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South Carolina and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement

ROBERT GREENE

ABSTRACT South Carolina has to date played a minor role in the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement. Greene's article revisits the history of civil rights with reference to the Palmetto State and, in the process, a fuller understanding of the complexities of the Civil Rights Movement begins to emerge. From the challenge of the Progressive Democratic Party over credentials in 1944 (preceding the better-known story of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party by twenty years) to the state's integral role in the rise of New Right conservatism in the late 1960s, Greene presents an alternative vision of the rise and fall of the New Deal coalition in the middle of the twentieth century. He highlights figures crucial to the struggle for African American self-determination. Women such as Modjeska Simkins and men like John H. McCray stand centre stage and demonstrate the various strategies employed by black South Carolinians in the struggle for civil and human rights. Overall, Greene focuses attention on a state that is often neglected in the standard narratives of the Civil Rights Movement.

KEYWORDS Civil Rights Movement, Democratic Party, memory, Orangeburg, South Carolina

The Civil Rights Movement, as understood in American history, involves key events in several states: Alabama (the march from Selma to

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Montgomery and the Montgomery bus boycott, among other events), Mississippi (the murder of Emmett Till and the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964) and, perhaps, Georgia (the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr, the setback at Albany, and King's funeral that in many ways marks the end of the movement in 1968). Each southern state had its own unique experience of the Civil Rights Movement. This article argues that South Carolina played its own uniquely important role in that movement, one that has been largely ignored in the historiography and, in addition, subsumed by the better-known stories of Alabama and Mississippi in the national narrative of the movement.

In recent years, historians have re-examined the Civil Rights Movement, expanding both its time frame and geographic scope. Most notably, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's article about the 'Long Civil Rights Movement' made the argument for considering the movement beyond the 1950s and 1960s, as well as beyond the American South. Nikhil Pal Singh's idea of the 'Long Civil Rights era', beyond the difference in wording, also argues for thinking about the struggle for civil rights by African Americans as extending beyond the organizations, figures and time periods of the traditional narratives.¹

While this article is not the place for debates about whether or not these 'long' narratives are effective for understanding the scope and scale of the Civil Rights Movement, they are worth considering with regard to the place of South Carolina in the national narrative.² For, while the movement in the Palmetto State was overshadowed by events elsewhere, the clash over equality lasted for decades in South Carolina. Indeed, if there was ever a state that best represented the idea of a long civil rights movement, South Carolina would fit the bill. The period from 1954 to 1968 traditionally used to date the Civil Rights Movement does not include recognition of the men and women who campaigned for desegregation in that state.³

- 1 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the political uses of the past', *Journal of American History*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2005, 1233–63; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004).
- 2 For critiques of the 'long movement' thesis, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, 'The "long movement" as vampire: temporal and spatial fallacies in recent Black Freedom Studies', *Journal of African American History*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2007, 265–88; and Clarence Lang, 'Locating the Civil Rights Movement: an essay on the Deep South, Midwest, and Border South in Black Freedom Studies', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2013, 371–400.
- 3 Again, this is not to slight in any way the contributions made in what is referred to as the 'heroic period' of the Civil Rights Movement in Peniel E. Joseph, 'Waiting till the midnight hour: reconceptualizing the heroic period of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968', *Souls*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2000, 6–17. For another view of the events that took place in the 1954–68 period, see Steven F. Lawson, 'The long origins of the short Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968', in Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (eds), *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2011), 9–38.

This article argues for a repositioning of the state within the history of the movement. It will start with a brief review of the history of the Long Civil Rights Movement. However, it will shift the focus away from states such as Mississippi and Alabama, and, for the moment, on to South Carolina. While several books have done a commendable job of explaining the rise of civil rights activism within the state, most general narratives of the movement pay far more attention to other states with more visible civil rights events, including Alabama and Mississippi. The opening section will therefore review both the history of South Carolina's civil rights struggle, and the effect that that struggle had on national debates about race and segregation.

