



Coming of Age in Utopia: The Odyssey of an Idea

Paul Gaston

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In this exquisitely wrought memoir of a committed life, historian and civil rights activist Paul Gaston reveals his deep roots in the unique utopian community founded in 1894 by his grandfather and later led by his father on the shores of Mobile Bay, Alabama. Fairhope grew into a unique political, economic, and educational experiment; a center of radical economic and educational ideals and institutions, and home to a vibrant idealism and creative arts, it was a haven for reformers, writers, and other visitors.

As time passed, however, Fairhope's radical nature went into decline. By the early 1950s it was clear that great changes were coming to the South, and the author began to look outward for ways to take part in the coming struggle -- the civil rights movement. Gaston's career at the University of Virginia, where he taught from 1957-97, forms the core of Coming of Age in Utopia.

The story Gaston tells of social change both in the city of Charlottesville and the University of Virginia is one in which he played significant roles. It illustrates a truism about struggles for justice: when privilege is deeply ingrained in the social order, change must come from below.

A master story teller with a compelling personal life and unique involvement in the events he describes, Gaston weaves these and other stories of struggles for social justice into a forceful narrative enriched with provocative interpretation.



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