

PRAISE FOR  
A LIFE ON THE RUN

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to these many contributors of these celebrant testaments for my memoir and for me:

“Dr. John Telford’s *A Life on the RUN* is a dazzling story of ardent dedication to racial equity and the best education for every student—and of a rare man in turbulent times.”

—Dr. Deborah Anthony, former director of technology,  
Rochester (Michigan) Community Schools

“*A Life on the RUN* is a spellbinding book that lays it on the line—John Telford is the champion of the underdog!”

—Dennis Archer, Mayor of Detroit, 1994–2001, and a former  
Associate Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court

“John Telford is a living legend, and his book is *electrifying*. Dr. Telford’s lifelong dedication to social equality inspires all of us who seek to make America a true democracy.”

—Prof. Joshua Bassett, director of the Wayne County Community  
College District-sponsored Institute for Social Progress

“In this evocative memoir, trailblazing educator/activist John Telford shows us in gripping personal stories the qualities of courage, imagination, and unrelenting passion he brought to his fight for equality for generations of underserved people. He demonstrates the same rigorous honesty in his writing that marked his fruitful years as a leader in education and social activism. His story is an indispensable addition to our city’s rich, embattled history and a call for us to follow in the spirit of his footsteps.”

—Bill Bowles, librarian at Western International  
High School, Detroit Public Schools

“This great book is the legacy of a great teacher—a lasting (but hopefully not a *last*) legacy. Some day the misguided Madison school board will be sorry they didn’t keep him as their superintendent, but the misguided and failing Detroit school board will regret even more bitterly that they didn’t make him their superintendent when they had the chance to do it. John Telford has taught, coached, guided, and inspired me and countless others like me for fifty years, and he is still doing it today.”

—Reginald “Reggie” Bradford, educator;  
former quarter-mile star, Detroit Pershing High School  
and the University of Michigan

“Coach Telford’s life story is one of the best books I have ever read, and Coach Telford is one of the best men I have ever known.”

—Andre Broadnax, Detroit Public School League  
quarter-mile champion and anchorman of Pershing High School’s  
state record-breaking one-mile relay team, 1966

“In his panoramic autobiography, John Telford accurately presents himself as a fierce competitor and a miraculous motivator. John first impacted my life in 1960 when I was only sixteen and he was my track coach at Detroit Southeastern High School. As a sixty-six-year-old man who still dreams the ‘impossible’ dream, I continue to draw inspiration and encouragement from him.”

—Rev. Arkles C. Brooks, pastor of Gospel Chapel of Detroit

“Dr. Telford was the Barack Obama of Detroit ‘back in the day.’ He also was my all-time favorite teacher. The way he fought for African-American rights really stands out to me. No matter how many bad things people tried to put in his way, he kept on fighting for us. He is truly a blessing from God.”

—*Roland Brown, Detroit Finney  
High School student, class of 2009*

“An exemplary life for people of all colors to emulate. John Telford is an *urban legend*.”

—*Hugh Burrell, columnist, Michigan Chronicle*

“John Telford—educator, coach, civil-rights crusader, world-class sprinter, unrelenting fighter—has truly lived a rich and productive life that continues to bear fruit. In his unabridged and extremely honest memoir, we are able to share some of his experiences. He has, without question, walked the *walk*. Better yet, he *ran* it!”

—*Terry Cabell, senior editor, Michigan Chronicle*

“The legendary legacy of a legendary leader.”

—*Lloyd Carr, head football coach,  
the University of Michigan, 1995–2007*

“This explosive book is *unadulterated dynamite*—a clarion call for radical reform of urban education!”

—*Senator Hansen Clarke, Michigan State Legislature*

“Telford’s epic fury at the racism and classism that has condemned blacks to inferior education *burns* throughout this riveting book.”

—*Kenneth Cockrel, Jr., president,  
Detroit City Council and recent interim Mayor*

“Dr. Telford is a great teacher.”

—*Dominick Countryman, alumnus,  
Detroit Finney High School, class of 2009*

“John Telford doesn’t *wait* for justice to happen—he *makes* it happen.”