The historiography of South Carolina within the Civil Rights Movement includes several major works written in the last twenty years. Patrician Sullivan's *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* was one of the earliest works to argue for a repositioning of the Civil Rights Movement's origins in the New Deal era.⁴ Peter F. Lau's *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* is also a useful primer on the state's long history of civil rights agitation.⁵ For both Sullivan and Lau, a study of civil rights and black equality in South Carolina should not begin with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Books on more specific events in South Carolina, such as Jack Bass's *The Orangeburg Massacre*, offer still more for historians and lay people alike to consider when thinking about how the Civil Rights Movement and its aftermath are framed in a local, regional and national context.⁶

Toward the Meeting of the Waters, a collection edited by Orville Vernon Burton and Winfred B. Moore, offers an up-to-date analysis of South Carolina's relationship to the Civil Rights Movement.⁷ This collection, more than any other book of the last thirty years, brings South Carolina to the forefront of Civil Rights Movement historiography. Emerging from a landmark conference entitled 'The Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina', held in March 2003 at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters* was intended to shed more light on the battles over civil rights in South Carolina. As the editors argued in their preface:

Far less well known is what happened in South Carolina during the long civil rights struggle . . . In general accounts of the era important people and events in

- 4 Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1996).
- 5 Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2006).
- 6 Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* [1970], 2nd edn (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 1984).
- 7 Orville Vernon Burton and Winfred B. Moore (eds), *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2010).

South Carolina are often either invisible or glossed over in favor of more widely publicized happenings in Alabama, Mississippi, and other states.⁸

The book's sections—'Governors', 'Aggressors', 'Reformers', 'Resisters', 'Retrospectives' and 'Crosscurrents at Century's End'—show Burton and Moore's determination to present varied aspects of the Long Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina, as well as the resistance from white leaders it encountered over the course of the twentieth century. An important aspect of the movement in South Carolina is, as demonstrated by one of the section titles, the importance of governors to the state's trajectory on racial issues. Tony Badger's essay, 'From Defiance to Moderation: South Carolina Governors and Racial Change', points to South Carolina's own 'self-congratulatory' remembrance of how the political leadership in the state dealt with civil rights agitation in the 1960s. While he argues that some of the plaudits leaders such as Governor (and later Senator) Ernest 'Fritz' Hollings and Governor John C. West have received are somewhat over the top, on the whole, their decision to pursue a moderate course, instead of continual race-baiting, 'took no little courage and no little political skill'.⁹ The essay on governors is an example of how to answer the questions posed by Charles Eagles in his *Journal of Southern History* article, 'Towards New Histories of the Civil Rights Era', in which he argued for narratives that offered a closer examination of the white resistance to integration in the South.¹⁰

African American activists in South Carolina during the civil rights era, such as Modjeska Simkins, John J. McCray or Sallie Mae Flemming, should be better known outside of the state. All of them were integral figures in the battle over civil rights in South Carolina. This essay will highlight both their contributions to South Carolina's struggle and their importance to the national movement. It may be that it is simply too difficult to chronicle all the important figures in a movement that took place in such a vast part of the United States. Yet, as the brief history of South Carolina's Civil Rights Movement will show in this essay, the state was often on the front lines of civil rights activism, protest and law-making.

Neither indeed can the story of the rise of modern conservatism be told without reviewing the role of politicians from South Carolina. These would include, most notably, Strom Thurmond, but other leaders from the state also made an imprint on both the rise of a 'New Right' in the 1960s and 1970s, and the realignment of the party system brought about by the shift by many white Southerners from the Democratic to the Republican Party at the same time. To separate this story from the civil rights narrative would be a mistake. Both were responses to, and were energized by, the rise of

8 'Preface', in Burton and Moore (eds), *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, xxi–xxiv (xxi).

9 Tony Badger, 'From defiance to moderation: South Carolina governors and racial change', in Burton and Moore (eds), *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 3–21 (19).

10 Charles W. Eagles, 'Towards new histories of the civil rights era', *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2000, 815–48.

New Deal liberalism in the 1930s. Recent scholarship by historians such as Jason Morgan Ward also points to South Carolina, among other southern states, as being the earliest to resist civil rights activism. His idea of a 'long segregationist movement' is one historians would be advised to consider as a useful tool for studying the history of American race relations.¹¹ Thus, overall, South Carolina was integral to the rise of New Right politics within the Republican Party.

I also want to advance the idea of South Carolina as important to the history of Black Power. The rise of Black Power activism in the state, and in the South in general, is still a story that needs telling. And, once again, scholars would do well to consider South Carolina as a unique contributor to the Black Power narrative, primarily through the writings of Cleveland Sellers. The points at which these movements *begin* and *end* are important to both civil rights and Black Power histories. South Carolina provides much to take into account in both cases.

