Before graduate student Mike King began using his given name, Martin Luther, before Detroit Red changed his name to Malcolm X, and before Medgar Evers joined the NAACP, civil rights activist Harry T. Moore was murdered. On Christmas night, 1951, an explosion ripped through his house, the bomb having been planted directly under his bed. His mother, visiting for the holidays, had been very concerned for Moore’s safety. In the 1950s, in the Deep South, Moore’s political activism had earned him plenty of enemies. Every advancement comes by way of sacrifice, he told his mother before going to bed that night. What I am doing is for the benefit of my race. In the 1930s and 40s, Moore drove the roads of Florida, organizing the local NAACP, speaking quietly against Jim Crow laws, and urging blacks to register to vote. He also wrote elegantly argued letters to the governor and other public officials, protesting injustices and atrocities against blacks. Seen as a troublemaker, Moore became entangled with Willis McCall—whom author Ben Green calls the prototype of the racist Southern sheriff. Green intertwines the biographies of these two very different men, drawing a picture of racial tension in an era before the issues reached national attention. Green is especially good at capturing the atmosphere of the events—dense fogs, sticky heat, clouds of biting insects—but goes slightly astray when listening to drunken former Klansmen, who are perhaps merely seeking their 15 minutes of fame and not unburdening their souls before they die, as they spout confessions about Moore’s murder. Like many biographers, Green clearly admires his subject, which makes him write slightly purple prose. Moore’s life, however, was clearly admirable and Green has written a moving tribute to this sadly forgotten man. --C.B. Delaney

My Personal Review:
Having moved to Brevard County in 1991, just when the Harry T. Moore murder case was back in the news, and the fact that I pass the Moore
Justice Center every day, I was anxious to learn about Harry T. Moore and happily picked up a copy of this book.

Harry T. Moore and his wife Harriette were murdered on Christmas Day, 1951 when a bomb exploded beneath their bedroom at their home in Mims, Florida. At the time of his murder, Harry Moore was the Florida coordinator for the NAACP and a founder of the Progressive Voters League. As the title of book implies, Harry Moore was before his time, including his murder. Remember this happen before Rosa Parks, before Medgar Evers, before Dr. Martin Luther King and before Brown vs. Board of Education. The murderer of the Moores has never been found.

Green traces the life of Harry Moore from childhood to teaching to his efforts in helping to lead the Civil Rights movement in Florida. Along the way Harry Moore instructed his students how to use the ballot, before African-Americans could vote and Harry Moores efforts in the investigations of violence (re: lynching) and murders of African Americans in Florida.

The most famous case that Harry Moore investigated was the Groveland Incident. The case involved the conviction of three African-Americans in the rape of a 17-year-old woman and the subsequent killing of two of the suspects by the Sheriff of Lake County Florida, Willis McCall, in an escape attempt. All the while, Harry Moore was fighting with the NAACP national organization to retained his position in the organization.

Greens biography of Harry Moore is sparse, though a lot of it could be contributed to lack of documents related to Harry Moores life. I felt the book would have been more complete with more details on Harry Moores internal fight with the NAACP national office and why Harry Moores place in the Civil Rights movement has been lost.

At the end of the book, Green spends too much time tracing down former Klan members who claimed they knew who murdered Harry Moore. However, all these statements were dead ends. Ben Greens book is a good starting point to learn about a true Civil Rights pioneer.

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Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, Americas First Civil Rights Martyr by Ben Green - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!