—*Dr. Patricia Dignan, a former executive director  
in the Detroit Public Schools’ Division of Instruction*

“Coach Telford was built for *speed*—he could outrun any of us. He looked like a white Secretariat. During the racially-charged 1960s, he provided wisdom for our lives after sports and pushed us to get college degrees. This compelling book is his proud story—and it is *our* proud story, too.”

—*Glenn Doughty, a Detroit Pershing High School and  
University of Michigan Rose Bowl star, and a retired All-Pro  
wide receiver for the vaunted and historic Baltimore Colts*

“The captivating chapter about Telford’s fighter father proves the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. If they had made Telford the superintendent in Detroit any of the several times he offered to do the job, he would have uncovered the shit long before it hit the fan and an emergency financial manager had to be brought in.”

—*Gary Doyle, superintendent (retired),  
Bloomfield Hills (Michigan) schools*

“Once one of the fastest men on the planet, John Telford remains a fast and indomitable fighter for human rights. His luminous life story is in turn outraged, droll, scandalous, and *sexy*. Also, his sometimes self-deprecating and dryly ironic humor never fails to make the discerning reader smile.”

—Dr. Wayne Dyer, world-renowned  
self-help author and lecturer

“A moving, thought-provoking book. Rather than run from the problem, Dr. Telford runs to the *roar!*”

—Minister Mary Edwards, co-founder,  
*Joy of Jesus Ministries*

“John Telford has fought relentlessly against racism and intolerance his entire life.”

—Dr. Gary Faber, superintendent (retired),  
*West Bloomfield schools*

“John Telford’s crusades for social justice truly inspire mine.”

—Geoffrey Fieger, celebrated trial lawyer

“Yes, I must own up to the fact that a *quarter-miler* named John Telford really *did* beat me once in a *1,000-yard* race—but he was smart enough never to race me *again* at that distance! Seriously, though—this book is far more than the memoir of an All-American athlete. It is the memoir of an All-American *man* who throughout his entire life has fought for the rights of *all* Americans.”

—Aaron Z. Gordon, Colonel, U.S. Army (retired),  
Ph.D., former world-record distance-relay runner  
at the University of Michigan and former president of  
OSAS (Detroit Public Schools’ Organization of  
School Administrators and Supervisors)

“This is the astounding story of a high-ranking administrator who retired and then actually *came back down* to a 100 percent black inner-city high school to *teach!* Dr. Telford’s students at Finney were positively *hypnotized* by him. So were *other* teachers’ students, when he went in and spoke to them. He pinned his students’ work on boards all over his classroom, and he made that classroom their *haven*. These wild kids would get almost *eerily* quiet whenever he began to speak. He never had to raise his voice. It was a rare sight to behold—his kids would have *killed* for him. As he says in the book, he called them his ‘Activist Army’—and that’s exactly what they became.

“When John Telford returned to the school after a full year away to deliver a surprise address at their 2009 commencement, the entire graduating class gave him a long and loud *standing ovation* before he even started to speak.”

—Tim Gore, Detroit Finney High School teacher and  
moonlighting Detroit police officer

“Coach Telford has led a life of which *legends* are made.”

—Spencer Haywood, former Pershing High School basketball  
and track star and All-Pro forward in the NBA

“The amazing story of an amazing man who bucked a flawed system and laid his life and career on the line. John Telford inspired me and countless others. He helped me get a track scholarship to college—and I became an electrical engineer. I pray that he *never* stops running his race.”

—Ken Howse, former Michigan high school track  
and cross-country champion and a record-breaker  
at the University of Illinois

“A great literary work by a great fighting educator.”

—Mrs. Connie Howse, wife of Ken Howse

“This exciting book has *everything*—drama, humor, poetry, romance, juicy scandals, sports challenges—and above all, a lifetime of fighting for justice in inner-city schools, suburban board rooms, and down and dirty in Detroit’s dangerous streets, defending the rights of the downtrodden and disenfranchised. John Telford has done it all.”

—Dr. Walter Jenkins, former Detroit Miller High School and  
Wayne State University track and football star, former Detroit Lion,  
and retired Detroit high school principal and executive director

“John Telford made me dare to *dream*.”