Finally, I will consider the role of memory in the construction of how Americans see the Civil Rights Movement. South Carolina's movement has been memorialized in some ways at a state level, but has not yet entered the national consciousness. I will end this article by considering whether or not the history of South Carolina, reflected upon, has had any impact on the memory of the Civil Rights Movement. Memory and history are both powerful tools in how people see the past. But memory, more often than history, is shaped and moulded by interactions between the public, historians and other scholars interested in the past.¹²

From the New Deal to the 1960s

The recently formed New Deal coalition, which included both African Americans and white Southerners, was in serious trouble by 1938. South Carolina, long a bastion of white Democratic rule, defeated one of Franklin Roosevelt's liberal challengers to the conservative status quo of the region. 'Cotton Ed' Smith's victory in South Carolina over Roosevelt's hand-picked successor, Governor Olin Johnston, was merely one of several rebukes to the sitting president in that year's Democratic primary campaigns in the South.¹³ The Long

11 Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2011). This idea is also explored in books such as Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2008).

12 The memory of the Civil Rights Movement is receiving more attention from historians. See Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (eds), *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2006).

13 Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 25–8. See also Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2010).

Civil Rights Movement narrative is, for all intents and purposes, a narrative that depends on the rise and fall of the New Deal coalition. That the increase in African American political power—best shown through large voting blocs in northern cities, fought over by both northern Republicans and Democrats—is concurrent with the rise of New Deal liberalism is hard to miss. Yet, in the South, African American power would manifest itself in different ways. South Carolina was the site of the greatest southern success of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) before the ‘modern’ Civil Rights Movement began.

The NAACP was already firmly established in Columbia, South Carolina (the capital city of the state) in 1917. Later chapters in Charleston would be formed within that same year.¹⁴ However, 1939 marked a watershed moment in the history of the NAACP and civil rights in the state of South Carolina. On 10 November of that year, the first meeting of the South Carolina NAACP State Conference of Branches took place.¹⁵ At this meeting, the state chapters of the NAACP began to slowly organize their talents for larger campaigns—and, even here, the clearest result of the meeting was the lack of any hope for a larger movement during the 1940s. As Peter Lau has argued: ‘it would be a mistake to understand the founding meeting of the state conference as a triumphant moment that somehow ensured the cooperation of existing NAACP branches in the state’, and the difficulties of keeping the Columbia branch afloat only exacerbated problems.¹⁶

On the national level, 1939–40 was hardly a time of hope for progress on the racial front. As already mentioned, New Deal liberalism was beginning a slow, but steady, retreat from the triumphant 1936 victory. Race was once again becoming a part of national debates about the role of the federal government in public (and private) life. But Franklin Roosevelt refused to spend precious political capital on anti-lynching legislation. At best, New Deal Democrats could offer only symbolic support for African American social and political equality, often through the development of African American culture.¹⁷ For South Carolina’s African American activists, national struggles over race had combined with local racial battles to create, by 1940, a still-uncertain future for civil rights campaigning on the ground.

Looking back, it is easy for a historian to see that 1940–1 would be the tipping point of the movement in South Carolina, the moment after which there was no turning back. John Henry McCray, an African American newspaper publisher, founded the *Lighthouse and Informer* that year. A black-owned newspaper in South Carolina, the paper, like so many other black-owned

14 Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 29–35.

15 *Ibid.*, 119.

16 *Ibid.*, 120.

17 Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2009); Scott A. Sandage, ‘A marble house divided: the Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the politics of memory, 1939–1963’, *Journal of American History*, vol. 80, no. 1, 1993, 135–67.

newspapers, became a centre of intellectual and political protest and activism. To understand the psyche and political thinking of black activists in South Carolina during the Second World War, as well as their activism, one has to turn to the *Lighthouse and Informer*. Not as well known as the *Chicago Defender* or the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Lighthouse and Informer* from this time period nonetheless deserves greater attention, especially considering the role McCray, among others, played in the creation of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP).¹⁸

Twenty years before the more famous Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) emerged to demand representation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, the PDP also campaigned for representation at the national convention. The PDP's story is less well known than that of the MFDP, for reasons that will be explained in a moment. But first, a brief history. *Smith v. Allwright*, the 1944 decision that ended the white primary in the South, gave black South Carolinians the opportunity to think about the power of the ballot as a tool for the first time in decades. McCray, along with local activist Osceola McKaine, founded the PDP as a vehicle for registering black voters in the state of South Carolina. Both African American activists and white politicians in South Carolina realized that the very existence of the PDP represented a fundamental change in southern politics. The PDP's decision to challenge the all-white Democratic Party at the 1944 national convention in Chicago, however, represented not only a black challenge to politics as usual in the South, but forced the Democratic Party once again to deal with an uncomfortable reality: keeping both African Americans and white Southerners in the same political coalition at the same time would be increasingly untenable as time went by.¹⁹

