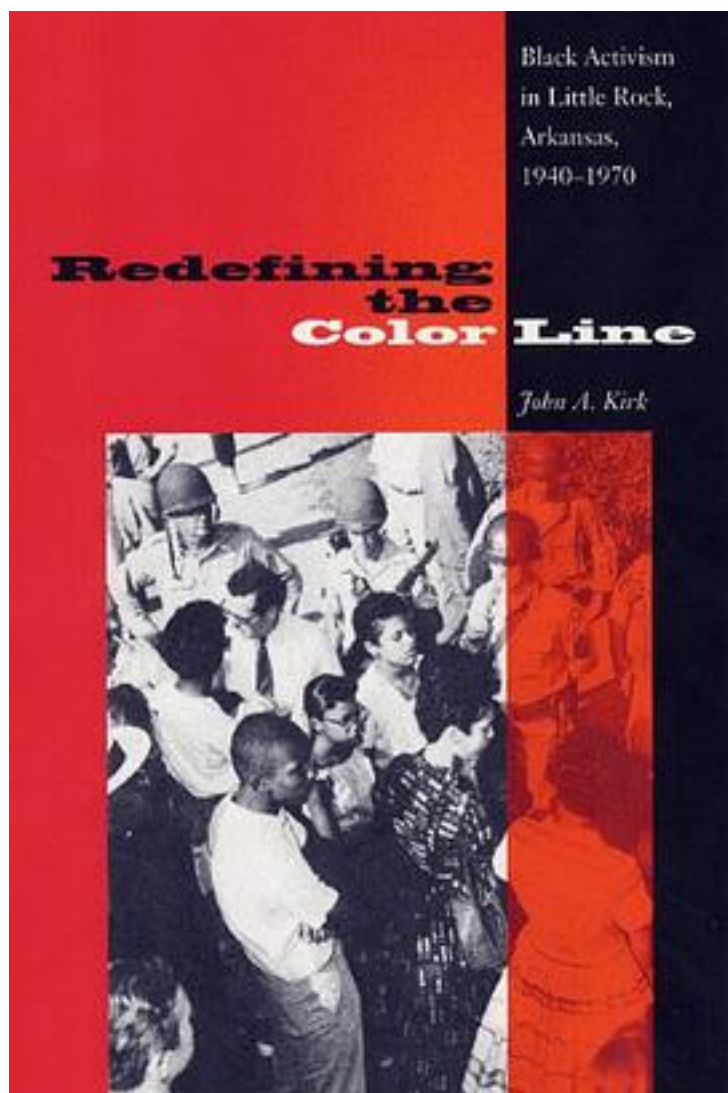


Redefining the Color Line



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One of the most significant events in the struggle for black civil rights in America was the integration in 1957 of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation was unconstitutional. The South's campaign of massive resistance against this ruling culminated in a showdown at Little Rock's Central High School, where President Dwight Eisenhower sent federal troops to protect nine black students as they entered the school. Although numerous studies have analyzed the Little Rock school crisis from a variety of perspectives, one striking omission in existing accounts is the role played by local black activists who were at the very center of events. This is the first book to contextualize the events in Little Rock within the unfolding struggle for black rights at local, state, regional, and national levels between 1940 and 1970. Early civil-rights scholarship focused almost exclusively on the role played by national civil rights organizations between 1955 and 1965. John Kirk argues that only by understanding the groundwork laid by black activists at the grassroots level in the 1940s and 1950s can we fully understand the significance of later protests. Moreover, Kirk shows that local-level black activists and black organizations were not homogeneous, but differed significantly in their goals and strategies, thereby adding a multi-dimensional facet to a complex struggle that was more than just white against black. Drawing upon oral history interviews and new material garnered from activists' privately-owned collections, as well as extensive documentation from local, state, regional, and national public archives, *Redefining the Color Line* charts new territory in the study of the Little Rock school crisis and forces a reevaluation of that familiar event and its place in the history of the civil rights struggle.

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