—Kevin Johnson (now Dr. Kevin Johnson),  
a former residential director at Wolverine Human Services  
who now directs Detroit’s philanthropic Phoenix Friendship House

“The sensational saga of a visionary civil rights crusader. As Professor John Powell writes in the *Introduction* to the book, John Telford is the only retired deputy school superintendent in America—black or white, urban or suburban—who dared to return to an inner-city high school to teach, and he was still doing it in his seventies, when we were colleagues at Finney High. This is the captivating story of his challenged boyhood, his triumphant youth, and his memorably embattled older years.”

—Keith Johnson, president, Detroit Federation of Teachers

“A unique historical perspective—a lifelong mission fueled with passion to level the playing field.”

—Janine Kateff, retired principal,  
Long Meadow School in Rochester, Michigan

“John Telford is an icon from the past who is now being rediscovered by the masses. This book is his second coming-out party for him to take his rightful place among the giants.”

—Dr. Stuart Kirschenbaum, Boxing Commissioner,  
State of Michigan, 1981–92

“A great man tells his life story. John Telford is simply a civil-rights *giant*.”

—Dr. John Kline, president,  
Black Legends of Professional Basketball  
and a former Harlem Globetrotter

“This is a *must read* for those who are working toward America becoming a more *just* society.”

—Dr. Daniel Krichbaum, chief operating officer for Michigan  
Governor Jennifer Granholm and a former executive director  
of the National Conference for Community and Justice

“John Telford is THE champion of minority rights.”

—Richard Lobenthal, midwest director (retired),  
Anti-Defamation League

“This book is a *blockbuster*. John has valiantly battled bigotry all his life.”

—Sam Logan, publisher of the Detroit-based  
Michigan Chronicle, the state’s oldest and largest  
African-American-owned newspaper

“Dr. Telford is our Champion for Truth and Justice. His book is a blueprint any true teacher must follow.”

—Jeffrey May, Jr., motivational speaker

“Dr. Telford always put his students first, sometimes at the risk of his own safety. He would confront hoodlums who came into the school from outside that even some *security guards* backed away from. I also saw him save some tough kids that everyone else had given up on. His life story in schools sets a sterling example for all of us to follow.”

—Anthony Merritt, senior security officer,  
Detroit Finney High School

“An insider’s view of the decline of Detroit and its schools, with common-sense solutions to reverse the decline—in Detroit and throughout urban America. Educators, activists, and athletes will *love* this book.”

—Maureen Meuser, librarian at Detroit Finney High School

“Telford’s bare-knuckled prose leaves a welt above the eye of racism, arrogance, and cruelty—and it jabs the noses of inept and self-serving administrators. This fast-paced book will be appreciated by educators, activists, and anyone seeking to understand the decline of Detroit and her schools during the post-war period.”

—John Mohn, DPS custodian and philosopher

“A fearless street fighter his entire life, John Telford has written the best memoir on Detroit I’ve ever read—a delightful and scandalous tale. He explicitly depicts the daily battles for respect and survival in the city’s toughest schools and neighborhoods.”

—Anthony Neely, press secretary and  
publicist for two Detroit mayors

“Here is the exciting, fighting saga of one of America’s top human rights pioneers. John Telford evolved from street thug to world-class track champion to heroic inner-city educator to become the clarion conscience of Rochester’s suburban elite, Detroit’s ~~classist and corrupt~~ school ‘leaders,’ and finally, Madison’s blue-collar racists. You won’t put this book down.”

—Sgt. Tom Nelson, West Bloomfield, Michigan,  
Police Department (retired); columnist;  
CEO of Great Lakes Pet Supply (retired); and MENSAs member

“John Telford saved my life. Now as I read the courageous story of *his* life, he inspires me once again to do great deeds for children.”

—Mike Oldham, charter school administrator,  
Academy of Warren (Michigan);  
former Rose Bowl and Super Bowl player

“John Telford is the Jonathan Kozol of the high school. He is also an educationally innovative genius.”

—Greg Owens, principal (retired),  
Reuther Middle School in Rochester

(Note: Mr. Owens died at sixty-eight on July 8, 2009—just before this book went to press. He was a rare man and a loyal friend, and I shall miss him every single day that remains to me on this earth.)