The PDP's challenge, which was ultimately defeated at the national convention, has been largely lost to public memory. The MFDP challenge of twenty years later, however, is still remembered as part of the dynamic and dramatic struggle for equality in the 1960s. There are several logical explanations for this. First, the 1944 PDP challenge was not the most serious threat that white Southerners faced at the convention. Concerns about Henry Wallace continuing as Vice President, and battles over the power of the CIO Political Action Committee within the Democratic Party, were far more worrying to white southern conservative Democrats than the PDP.²⁰ Second, the dramatic struggle over the MFDP's credentials at the 1964 convention was captured on

18 Sid Bedingfield, 'John H. McCray, Accommodationism, and the framing of the civil rights struggle in South Carolina, 1940–48', *Journalism History*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, 91–101 gives an especially strong account of McCray's activism and journalism. See also Sullivan, *Days of Hope* in which this source is effectively used in detailing South Carolina's nascent civil rights campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s.

19 Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 169–91.

20 As Patricia Sullivan noted: 'The power of southern conservative Democrats in Congress remained largely unchecked and unchallenged' (Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 187). This was also the case with the nominating process for president and vice president, which in

television. Like many landmark civil rights events of the 1960s, the MFD's moment—summed up by Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony before the Democratic Party Credentials Committee—made for spellbinding television. Could the same have happened if television had been the same well-established and ubiquitous communication medium in 1944? An answer to that question would be, at best, speculative. But it's also a reminder of the importance of television in the creation of historical narratives of the Civil Rights Movement.

The scepticism shown by activists such as Modjeska Simkins as to what could—and could not—be done with regard to civil rights is also revealing of South Carolina's position within the larger civil rights narrative. Simkins, born to an African American family in Columbia, South Carolina in 1899, was on the front lines of civil rights battles in South Carolina for decades. In an oral history interview conducted by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall in 1974, Simkins looked back with dismay at the Interracial Commission in South Carolina that offered some hope at the time. She argued: 'I think that they thought they were well-meaning people, but for the most part, they were paternalistic. And as I said this afternoon, it was, as they say now, more "rhetoric" than anything else.'²¹ Simkins, involved in both the NAACP and the Interracial Commission, was a force in South Carolina activism. She, like Septima Clark, is part of a long list of black women activists during the civil rights era who are only now getting their due. Simkins and Clark were both, of course, South Carolina natives. With good reason, Cherisse Jones-Branch referred to Simkins as 'part of a cadre of African American leaders in South Carolina in the twentieth century who called the state to task as they pursued civil and political rights for all of its citizens'.²²

By 1946 African American activists began to win more battles in the political arena. Black voters attempted to vote in the Democratic primary. Initially turned away, they won the right to vote following the 1947 decision in *Elmore v. Rice* that guaranteed the right of South Carolina's African Americans to participate in the state's Democratic primary (which, like in many southern states, was the de facto election until the 1960s). While the 1944 Supreme Court decision *Smith v. Allwright* ended the 'white primary' prevalent in most southern states, *Elmore v. Rice* made that decision a reality in South Carolina. The latter decision was coupled with repeated attempts to integrate the

1944 still had to mollify southern conservatives who were uneasy with the liberal Henry Wallace remaining on the ticket.

21 'Oral history interview with Modjeska Simkins, November 15, 1974. Interview G-0056-1. Southern Oral History Program Collection', available online as part of the *Documenting the American South* project at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0056-1/menu.html> (viewed 14 September 2015).

22 Cherisse Jones-Branch, 'Modjeska Monteith Simkins: I cannot be bought and will not be sold', in Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield and Joan Marie Johnson (eds), *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times, Volume 3* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2012), 221–39 (221).

