



# MARIA GITIN

## CIVIL RIGHTS VETERAN, SPEAKER AND AUTHOR

As a 19 year-old freshman at San Francisco State College in 1965, Maria Gitin felt called to action after viewing televised images of brutal police attacks on nonviolent demonstrators in Selma, Alabama, an historic event known as "Bloody Sunday." Gitin immediately volunteered for the Summer Community Organization and Political Education (SCOPE) project of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Gitin's book, *This Bright Light of Ours*, is based on her original letters from 1965, reunions with co-workers, and in-depth conversations with Wilcox County civil rights activists more than forty years later.

Her book emphasizes the unheard voices of grassroots freedom fighters who formed the backbone of the civil rights movement. Atypical among white civil rights volunteers, Gitin came from a low-income rural family. She raised funds to attend an intensive orientation in Atlanta featuring legendary civil rights leaders. Gitin spent the rest of the summer canvassing for voters with local youth in rural Wilcox County, Alabama where the Ku Klux Klan was active and the sheriff vitriolic. Her life-changing experiences include speaking at mass meetings, being jailed, and learning first hand what the role of whites in the freedom fight should be by working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council (SNCC). She never forgot the courageous local residents who risked their lives to work side by side with SCOPE and SNCC field workers as they joined forces during the neglected last integrated Freedom Summer of the civil rights movement.

*This Bright Light of Ours : Stories from the Voting Rights Fight*  
University of Alabama Press

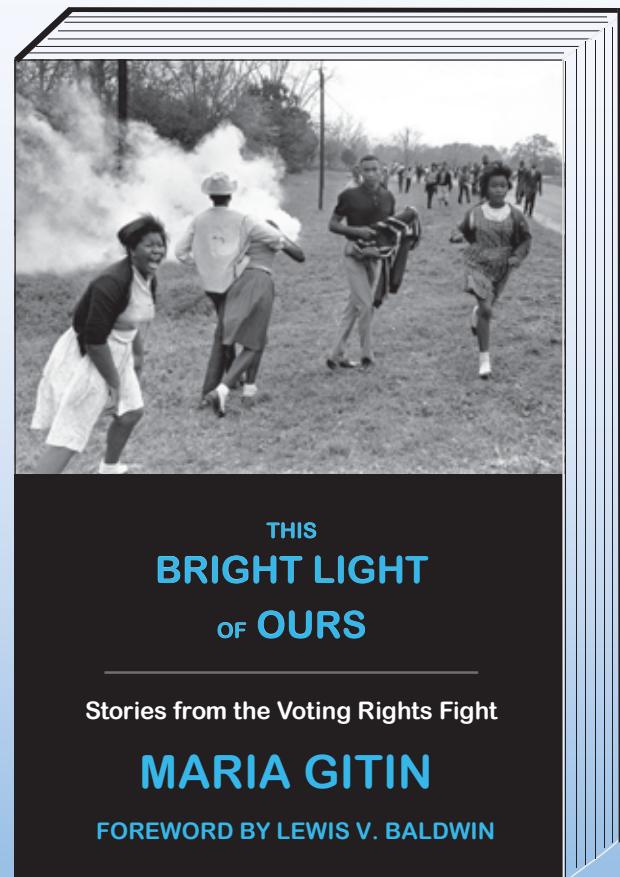
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"The wide and diverse array of voices leaps from the pages of *This Bright Light of Ours* with stunning force. They are authentic voices, and the stories they share are dramatic, gripping, poignant, uplifting, and empowering."

— Lewis V. Baldwin, Vanderbilt University,  
King Scholar, Wilcox County native



## Advance Reviews

### *This Bright Light of Ours: Stories from the Voting Rights Fight*

Maria Gitin

University of Alabama Press (2014)

*This Bright Light of Ours: Stories from the Voting Rights Fight* is a first-hand, from the front-lines report of the '60s Southern voting rights movement in one of the most resistant counties in one of the most resistant states. This is a must read account of a less publicized aspect of the Southern civil rights movement, white volunteers risking life and limb to challenge white supremacy at its most brutal.

— Julian Bond, Chairman Emeritus, NAACP

This is an important work about a neglected period of the Civil Rights Movement, the 1965 Voting Rights Movement. Gitin clearly communicates her commitment to civil rights and social justice by presenting us with the fresh voices of unheralded community leaders in Wilcox County, Alabama. It adds wonderful new insight and texture to the story of how courageous Americans transformed their community and the country.

— Robert Michael Franklin, President Emeritus of Morehouse College

The wide and diverse array of voices leaps from the pages of *This Bright Light of Ours* with stunning force. They are authentic voices, and the stories they share are dramatic, gripping, poignant, uplifting and empowering.

— Lewis V Baldwin, Wilcox County native, King Scholar, Vanderbilt University, author of *In a Single Garment of Destiny*

Gitin provides one of the most nuanced treatments of white involvement in the movement that I have read. She avoids many of the pitfalls that typically mar works treating the subject, most notably devaluing the role of outside organizers while simultaneously overstating the contributions they made.

— Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Ohio State University, author of *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*

Maria Gitin's lively and candid memoir-history answers the call for a grassroots rather than leader-centered account of the southern struggle against the Jim Crow system. *This Bright Light of Ours* helps readers understand how millions of black Southerners finally became American citizens.

— Clayborne Carson, Director King Institute  
Stanford University

*This Bright Light of Ours*, shares important details of the experience of giving oneself to the country-changing work of the civil rights movement. Much credit is given to a select few whose names are often called as leaders of this powerful movement. But there would have been no freedom movement certainly not of the breadth and scope to which it evolved had it not been for movement volunteers like Maria Gitin and others she writes about. Because of their giving spirit, their willingness to suffer even, a cruel and unjust system that impacted the lives of all of us was changed.

— Dorothy Cotton, SCLC Education Director

Maria Gitin's book is a unique blend of her own story and those of the local community with whom she worked in Wilcox County in the exceptionally challenging struggle of the 1960's civil rights movement. Very, very few books offer this kind of retrospective and prospective. Gitin's love for the people of Wilcox County shines through. The work reinforces an understanding of the courage of those times, the penalties exacted in real human lives and ways, the strength of the Black community, their openness and caring, and a brilliant documentation of how completely segregated the South — at least this corner of the South — remains.

— Bettina Aptheker, Professor Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

Bernard LaFayette and I worked together in Wilcox. In fact, the first Blacks to attempt to register since the fall of Reconstruction were from Wilcox County. We were early introduced to the violence of Sheriff Jenkins and a county with more dead folk on the voter rolls than living. I am very proud to see that a Sister is out there telling the story from which at last hopefully soon a legacy of SNCC will emerge, a legacy that our young can use as bread from which to draw sustenance. We desperately need it.

— Colia Liddell LaFayette Clark, SNCC field director, Freedom Flame Award recipient Selma Jubilee 2011