“Dr. John Telford is a *rebel*, a *renegade*, and a *renaissance man*. He began his journey as a champion sprinter but found his true calling as a champion of equal education for all. This is a tough and honest account of his life and his mission to save three generations of students. You’ll find tears, laughter, and inspiration in every chapter.”

—Huel Perkins, Fox 2 TV anchor, Metro Detroit

“*A Life on the RUN* is more than just the life story of a great man. It is also great literature. In addition to everything else this amazing athlete/activist has done, he tells his spellbinding story with an eloquence and style which hauntingly evoke the eloquence and style of the recently deceased writer John Updike.”

—Robert Plumpe, defense attorney;  
board member, the Detroit-based Team for Justice

“A mentor of mentors—Dr. Telford loved his students *unconditionally*. They knew he ‘had their back’—and they had *his* back, too.”

—David Points, Commander (retired), United States Navy;  
retiring teacher, Detroit Finney High School

“Throughout the years, John Telford’s achievements and philosophy have had an inspirational impact on my own—as effected most recently when as a suburban school superintendent he stood steadfast in the fearsome face of racism.”

—Prof. John A. Powell, who—in addition to directing the  
Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at  
The Ohio State University and holding the University’s Chair on  
Civil Rights and Civil Liberties—is a former national legal director  
of the ACLU, a former professor of law at Harvard University,  
and the founder and former director of the National Institute on Race and  
Poverty headquartered at the University of Minnesota School of Law

“If you care about the future of America’s black children, you will *memorize* parts of this powerful book.”

—Charlie Primas, Wayne State University All-American,  
former Harlem Globetrotter, and retired principal of a Detroit public  
school housed at the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility

“A sensational story engagingly written by a prodigious teacher, administrator, athlete—and *lover*! This captivating book is filled to the brim with Dr. Telford’s passionate and often poignant personal experiences, along with his wealth of institutional knowledge and trans-formative insights.”

—Dr. James E. Ray, superintendent (retired), Flint, Michigan Schools

“Telford is the *Superman* of Education—he fights for Truth, Justice, and the American Way. I want my children and my children’s children to read this memorable profile in courage and take it to heart.”

—Marvin Rubin, former principal,  
Van Hoosen Middle School, Rochester, Michigan

“An inspiring and unique book. Telford was a great athlete and scholar—and a master teacher and administrator. Today, he remains a selfless servant for all humanity.”

—Lamont Satchel, former interim superintendent,  
Detroit Public Schools

“*A Life on the RUN* is both the chronicling of a phenomenal trailblazer’s tale and an important guide for how one can exhibit an unbridled adherence to righteousness even in the face of tribulation and retribution. This book vividly reveals what most of us already know—that John lives by *love*, teaches with *heart*, speaks his *mind*, and does it all without fear of *anyone* or *anything*. If you seek to be so similarly disposed and want to know how to do it, then read this treasure of a treatise from a *true practitioner*.”

—Rev. Horace L. Sheffield III,  
Detroit Association of Black Organizations

“This book is a *masterpiece*. It is also a *must read* for anyone interested in the evolution and revolution of equality in our time. Dr. John Telford’s life has been a life boldly lived on front-line duty in the ongoing fight for social justice. In this masterful memoir, he provocatively captures the essence of his engagement with the forces of progress and the forces of entrenchment—and retrenchment.”

—Rabbi Arnie Sleutelberg of  
Congregation Shir Tikvah, Troy, Michigan

“A great book!”

—Dr. David Snead,  
former Detroit Public Schools superintendent

“While Telford dodges the label ‘radical,’ he is far more than a bedrock liberal.”

—Caleb Southworth, former editor,  
The Metro Times, Detroit and Ann Arbor

“John doesn’t hesitate to fight the white *and* the black establishment when they aren’t about *kids*. How many teachers, black or white, do you know whose black *and* white students—new and old—still call him every day, not only to *thank* him, but just to come and *hang out* with him? I’m proud of my African heritage, but I’m *proudest* to have John for my husband and lover. He still has those million-dollar legs—it’s understandable why women chase him—but they’d better *stay away* (or else he’d better use those two swift legs of his to run *away* fast).

“John will always be the *Man*, the *Myth*, the Legend!”