University of South Carolina (USC) but, like other key civil rights events in South Carolina and elsewhere, they have been largely forgotten. While USC would not be desegregated until 1963, African American activists attempted to integrate it, as they did other southern universities, several times in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. In one attempt in 1947, John Wrihten sued USC Law School, a suit that caused the South Carolina legislature to fund the creation of a separate black law school rather than allowing integration. Black activists across the South used cases such as Wrihten's to obtain increased funding for black institutions if not to integrate all-white institutions.²³ Education was key to South Carolina's legacy of activism in other ways as well. *Briggs v. Elliot*, a court case that was part of the package of cases that went before the Supreme Court in 1954 as *Brown v. Board of Education*, was also argued in 1952. Essentially, the NAACP had both the infrastructure and the will to fight for an end to separate and unequal educational facilities in the Palmetto State.²⁴ Once again, in education, South Carolina's position as a 'battlefield' of the Civil Rights Movement was significant.

And then there's Sallie Mae Flemming who, like Rosa Parks, refused to sit at the back of the bus. She was expelled from a bus in Columbia, South Carolina in 1954, several months before the more famous Parks case. It is worth noting that the Flemming case played an important role in the later Parks trial in Alabama. Like so many other historic civil rights figures in South Carolina, Flemming is far less well known than Parks due to media coverage. In this case, Parks, as a middle-aged woman, made a better media figure than Flemming who was only twenty-one years old during the initial bus incident in 1954.²⁵ Flemming's struggle against segregation in Columbia failed to generate, for example, anything close to the comic book created by the Fellowship of Reconciliation entitled *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*.²⁶ Without the oratory and leadership of a Martin Luther King, Jr, and the spirit of civil disobedience that animated the movement in Montgomery, there was little for the national press to latch on to in Columbia.

By the time Clemson University and the University of South Carolina were desegregated in 1963, the state was witness to still more examples of activism that echoed what was going on at the national level. African American students from Allen University and Benedict College, for example, staged sit-

23 R. Scott Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926–1972* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2006), 76–83.

24 *Ibid.*, 96–101.

25 Flemming still awaits more scholarly attention, but has been the subject of a documentary film, *Before Rosa: Sarah Mae Flemming's Unsung Contribution*, Steve Crump Productions, Charlotte, NC 2005, broadcast in South Carolina on the PBS affiliate ETV as part of Southern Lens series on 7 April 2005.

26 *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* (Nyack, NY: Fellowship of Reconciliation 1956), available on the *Ethan Persoff* website at www.ep.tc/mlk/index.html (viewed 15 September 2015). Created to disseminate the struggle of the Montgomery bus boycott, the comic book was later translated into Spanish and Arabic.

ins across Columbia in 1960, following very close on the heels of the sit-in campaigns begun in Greensboro, North Carolina that same year. There was no rioting, unlike events on the campus of Ole Miss in Oxford, Mississippi in 1962, nor did the state governor ever stand in the schoolhouse door to bar entrance like Alabama Governor George Wallace did in 1963. Instead, Governor Ernest 'Fritz' Hollings, in his valedictory speech in January 1963, made it clear that South Carolina would not follow the same path as states such as Mississippi and Alabama. He told the state legislature: 'This General Assembly must make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men.'²⁷ Hollings's response contrasted strongly with that of Wallace, and this has marked how South Carolina has been remembered in the civil rights narrative.

Of course, this is not how the story ends. What does one make of Black Power in South Carolina? Cleveland Sellers, one of the Black Power movement's most notable figures, hailed from the state. Indeed, the Sellers autobiography cum history of the Black Power movement, *The River of No Return*, deserves a place alongside other notable memoirs and autobiographies of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. Sellers describes his life as a black Southerner growing up in Denmark, South Carolina, and makes serious points about the importance of *regional* identity to many up-and-coming activists. Sellers wrote: "I am a black Southerner," I said. "I am going to attend a black college in the South. I want to remain with my people, where the action is. I intend to be a part of the movement. I can't do that while going to school at some white college up North.' Sellers eventually chose Howard University due to the student activism on its campus.²⁸

The life and career of Cleveland Sellers allowed him to stand shoulder to shoulder with figures such as Stokely Carmichael, the charismatic organizer and later leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Sellers's memoirs also offer an eyewitness retelling of the 1968 Orangeburg Massacre: another signature event from South Carolina's civil rights history not very well known beyond the state's borders.²⁹ The violence was sparked by a protest by African American students from the historically black South Carolina State College against the continuing segregation of a bowling alley in 1968, four years after the passage of the Public

27 Address by Governor Ernest F. Hollings to the General Assembly of South Carolina, 9 January 1963 (9), available as part of USC's digital collection 'Fritz Hollings: In his own words', available on the *University of South Carolina* website at <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/how&CISOPTR=291&REC=2> (viewed 15 September 2015).

