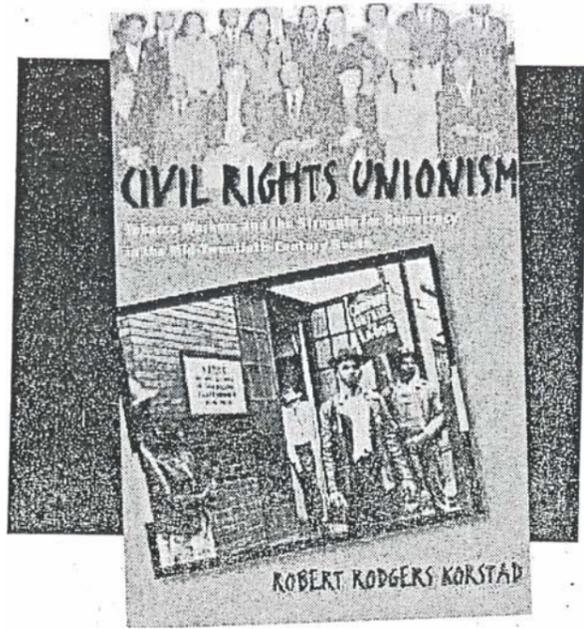


Many of UE 150's most active leaders and organizers have been inspired by a book published in 2003 by a North Carolina author, about an exciting but previously little-known chapter of North Carolina history. Robert Rodgers Korstad, who teaches history at Duke University, begins his book with these words:

Civil Rights Unionism tells the story of a workingclass-led, union-based civil rights movement that tried to change the arc of American history in the years surrounding World War II. Its protagonists consist of roughly 10,000 tobacco manufacturing workers, mostly African American but including several hundred whites, who through Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers - Congress of Industrial Organizations (FTA-CIO) initiated and sustained a broad-based challenge to economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, and racial discrimination in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, throughout the decade of the 1940s. Arrayed against them were the managers of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and an industrial oligarchy that wielded enormous power in the city, the region and the nation.



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Civil Rights 'Unionism

(Continued from page 9) the hysteria of the "red scare" being directed against ITA; treacherous attacks on Local 22 by both the CIO and AFI; and the weakness of most white workers in siding with white bosses instead of with black fellow workers.

Robert Korstad's father Karl was an ITA organizer, and Bob grew up in Greensboro, NC. In this book - one of the best labor histories you could ever read - he tells the story of the people of Local 22 eloquently and passionately. He also deeply understands how organizing is done, and his book could serve as a union organizer's handbook. Recently the UE NEWS spoke to Prof. Korstad about how he came to write the book, and his thoughts on the importance of labor history to building strong unions today.

"I'd grown up hearing about these events from my father and from Robert Black, who'd been the president of the union (Local 22) and who worked with my father. They did landscaping

because they couldn't any other work. So I knew a lot about it."

Bob's work on this book really started in his student days in the 1970s. He first wrote about the FTA as a thesis for a labor economics class, and gradually digging deeper into the story, expanded it until it became *Civil Rights Unionism*.

"It was pretty hard at the beginning. Because of the attacks on the union, it was very difficult for many of these people (the former members of Local 22) to even talk about their experiences. They'd gone on with their lives - they were doing other things. It took a good bit of time to get people to a point where they were willing to sit down and talk to me."

Korstad faced additional hurdles. Most of the records of Local 22 had disappeared. He slowly assembled records from the personal collections of former

members and leaders he interviewed. Fortunately the FTA records still existed in several libraries.

"It was an important story to tell, and so important in my parents' lives and the lives of the people I interviewed. There's a tremendous amount of this history of struggle that doesn't get communicated from one generation to the next. As a result, people live in a bit of an historical vacuum, and that's very disempowering."

"This work people in UE here are doing to use history and appreciation for the fights that have gone on in the past has a real value in helping contemporary organizing - so that people don't think they're trying to do something that no one has ever done before."

"The labor movement has to find ways to fill that void. Music is one way, and there's history, drama - there's a lot of ways to do that, and it's really important."

A BRIGHT LIGHT SNUFFED OUT

Historically in 1950, this bright light of Southern labor was snuffed out. Local 22 was defeated and decertified through a combination of forces: the relentless hostility of the company; its changes in production and restructuring of the workforce to eliminate the black majority in the workforce;

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