



State of Defiance: Challenging the Johns Committee's Assault on Civil Liberties

Judith G. Poucher

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“Judith Poucher’s account of the resistance to the Johns Committee gives us the individual stories that characterize successful social protest movements. Situated between civil rights, Gay and Lesbian history, and the fight over academic freedom, this book weaves these difficult histories into a single narrative.”—Robert Cassanello, author of *To Render Invisible*

“Looks at Florida’s Johns Committee in a new way: through the lives and memories of Floridians affected by its persecutions in the 1950s. Their stories are inspiring, disturbing, and instructive.”—Sarah H. Brown, author of *Standing Against Dragons*

“An important addition to the expanding body of scholarship on the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee. Readers will find intriguing the process by which ‘ordinary citizens’ championed integrity and conscience in the face of state oppression.”—Karen L. Graves, author of *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida’s Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers*

“Readers will learn a great deal from the lives of these unsung but extraordinary people who refused to cower before this instrument of legislative terror.”—Steven F. Lawson, author of *Civil Rights Crossroads*

The Johns Committee, a product of the red scare in Florida, grabbed headlines and destroyed lives. Its goal was to halt integration by destroying the NAACP in Florida and smearing integrationists. Citizens were first subpoenaed under charges of communist tendencies and later for homosexual or subversive behavior.

Drawing on previously unpublished sources and newly unsealed records, Judith Poucher profiles five individuals who stood up to the Johns Committee. Virgil Hawkins and Ruth Perry were civil rights activists who, respectively, foiled the committee’s plans to stop integration at the University of Florida and refused to divulge Florida and Miami NAACP records. G. G. Mock, a bartender in Tampa, was arrested and shackled in the nude by police but would not reveal the name of her girlfriend, who was a teacher. University of Florida professor Sig Dietrich was threatened with twenty years in prison and being “outed,” yet he still refused to name names. Margaret Fisher, a college administrator, helped to bring the committee’s investigation of the University of South Florida into the open, publicly condemning their bullying.

By reexamining the daring stands taken by these ordinary citizens, Poucher illustrates not only the abuses propagated by the committee but also the collective power of individuals to effect change.

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