28 Cleveland Sellers with Robert Terrell, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* [1973] (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1990).

29 The seminal work on the Orangeburg Massacre is Bass and Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre*.

Accommodations Act of 1964. Three protestors were killed and numerous more were injured after local police fired on a demonstration.

All of this took place against the backdrop of the 1968 presidential election, in which former segregationist Strom Thurmond served as kingmaker in the Republican Party. Thurmond was the first prominent southern politician to make the leap from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1964. In 1968 Richard Nixon needed his help to stave off the up-and-coming darling of conservatives, Ronald Reagan. With Thurmond's pushing of southern conservatives to support Nixon, and not Reagan, the former Vice President and future President avoided a last-minute challenge at the 1968 Republican National Convention. Furthermore, the fact that Thurmond backed Nixon and not George Wallace—who, in 1968, appeared to follow in the Dixiecrat third party footsteps of Thurmond and his 1948 campaign—was a surprise to many political pundits. South Carolina's importance to the formation of a new conservative coalition in the late 1960s is impossible to ignore.³⁰

Nor is that the end of the ties between South Carolina and more radical undertakings by African Americans during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. By 1969, the city of Charleston was embroiled in a hospital workers' strike that would attract the attention of many of the movement's leaders. Coretta Scott King and Ralph Abernathy would both speak in Charleston on behalf of the striking workers. *Freedomways*, the black left-wing periodical that was in its heyday in the late 1960s, mentioned the strike several times in its pages, alongside stories about the accumulation of black political power in the North and concerns about the winding down of the civil war in Nigeria. As *Freedomways* asserted: 'Charleston is a crucial battleground, therefore, in this new phase of the Freedom Movement.' The hospital strike was linked to the previous year's Poor People's Campaign, and seen as no less than a 'second chapter' of that movement by Ralph Abernathy.³¹

In general, numerous events in South Carolina's history both link it to the larger history of civil rights and, in some ways, justify the claim that South Carolina was ahead, not behind, several other states, challenging segregation before what happened in other southern states years, even decades, later. Where is the national memory of some of these events?

The nearly invisible South Carolina in civil rights memory

The historiography of the Civil Rights Movement is full of books and articles that are devoted to South Carolina's role in the movement. Some of them are

30 Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang 2012), 207–10.

31 Editorial, 'Charleston—battleground for the dignity of the poor', *Freedomways*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1969, 101–3 (102).

cited throughout this essay.³² Yet, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, they are often not part of the American memory of civil rights.³³ Before continuing, let us consider what those events are, and what they have in common.

Events such as the Montgomery bus boycott or the murder of Emmett Till are remembered in large part due to their high profile in 1950s media. Television transmitted the images of a young Martin Luther King, Jr from Montgomery to the rest of the nation. The Emmett Till case was shocking, not just because it happened, but because *Look* magazine published an interview in which the alleged murderers of Till admitted the crime, and because *Jet* magazine, the black-owned weekly, published pictures of Till's mutilated body as it appeared at his open-casket funeral. Yet, while print media would contribute to the memory of the civil rights era, it was television that proved to be the greater shaper of that memory. As Aniko Bodroghkozy has argued in *Equal Time*, the Civil Rights Movement and southern segregationists were both well aware of the importance of television imagery in the larger political and intellectual battles over segregation.³⁴ Numerous times, however, segregationists lost the media battle at moments such as the March on Washington in 1963, or in Birmingham, Alabama that same year, or at Selma's Edmund Pettis Bridge in 1965.

There was no such event in South Carolina's civil rights history. There were no moments when a major city in the state—such as Columbia or Charleston—was the site of a massive police riot. Instead, the state was able to maintain a veneer of respectability in comparison to the tragedies that occurred in Alabama and Mississippi. South Carolina wasn't quite 'too busy to hate', as the city boosters of Atlanta claimed to be. But the state was at least savvy enough to avoid the kind of media circus that would have accompanied a severe crackdown on civil rights activism. A second look at Governor Hollings's last speech in office in 1963 yields further clues in this regard. Hollings argued that the state had to move on and not throw up the same roadblocks to desegregation as had Alabama. However, before that, Hollings had also stated:

32 Other excellent works on South Carolina and its civil rights history include Cherisse Jones-Branch, *Crossing the Line: Women's Interracial Activism in South Carolina during and after World War II* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 2014); and James Felder, *Civil Rights in South Carolina: From Peaceful Protests to Groundbreaking Rulings* (Charleston, SC: The History Press 2012).

