

Here's a small piece of Mitchell's original account, in the Baltimore Afro-American, of the Eastern Shore lynching of a black man named [George Armwood](#), dragged through the streets by a murderous mob and hanged from a tree in front of a judge's house:

"[His] skin was scorched and blackened while his face had suffered many blows from sharp and heavy instruments. ... One ear was missing and his tongue, between his clenched teeth, gave evidence of his great agony before death. There is no adequate description of the mute evidence of gloating on the part of whites who gathered to watch the effect on our people."

"Here Lies Jim Crow" tells us how we got from such savagery to today's political climate, in which two men run for president and the nation attempts to put aside all questions of skin color and judge each on his abilities to handle the toughest job in the world.

Can we do it? Smith tells us where we've stumbled along the way in the Free State, and where we triumphed. He brings us the remarkable [Lillie Mae Jackson](#), daughter of Maryland's slave father, [Charles Carroll](#), who was himself a descendant of Charles Carroll of [Carrollton](#), a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

And there's [South Baltimore](#)'s [Theodore McKeldin](#), from [Baltimore's City Hall](#) to [Annapolis](#)' State House, trying to inch race relations toward civility in the middle of the 20th century — and [Spiro Agnew](#) undoing so much of it in a single post-riots speech in 1968.

But the book's more than politics. Smith finds the tireless [A. Robert Kaufman](#) among the pickets outside the old [Ford's Theater](#), where black patrons had to sit in the balcony. He finds William "Little Willie" Adams, "never carrying more than seven dollars in cash," rising from a street-corner numbers operator to a millionaire who bankrolled politicians and business deals.

And he recounts nights inside Pennsylvania Avenue's Royal Theater, where the regulars included [Billie Holiday](#) and [Count Basie](#), and [Duke Ellington](#) and [Fats Waller](#), in an atmosphere recalled by a young [Kweisi Mfume](#) in his own memoir as "loud and cantankerous, pulsating with honking horns, droning voices, and raucous laughter, and smelling of cigars, perfume, and roasted peanuts."

And Smith also gives us Harry C. "Curley" Byrd, president of the [University of Maryland](#) in 1935, around whom rumors spread that he bargained with state legislators for construction money, "promising in return to keep the school free of black students."

It's not always a pretty history, but it's a triumphant one in a lot of ways. We're still trying to work things out, trying to see past skin color to human character.

And "Here Lies Jim Crow," published by the [Johns Hopkins University](#) Press, slowly makes you realize how intricately Maryland's racial history has been entwined with the nation's, and how profoundly.

Any high school civics teacher who doesn't make use of this book ought to explain why. This is history at our front door. And it's history that takes us right into the heart of the current political moment.

*Examiner*