—Mrs. Gina Telford, artist, actress, activist,  
and former flight attendant

“The brave tale of a noble knight who dons armor to do battle for fairness and light in a dark world which hasn’t yet recognized that ‘together we *stand*, divided we *fall*’.”

—Dr. Terry Truvillion, long-time Detroit principal,  
and one of the first women to receive the  
Coleman A. Young Educator of the Year Award

“John Telford’s got *guts*.”

—Dr. Carl Wagner, principal, Madison High School  
Madison Heights, Michigan

“John Telford stands for what’s *right*—and he’s *tough*.”

—Alvin Ward, former principal, Detroit Finney High School;  
now principal, Detroit Kettering High School

“A fast life in the fast lanes of equality and justice—and also of *amour*! Anyone with a *heart* has to read this book!”

—Sam Washington, Jr., son of the Michigan Sports Hall of Famer

“Some call John Telford wild, a loose cannon, even *crazy*—but he *aims* his cannon straight at the perpetrators of the educational genocide of black children. And while he has fought white racists all his life, those administrators and board members whom he calls the ‘elitist black *classists*’ who exploit impoverished black children fear him, as well—and he gives them plenty of *reason* to fear him.”

—Tom Watkins, Michigan’s state superintendent of  
public instruction from 2001 until 2005, now a business and  
education consultant in the U.S. and China

“A legendary educational leader, activist, athlete, musician, painter, and poet has brought us his fascinating story we’ve all been waiting for!”

—Dr. William Waun, general director of Secondary Education (retired),  
Rochester (Michigan) Community Schools

“This resounding, biting fierce encomium for racial justice is also often biting and incredibly *funny*. It’s also rich, educational, and enlightening. This book should be on *everyone’s* coffee table.”

—Heaster Wheeler, director, Detroit NAACP

“Telford is a daring Don Quixote who tackles the big issues.”

—Dan White, assistant superintendent (retired),  
Bloomfield Hills (Michigan) schools

“Dr. Telford’s journey illustrates his fight for justice, his passion for possibility, and his tenacious spirit to challenge the status quo and effect change in urban and suburban education. His is a story for the ages.”

—Kenyetta Wilbourn-Snapp, principal,  
Detroit Denby High School

“This captivating book is a *classic*. John Telford was a great athlete, and he remains a great *integrationist*, a great *community catalyst*, and above all, a great *man*.”

—Robert E. Wollack, CEO, Wolverine Human Services,  
Detroit and Vassar, Michigan

“The consummate proponent of civil rights, John Telford is an unforgiving advocate for the underdog. He will face down anyone who wields power wrongfully. What he *writes*, he *lives*.”

—Willie Wooten, department head of Language Arts (retired),  
Detroit Southwestern High School

“I have an *urgent message* for any person who will *dare* to read *every word* of *A Life on the RUN*: I challenge you *not* to be intrigued and *not* to have your spirit moved by this book! John Telford isn’t *just* a brilliant writer. He isn’t *just* a gargantuan educator. He isn’t *just* a former Olympic-level athlete, nor *only* an unrelenting defender of civil rights and children’s rights. John Telford is an *archangel* wielding a *shining sword of social justice*, singlehandedly waging his holy war against the hypocrisy and horror of racism in America. Cutting through the excuses and opposition of those who maim, murder, and molest

minorities, he protects those among us who are less-equipped to defend our God-given right to life and liberty in this so-called ‘greatest country on earth.’

“Dr. John Telford’s life story is a testament to his courage under fire and his spiritual and physical prowess, while also retaining his *humble humanity*. This isn’t the story of a big celebrity or superstar or self-professed icon—it’s the story of a *real* hero. It’s also the story of a real *man*.

“I love you, Doc!”

—Ray Wright, *Detroit and Pontiac activist  
and advocate for youth*

“Wow! I love you, too, Ray.

I now invite the righteous reader to *read righteously on*, in order to learn what these many preceding accolades are *all about*, hopefully to *become inspired*, and also to become righteously *angry*, righteously *enlightened*, and perhaps even righteously *illuminated* . . .

—John Telford, duly designated archangel and wielder of a shining sword of social justice, per the hyperbolic last testifier, Ray Wright (—“Because of the oppression of the weak . . ., I will now arise,” saith the Lord, “and I will protect them . . .” – Psalms 12:5)