33 This debate over memory, no less than the debate over the history of South Carolina in the movement, matters a great deal. As Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano argue in the introduction to their collection of essays: 'As the essays in this collection demonstrate, the struggles over the memory of the civil rights movement are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for racial equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle': Raiford and Romano, 'Introduction: the struggle over memory', in Raiford and Romano (eds), *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xi–xxiv (xxi).

34 Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2013).

We have all argued that the Supreme Court decision of May 1954 is not the law of the land. But everyone must agree that it is the fact of the land. Interposition, sovereignty, legal motions, personal defiance have all been applied to constitutionalize the law of the land. And all attempts have failed. As we meet, South Carolina is running out of courts.³⁵

Hollings did not give a ringing endorsement to integration. Instead, where political leaders such as George Wallace used the white southern backlash to their advantage in a largely fruitless fight against integration, Hollings merely read the writing on the wall and called for a strategic retreat.

Or think back to the Orangeburg Massacre. Three students dead, scores more injured—and yet it is not in the public consciousness the same way that the Kent State massacre has been remembered since 1970.³⁶ Race and timing are the two principal reasons why Orangeburg is not better remembered. With so many other tragic events in 1968—the assassinations of King and Robert Kennedy, the riots after the King murder, the Tet Offensive and the police riots at Chicago's Democratic National Convention—it's not difficult to conclude that the Orangeburg Massacre falls through the cracks of historical memory. But let's examine Orangeburg a little more closely. First, this was an incident in the Deep South *after* the Civil Rights Movement had 'gone North', that is, when the movement became remembered more for urban rioting, the rise of Black Power and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet here were protestors in South Carolina still struggling to desegregate a bowling alley. In many ways the incident seemed to be a relic of an earlier, more 'innocent' time in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Undoubtedly, however, race is a prime factor in why Orangeburg is not better remembered. The massacre took place against the backdrop of 'law and order' rhetoric, with African Americans receiving less sympathetic coverage in the press and often being overshadowed by either conservative demands for calm in the streets or radical demands for more action and less talking.³⁷

35 Address by Governor Ernest F. Hollings to the General Assembly of South Carolina, 9 January 1963 (8), available as part of USC's digital collection 'Fritz Hollings: In his own words' on the *University of South Carolina* website at <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/how&CISOPTR=291&REC=2> (viewed 15 September 2015).

36 It is definitely worth remembering that, around the time of the Kent State Massacre, there was also an incident that occurred at Jackson State, a historically black college, where two students were killed protesting the US invasion of Cambodia. For more on this incident, see Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press 1988).

37 Within the state of South Carolina, however, the memory of the Orangeburg Massacre has been kept alive. Orangeburg native Jack Shuler details the efforts of the town's residents to come to terms with what happened on the campus of South Carolina State College in 1968. He posits that race is a factor in the lack of remembrance of the Massacre—'State's status as a historically black college'—and even the lack of a song about the events of 1968 in Orangeburg comparable to Neil Young's classic 'Ohio', goes some way to explain why the massacre has been forgotten. Jack Shuler, *Blood and Bone: Truth*

Even the Charleston hospital workers' strike of 1969 deserves a larger place in the national memory of civil rights. But where would it go? At the time, as demonstrated above, it was tied to the memory of Martin Luther King's last campaign, the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C. But that particular King is often overshadowed in the national memory of the movement by the King who spoke at the March on Washington in 1963. That King, who in the eyes of popular discourse yearned for nothing more than Americans being judged 'not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character', is the one memorialized on postage stamps and for whom statues are erected. The Martin Luther King referred to as a slain martyr during the Charleston hospital strike is more radical, more desperate and less willing to be seen as a non-partisan activist.³⁸

Timing also matters in the case of the Progressive Democratic Party's attempt in 1944 to get credentialed by the Democratic Party. But perhaps one aspect of an answer might be the way in which the movement itself unfolded in South Carolina. As McCray himself admitted, many years after his involvement with the *Lighthouse and Informer* and the PDP:

In South Carolina, the legal approach was the way to go. It worked. As long as Reverend James Hinton was president of the state NAACP and as long as we ran *The Lighthouse*, we didn't have street demonstrations, although they had been done by the NAACP for years. Not that we were against them, but that wasn't the way it was done then. And as we look back on those years, we have to concede that when you get through marching in the street, and you're bailed out of jail, you still got to settle these things in court.³⁹

While court cases are very much part of the civil rights narrative—think *Brown v. Board of Education*, most notably—the slow, grinding legal process in South Carolina does not lend itself as well to memorialization.

There are efforts underway to correct all this, most of which are being performed on a local level in South Carolina. For several years, the Columbia 63 project, headed by University of South Carolina history professor Bobby Donaldson, has been collecting as much information as possible about the movement in South Carolina. This was part of a larger effort throughout the South to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of 1963, 'the height of

and Reconciliation in a Small Southern Town (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2012), 111.

38 David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr* (New York: Random House 2014) argues that the debates of the 1970s and 1980s over race and civil rights often included evocations of the legacy and memory of Martin Luther King, Jr.

39 John H. McCray interviewed by Worth Long with Randall Williams in 'People who made the movement', *Southern Changes*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1997, 5–20 (15). The interview was originally conducted in the 1980s on behalf of the Southern Regional Council.

the Civil Rights Movement', as the Columbia 63 project refers to it.⁴⁰ The African American Studies programme at the University of South Carolina, working in conjunction with the Columbia 63 project, hosted several events, including a symposium filled with several graduate and undergraduate historians, all devoted to delving deeper into the history of USC and desegregation.⁴¹

Finally, events in the summer of 2015 also turned national attention to South Carolina's history of civil rights protest. The Emanuel AME shooting, which cost the lives of nine African American parishioners, was the first time most Americans had heard of the historically black church. The tragedy, however, became an opportunity for many outside of South Carolina to learn both about the church's history and also about the boisterous debate over the Confederate flag that was a hallmark of South Carolina politics since it was put up in 1961. National outcry about the flag, originally hoisted to celebrate the centennial of the American Civil War as well as to show defiance towards national civil rights legislation, led to a bipartisan effort in South Carolina to lower the flag and remove it from the Statehouse grounds.

Memory was at the centre of this latest Confederate flag debate. As was the case in the 1990s, when debate over the flag flared up in Georgia and South Carolina, and again in 2000, when the flag was moved from the top of the Statehouse dome to the grounds, many white conservative politicians defended the flag as part of their 'heritage'. A handful of white Democrats, all African American Democrats and even some moderate Republicans (most notably Jenny Horne, a descendant of the Confederacy's only president, Jefferson Davis) argued that this was not the case, that the flag was a hurtful symbol of oppression and intolerance and needed to come down as quickly as possible. 'My heritage is based on a group of people who were brought here in chains', exhorted African American Democrat Joe Neal at the height of the Statehouse debate.⁴² Despite the fact that the law to take down the flag passed both houses of the South Carolina legislature, the partisan nature of the debate—the only supporters of the flag staying up were conservative Republicans—is a reminder of W. Fitzhugh Brundage's warning in *The Southern Past* about the prevalence of memory in southern politics: 'Controversies continue to flare because they touch on fundamental issues of power and identity.'⁴³ In short, how Americans remember the Civil Rights Movement is

40 'Columbia's story matters', 2012, home page of the Columbia SC 63 website at www.columbiasc63.com (viewed 16 September 2015).

41 The author of this essay delivered a paper at the symposium on attempts to desegregate the University of South Carolina before 1963. Other papers given at the event focused on USC's earlier desegregation during Reconstruction, and also on how the university slowly adjusted to a larger black presence on campus in the 1960s and 1970s.

42 Matt Pearce, 'My family was "brought here in chains," S.C. lawmaker says during Confederate flag debate', *Los Angeles Times*, 9 July 2015.

43 W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2005), 317.

shaped as much by the power of different groups—former activists, middle-of-the-road politicians, historians—as it is by any ‘facts’ on the ground.

In sum, South Carolina meant a great deal to the civil rights struggle. And while public memory does not yet give it the full attention it deserves, such a process does take time. As historians move beyond the ‘classic’ narrative—from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the death of Martin Luther King—it is only a matter of time before the national narrative of civil rights begins to incorporate more, and fuller, stories of the movement. The history and the memory of the movement in South Carolina should no longer be underplayed in discussions of the regional, and national, narratives of debates about race and democracy in the twentieth century.

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